

A Transcultural Approach to EIL Teaching and its Impact on Learners' National Identities

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This article reports on an initiative characterised by a transcultural approach to English Language Teaching (ELT) which may be seen as an instance of Internationalisation at Home (IAH). Participants were ninety-five learners of English from three secondary schools in Spain and Poland who stayed in touch throughout the project through Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). The article explores the impact of this particular IAH experience on the participants' national identities through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Data point to national identity discourses being perceived very differently by the Spanish and Polish participants in the sample, and show how the participants' positions with regard to such discourses change during the programme. The results challenge the notion that transcultural competence may result in the individual perceiving him/herself as culturally closer to members of other imagined communities. Instead, they point to the gradual erasure of national imagined communities as transcultural competence develops, thus opening up a new avenue of research.

Keywords: Internationalisation at Home; national identity; transcultural pedagogy; English as an International Language; Computer-Mediated Communication; ethnocentrism

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Un enfoque transcultural en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua internacional y su impacto en las identidades nacionales de los aprendices

Este artículo informa sobre una iniciativa caracterizada por una aproximación transcultural a la enseñanza del inglés que puede verse como un ejemplo de internacionalización en

casa (IeC). Los participantes fueron noventa y cinco estudiantes de inglés de tres escuelas secundarias en España y Polonia que se mantuvieron en contacto durante todo el proyecto a través de comunicación mediada por ordenador. El artículo explora el impacto de esta experiencia particular de IeC en las identidades nacionales de los participantes a través de una combinación de datos cualitativos y cuantitativos. Los datos dejan entrever diferencias sustanciales en la manera en que los participantes españoles y polacos de la muestra perciben los discursos de identidad nacional, y muestran cómo las posiciones de los participantes con respecto a tales discursos cambian durante el proyecto. Los resultados desafían la percepción de que la competencia transcultural puede hacer que el individuo se perciba a sí mismo como culturalmente más cercano a los miembros de otras comunidades imaginadas. Por contra, apuntan a la eliminación gradual de las comunidades nacionales imaginadas a medida que se desarrolla la competencia transcultural, abriendo así una nueva vía de investigación.

Palabras clave: internacionalización en casa; identidad nacional; pedagogía transcultural; inglés como lengua internacional; comunicación mediada por ordenador

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and identity discourses cannot be separated, since the latter are primarily disseminated through the former. Consequently, (first) language acquisition appears to be not only a cognitive process but also an ideological one—an avenue of research triggered by milestone publications like that by Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner (2007). The question as to what the consequences may be when one or more additional languages are added to the individual's linguistic repertoire remains unanswered. In order to address this issue, the Modern Language Association encourages practitioners to develop “effective translingual and transcultural competence” in the foreign language classroom (2007, 4).

Although often used as a synonym of intercultural competence, in this article transculturality will not refer simply to the individual's capacity to straddle two different cultures (one of them being their own) (Higgins 2011), but to more developed skills involving “a sense of multidirectional movement, flow and mixing” (Thompson 2011, 207) in complex communication contexts involving people with different first languages and using additional languages to communicate between them. The term *transcultural* seems to be all the more appropriate if English is to be discussed in contexts involving the teaching and acquisition not of a *foreign* but an *international* language (EIL). Thus, a transcultural approach to EIL teaching would introduce language learners to topics that are of universal significance in all cultures.

Despite the fact that very little actual classroom practice has so far been reflected in the literature (Byram, Holmes and Savvides 2013), different models have been put forward to theorise about the qualities of transcultural EIL speakers. Such models (Levy 2007; Baker 2009) refer to several features that can be subsumed under the concept of “perspective consciousness,” i.e., “the ability to question constantly the source of one's cultural assumptions and ethical judgements, leading to the habit of seeing things through the minds and hearts of others” (Slimbach 2005, 206). This starts with the individual (re)examining their own national identity (Osler and Starkey 2005, 23), realising what it means to them, and discovering that it involves specific ways of looking at themselves—not necessarily experienced identically by all in the in-group—and equally specific ways of looking at people outside their “imagined community” (Anderson 1991).

Transcultural competence is at the base of Internationalisation at Home (IAH), a varied set of curricular, methodological and pedagogical measures that educational institutions can apply to foster cultural diversity. It includes “any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility” (Wächter 2000, 6) and may involve—among other possibilities—“curricula in foreign languages or linguistics which explicitly address cross-cultural communication issues and provide training in intercultural [read *transcultural*] skills” (Nilsson 2000, 22). IAH has been closely linked with the use of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) as a vehicle for “virtual mobility” and the creation of a “virtual international classroom” (Nilsson

2000, 24). Such virtual mobility should be a key ingredient in the transformation of the classroom into a “third space” (Bhabha 1994) where a variety of cultural practices meet, thus establishing a “sphere of [trans]culturality” (Kramsch 1993).

References to EIL and third spaces are essential in this article, which focuses on a specific case study showcasing the use of CMC between EIL learners from two different countries as an instance of IAH (namely, the international class, i.e., formal instruction with an international dimension) characterised by a transcultural approach to English Language Teaching (ELT). The article explores the possible impact of this particular IAH experience on the participants’ national identities through two complementary research questions:

RQ1 Does this methodology have an impact on how participants see themselves and their own imagined communities?

RQ2 Does this methodology have an impact on how participants see members of other imagined communities?

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

Participants were ninety-five English language learners from three secondary schools, two in Opole (Poland) and one in Bendinat (Calvià, Majorca, Spain), which implemented largely parallel transcultural ELT approaches over one school year (2010-2011). The Spanish participants (N = 42), aged fourteen-fifteen, attended IES Bendinat, a state secondary school, and 61.9% of them were female. The Polish students attended two different schools in Opole: participants from TAK (N = 20), a private school, were aged fourteen-fifteen and evenly distributed gender-wise, while those from VPLO (N = 33), a state-run school, were fifteen-sixteen, and females (84.85%) clearly outnumbered males (15.15%).

No substantial differences concerning the participants’ competence in English were evident, although TAK participants also studied Spanish as a foreign language. In both countries, work on the project was initiated in the English language class with the teachers’ collaboration.

2.2. Setting

In line with Bengt Nilsson (2000), the transcultural approach to the teaching of EIL behind this research set itself two main objectives. First, cognitive changes were expected in participants in the form of increasingly open worldviews. Cognitively, this could be described as the formation of new knowledge or the activation of a process of reconceptualisation of previous knowledge, typically associated with stereotypical

information concerning other cultures and ways of life, which was expected to result in diminished levels of ethnocentrism. Consequently, participants were also expected to undergo attitudinal changes (tolerance, open-mindedness, flexibility) resulting from their evolving emotional state due to their communication with people from another country, which could even have an impact on their very identities.

Methodologically, this approach is best described as content-based, since participants were introduced to a series of culturally-oriented units of work as part of their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, namely, (1) Cultural Stereotypes, (2) Africa, (3) Music with a Message and (4) Questions and Answers (where students could ask each other questions pertaining to a variety of cultural issues). Participants then exchanged comments on the work they had been doing in class in the virtual third space provided by the *EIL in Poland and Spain* blog, which was working alongside the class-based units throughout the year. One of the researchers acted as blog administrator, systematically stimulating debate at each stage. She was helped by the English teachers in the three participating schools, who agreed that their students' blog posts and comments would account for 10% of their final mark.

2.3. Research Design, Instruments and Data Collection

This study combines both qualitative and quantitative data, thus complying with methodological triangulation (Brown and Rodgers 2002, 244), which adds internal validity to the results. Qualitative data, drawn from the course's first didactic unit, Cultural Stereotypes, complemented the quantitative results, providing additional insight into the participants' cultural and national affiliations. Tasks from this unit involved the writing of a list of the five most important cultural artefacts that, according to the participants, symbolise their home countries. Additionally, they were also asked to obtain a similar list from their parents or carers. Participants also answered three questions on the blog concerning the lists and the persuasive (non)effectiveness of stereotypes.

Quantitative data were expected to help trace the development experienced by participants regarding their ethnocentric levels, specifically, how they saw (1) themselves and (2) other imagined communities. These were obtained from a Semantic Differential Test (SDT), administered to the students at the beginning of the academic year (T1), and then repeated when the course was drawing to a close (T2). The test was written and administered in English although instructions were provided in English, Spanish (in Spain) and Polish (in Poland). The English teachers from all three participating schools were available at all times to address any queries.

The SDT was based on a model successfully used by Michael Byram, Veronica Esarte-Sarries and Susan Taylor (1991). It featured a combination of the semantic differential scale (Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum 1975) and a social distance scale (Bogardus 1925), and incorporated elements from John H. Schumann's acculturation hypothesis (1986).

The SDT assessed the participants' attitudes towards the Other using a cultural/social distance continuum of eight cultural dimensions ranging from "I," "my friends" and one's fellow nationals ("the Spaniards" or "the Poles," as applicable) at one end, to "the Poles" (in the case of Spanish participants) and "the Spaniards" (in the case of Polish participants) at the other. In between, it also covered other Western cultural categories ("the Germans," "the French," "the British," "the people from North America" [USA and Canada]). The semantic differential scale for each social distance comprised six bipolar pairs of adjectives on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) friendly-unfriendly, (2) polite-rude, (3) honest-dishonest, (4) kind-cruel, (5) hardworking-lazy and (6) well-educated-poorly-educated. Participants circled the number on the scale that most represented their perception of the cultural dimension. An example of this test can be seen in figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Example of SDT

The Spanish are....									
Friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unfriendly	
Polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Rude	
Honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonest	

2.4. Data Management and Analysis

For anonymity's sake, participants were given codes. Each code is a combination of letters identifying the participant's school (BE for Bendinat, TA for TAK, and VP for VLPO) followed by their initials.

Atlas.ti7 was used to thematically analyse the qualitative data (i.e., all posts contributed to the blog by the participants, either as individual or group entries). Quantitative results were only considered when (1) participants had completed the SDT at both T1 and T2; (2) ninety-five percent of the SDT had been duly completed; and (3) evidence was not found that SDTs had been completed randomly. Consequently, twenty-two SDTs from Spain and forty-one from Poland were analysed.

SPSS 19 was used to handle the quantitative data. Individual participant scores were obtained for each cultural dimension by dividing the total sum for each of the six pairs of bi-polar adjectives by six. In order to obtain the mean group scores for each cultural dimension, the sum of these individual means was divided by the total number of students in the group. These means were interpreted as the overall levels of ethnocentrism/ethnorelativism for each group towards a specific group of people. The closer to zero the mean scores, the more positive the attitude is towards the cultural dimension being assessed.

In order to assess the ethnorelativity of the groups as a whole, the score for each dimension was added up for each participant and then divided by eight (the number of dimensions) to obtain a mean score. The sum of the individual means for each group were then added together and divided to obtain a group mean. Consequently, the closer to zero the overall mean is, the more ethnorelative (and less ethnocentric) the group is as a whole. Cronbach's alpha was used to ensure the reliability of the mean scores (with standard deviation) and Levine's test of equal variance was used for the ANOVA analyses.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Qualitative Data

As a complement to the Cultural Stereotypes unit, participants had to answer three questions on the blog for their Christmas homework. Previously in class, students had drawn up lists of what they considered to be cultural symbols of their respective countries, and they had also elicited similar lists from their parents or carers. The first question was based on these lists:

Q1. Were there any differences between the lists made by you and those made by your parents or carers concerning the cultural symbols of Spain/Poland?

Additionally, participants were asked to answer the following questions:

Q2. Are cultural stereotypes a good way to learn about people from other nations or do you think they cause prejudice and can be harmful?

Q3. Do cultural stereotypes motivate you or put you off wanting to visit a country or learn the language spoken there?

3.1.1. National Symbols for Participants and their Elders

The combined results of lists of national cultural symbols drawn up by the Bendinat participants and their parents or carers was uploaded onto the blog (table 1). Together with their answers to Q1, they provide interesting qualitative data concerning the way the participants themselves and their parents or carers perceive their respective imagined communities.

Although the list (table 1 below) was published on the blog, most Spanish participants tended to avoid Q1 by either not answering it or simply answering it with a monosyllabic "Yes" or "No." Most of the Spanish students who answered Q1 believe that there are differences between their lists and their parents', although the summary provided in table 1 seems to belie this and they choose not to explain what the perceived differences are.

TABLE 1. Cultural symbols for Spanish students and their parents

Cultural symbols for students		Cultural symbols for parents / carers	
Number of references	Most representative things of Spain	Number of references	Most representative things of Spain
15	Food <i>paella</i> (5), Spanish serrano ham and cold meats (5), food in general (3), <i>ensaimada</i> ¹ (1), olives (1)	22	Food <i>paella</i> (8), Spanish serrano ham and cold meats (5), food in general (9)
6	Sports football (5), sport in general (1)	12	Cultural traditions bullfighting (11) <i>San Fermín</i> ² (1)
5	Cultural heritage monuments in general (3), Way of St James (2)	7	Sports football (4), sport in general (2), Rafael Nadal (1)
4	Bullfighting	6	Music and dance
3	Spanish women Spanish women/girls (2), Penélope Cruz (1)	6	Mediterranean beaches (2), Mediterranean Sea (2), temperature (2)
3	Beaches	5	Monuments <i>Puerta del Sol</i> ³ (3), <i>Sagrada Família</i> ⁴ (1), monuments in general (1)
3	Flamenco	4	Partying
		3	Wine
		2	Spanish language
		2	Crisis
	The following items were mentioned only once: crisis poorly educated people siesta partying speak loud and fast work in tertiary sector		The following items were mentioned only once: family Madrid – Barcelona <i>castellers</i> ⁵ patriotism culture Don Quixote army Spanish flag Andalusian Easter processions amusing people

¹ Local pastry speciality from Majorca.² Festival held in Pamplona in July.³ Madrid's best-known square—crowds gather here to welcome in the New Year.⁴ Gaudí's masterpiece in Barcelona.⁵ People who form human towers, common in Catalan festivals.

For their part, due to time constraints and different classroom dynamics, the Polish students did not post a class list of Polish cultural symbols on the blog. However, they did publish some posts and comments reflecting their opinions. Polish participants generally did address Q1 and the answers available invariably referred to their perception that there were differences in the national symbols selected by the students and their parents or carers.

Especially detailed was a joint entry made by VPAGPE and VPEDMA providing abridged information from Wikipedia regarding what they considered the most representative Polish symbols, such as *Solidarność*, Lech Wałęsa, Chopin, Pope John Paul II and the widely popular (although unofficial) motto *Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna* (God, Honour, Fatherland). An interesting feature of this entry is that, although apparently meant to cover whatever their elders consider symbolises Poland (the entry is titled “Symbols of Poland for our parents and grandparents”), the fact that they obtained the information themselves from Wikipedia seems to indicate that they also recognise themselves in the symbols listed. Their post triggered a comment by one Spanish participant (example 1), expressing her surprise at finding out that Pope John Paul II was Polish:

(1) I didn't know that the last pope was polish :O (BELAMU)⁶

3.1.2. How Participants See Members of Other Imagined Communities

Relevant qualitative information concerning how participants see members of other imagined communities at T1 can be obtained from their answers to Q2 and Q3. Q2 inquired into the perceived usefulness of cultural stereotypes as a source of information on people from other countries. This resulted in relatively short, not always coherently phrased answers. Answers to Q2 are summarised in table 2.

TABLE 2. Summary of results (Q2)

	BENDINAT	TAK	VPLO	TOTAL
Positive	9 (37.5%)	1 (10%)	0	10 (25%)
Negative	6 (25%)	9 (90%)	6 (100%)	21 (52.5%)
Mixed	9 (37.5%)	0	0	9 (22.5%)
TOTAL	24	10	6	40

Only ten out of forty contributions, nine of which were posted by Spanish participants, recognise the usefulness of stereotypes as a source of information, while

⁶ All examples have been taken verbatim from the blog without any editing.

75% of posts express a substantially different opinion on stereotypes and their role. To start with, nine posts offer mixed views on the subject, hinting that there is a grain of truth to be found in stereotypes (example 2):

- (2) Yes and no. Yes, because it can be helpful to know, more or less, how the people of the country thinks and are and you can link things with it [...]; and no, because the stereotypes can give to us a bad idea of the people of the country. (BEANMO)

These views are largely shared by BEJUSA (example 3), who insists that generalisations are dangerous and that ultimately no community is perfectly homogeneous:

- (3) Everybody is different, so you can't say "everybody in Spain likes bull-fighting" or things like that because there will be people who like it and people who dislike it. [...] IN GENERAL, English people are quiet, don't have a surprise if you meet a fun English boy or girl). Conclusion: [...] remember that not everybody is equal, and some of them won't like you saying things like: "oh, I thought you Spanish people love the Siesta and Paella! D:". Generalize is bad >_> (BEJUSA)

Over half of the respondents (52.5%), however, flatly reject stereotypes as a valid source of information on other peoples and cultures. Such negative views are especially representative of the Polish participants, as illustrated in example 4:

- (4) We think cultural stereotypes sometimes are obsolete and exaggerated. Stereotypes can hurt people. The best way to learn [sic] about foreign cultures is to travel and to meet people face-to-face. Then we can make own opinion about other nations. (VPAGRO)

Q3 inquired into whether stereotypes would play a role in decisions to visit a country or learn its language, and a summary of the results is provided in table 3.

TABLE 3. Summary of results (Q3)

		BENDINAT	TAK ⁷	VPLO
Influence on decision to visit a foreign country	Positive	4 (12.5%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (14.28%)
	Negative	3 (9.4%)	3 (27.2%)	1 (14.28%)
	None	8 (25%)	1 (9.1%)	0

⁷ Blog posts for TAK and VPLO were done in groups and so there are fewer entries.

		BENDINAT	TAK ⁷	VPLO
Influence on decision to learn a foreign language	Positive	1 (3.1%)	1 (9.1%)	0
	Negative	1 (3.1%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (14.28%)
	None	10 (31.3%)	0	2 (28.6%)
Mixed influence on decision to visit a foreign country and learn a foreign language		5 (15.6%)	2 (18.2%)	2 (28.6%)
TOTAL		32 (100%)	11 (100%)	7 (100%)

Many of the Spanish participants that answered Q3 believe that cultural stereotypes do not influence the decision to learn a new language (31.3%) or visit a new country (25%) (example 5):

- (5) So, the cultural stereotypes, in my opinion [sic], haven't got any importance to impulse you to learn the language or putting you off wanting to visit it. (BEAIBE)

Some participants from Spain acknowledge that, far from producing a negative effect, cultural stereotypes make a country appear more interesting (example 6):

- (6) Yes, because you know a little bit and you want to know more and more, it's like an interesting novel. (BEEDCA)

Nevertheless, there are opinions that stress the negative effect that stereotypes may hold over the students' interest in foreign languages and cultures. This can be appreciated in examples 7 and 8:

- (7) We all think cultural stereotypes can put us off wanting to visit or hear the language spoken there. For example, I VPKIKO don't like China because of some cases and I don't want to hear the language nor visit their country. (VPALPA, VPKIPO, VPMIGI)
- (8) For me stereotypes don't have any influence on learning a language. But they do have an influence that I would like go to visit a country. For example if a friend says to me that a land is horrible, I prefer to visit to another country. (BE1ALBE)

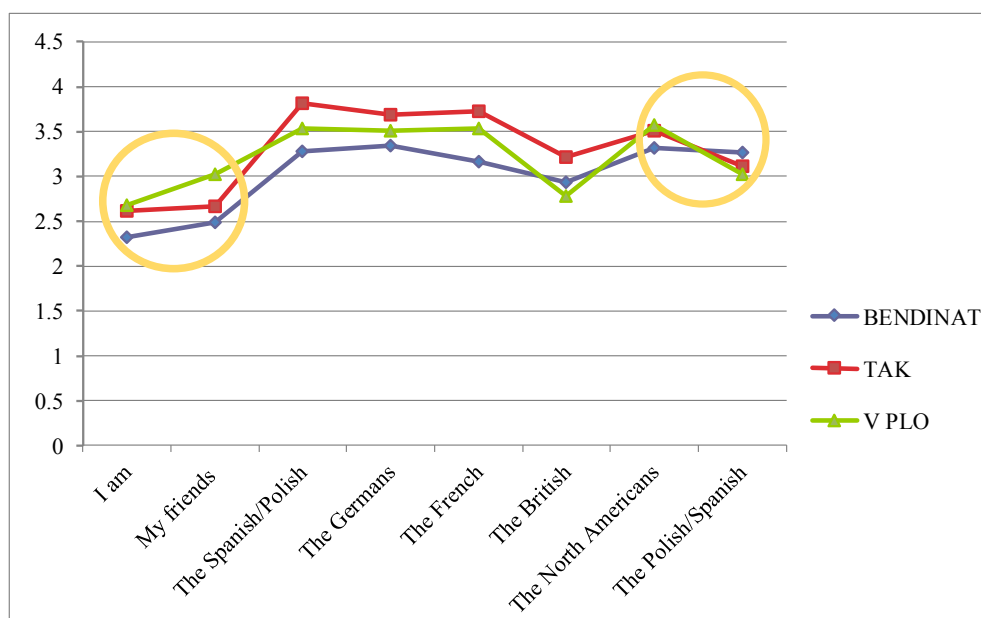
3.2. Quantitative Data

Quantitative data are drawn from the participants' performance on the SDT, designed to measure group levels of ethnocentrism/ethnorelativism towards various

cultural dimensions (figures 2 and 3) as well as their overall levels of ethnocentrism/ethnorelativism (table 4) at the beginning (T1) and end (T2) of the academic year.

T1 results are summarised in figure 2. The mean scores that are closer to zero reflect a more positive attitude towards a specific cultural dimension. In figures 2 and 3, “The Spanish/Polish” dimension means “The Spanish” for Spanish participants and “The Polish” for Polish participants. Conversely, “The Polish/Spanish” dimension means “The Polish” for Spanish participants and “The Spanish” for Polish participants.

FIGURE 2. Levels of ethnocentrism/ethnorelativism T1



The variables “I am” and “My friends are” have comparable levels of ethnorelativism, all within the 2.32 and 2.68 level, meaning that the three groups perceive themselves and their friends fairly positively (on the 1-7 Lickert scale). All three groups also position themselves very closely to the British dimension, more so than to their national counterparts (Spanish if in the Spanish group and Polish if in the Polish group), the widest gap being 0.61 for both Bendinat and TAK. On the other hand, there is a tendency to consider their national counterparts on a par with the North Americans and other European countries. Finally, the Spanish and Polish participants do not seem to perceive themselves as being especially different from each other. Having said this, TAK participants, who took Spanish as a second foreign language, did not perceive themselves to be closer to the Spanish than their VPLO peers.

Figure 3 shows the SDT results at T2. Here the Bendinat and VPLO participants tend to consider themselves closer to the British than to any other group, with TAK participants relating more closely to North America.

FIGURE 3. Levels of ethnocentrism/ethnorelativism T2

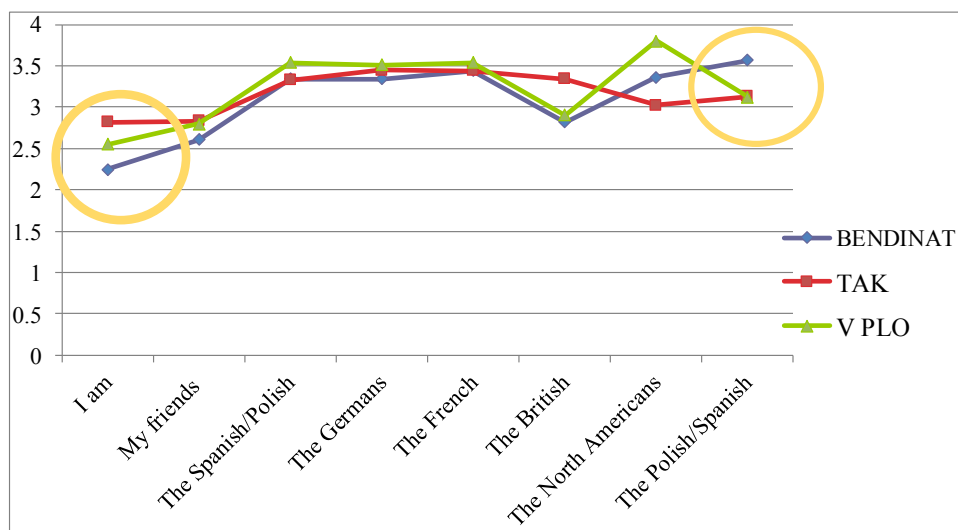


Table 4 offers a more complete picture of the participants' evolution throughout the study, detailing group means for each dimension at both collection times.

TABLE 4. Overall group means for cultural dimensions at T1 and T2

		BENDINAT	TAK	VPLO
Statement	Time			
I am ...	T1	2.32	2.61	2.68
	T2	2.25	2.82	2.55
My friends are ...	T1	2.49	2.67	3.03
	T2	2.60	2.83	2.80
The Spanish/Polish are ⁸	T1	3.28	3.82	3.54
	T2	3.34	3.33	3.45

⁸ Here read as "Spanish" for the Spanish students and "Polish" for the Polish students.

		BENDINAT	TAK	VPLO
Statement	Time			
The Germans are ...	T1	3.34	3.69	3.51
	T2	3.47	3.99	3.48
The French are ...	T1	3.16	3.73	3.54
	T2	3.44	3.44	3.51
The British are ...	T1	2.93	3.22	2.78
	T2	2.82	3.34	2.90
The North Americans are ...	T1	3.32	3.51	3.57
	T2	3.35	3.02	3.80
The Polish/Spanish are ... ⁹	T1	3.27	3.12	3.03
	T2	3.57	3.13	3.12
Overall level of ethnorelativeness per group	T1	3.01	3.19	2.88
	T2	3.11	3.32	3.20

Participants from all three schools show fairly similar overall levels of ethnorelativism at both T1 (ranging from 2.88 to 3.19) and T2 (ranging from 3.11 to 3.32), clearly placing them at the ethnorelative end of an ethnorelative/ethnocentric continuum (with zero being ethnorelative and seven being ethnocentric). The data show a slight decrease in ethnorelativism at T2. However, the results of a paired t-test for each group at T1 and T2 found no significance. An ANOVA was conducted between groups to compare the overall effect of time between the Spanish and Polish participants at T2, the results of which bordered on significance ($p=0.09$).

Statistical significance aside, table 4 shows that the Spanish and Polish participants seem to behave somewhat differently in two specific fields. When it comes to how they see fellow nationals, values increase marginally over time in the case of the Spanish participants (+0.06), whereas they diminish for the Polish students both for VPLO (-0.09) and particularly for TAK (-0.49). This points to a tendency for Spanish participants to distance themselves from fellow nationals at T2 whereas closer cultural proximity is felt by the Polish participants with regards to fellow Poles.

Finally, as regards the Spanish and Polish participants' image of each other at T2, values increase in all cases (thus signalling the perception of greater social distance),

⁹ Here read as "Polish" for the Spanish students and "Spanish" for the Polish students.

although this is less visible in the case of the view that the Polish participants have of the Spaniards (-0.01 for TAK, +0.09 for VLPO) than in the case of Spanish participants' view of Poles (+0.30).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Impact of the Transcultural Methodology on How Participants See Themselves
According to the quantitative data, participants do not demonstrate particularly high levels of cultural proximity towards fellow nationals at T1 and distance themselves further at T2. The qualitative information gathered may provide answers for this, as it provides some insight into the participants' feelings of national identity at T1.

As noted in section 3.1, participants did not always coherently discuss the lists of national symbols they had drawn up. This is highly indicative of the difficulty of the task posed: although participants were never asked directly about their national identity feelings, there was no way for them to reply to this question without carefully pondering this elusive construct. Intrinsic difficulties notwithstanding, the fact remains that answers are notoriously less numerous among Spanish participants. Their monosyllabic answers seem to suggest that this task was more demanding for them.

Qualitative data indicate that participants perceive that the meaning of national identity varies across generations—although it is difficult to spot clear-cut differences between the way Poland is perceived by the younger Poles and their elders. This may be indicative of the rapidly changing features of contemporary societies, which fosters the perception of identity as a “process” (Hall 1991, 47) as opposed to the images of continuity and sameness identity discourses traditionally convey (Hall 1991, 43).

Cross-generational perceptions aside, the lists of Spanish and Polish national symbols are substantially different in nature. Although both lists provide evidence of the status of food as a cultural signifier (Carter 2004), the Polish lists include numerous contributions to science, the arts, politics and even religion, typically presented in terms of “icons of affinity” (Ward 2001, 14), i.e., national deities, covering centuries of—what is perceived as—uninterrupted Polishness. Conversely, what characterises the list of Spanish symbols is its fragmentation: well-known personalities are mentioned, but never in relation with patriotism or national history; symbols sometimes appear to be mentioned in opposition to each other (e.g. Madrid vs. Barcelona); and Spanish participants seem to have mixed feelings about what defines Spaniards as a people, perceiving them as enjoying a good quality of life, whilst also seeing them as ill-mannered and ignorant.

Results therefore suggest that Spanish and Polish participants view national identity differently. On the one hand, contributions by the Polish participants point to the strongly Catholic-based sense of national identity that the Polish state fostered in the aftermath of the First World War (Sadkowski 2000, 175). On the other hand, the dearth

of national symbols mentioned by Spanish students points to the sore identity issues characterising contemporary Spain and, more specifically, how erstwhile hegemonic discourses that placed Castilianness at the centre of a wider notion of Spanishness are being contested by peripheral counterdiscourses (Jensen 2000). It should be noted that Majorca is one of Spain's Catalan-speaking territories. Consequently, although this has not yet resulted in a strong separatist movement on the island, the linguistic and cultural connections with Catalonia are strong, which has led to identity being felt in Majorca very differently from, say, central Spain (Mestre i Sureda 2002, 99).

Finally, the transcultural methodology participants were exposed to may also account for the Spanish participants distancing themselves further from fellow nationals at T2: it may have resulted in an increased awareness of the existence of different worldviews and alternative cultural values, and their distancing themselves even further from the complex discursive constructions that comprise contemporary Spain.

4.2. The Impact of the Transcultural Methodology on How Participants See Members of Other Imagined Communities

The qualitative data have provided valuable information concerning how participants see members of other imagined communities at the beginning of the study. The participants' young age may have played a role in their not always answering Q2 and Q3 coherently, questions which required conscious reflection on abstract concepts like identity. Nevertheless, their answers to Q2, which looked into participants' perceptions of stereotypes as a source of information on other nationalities, show that 52.5% of participants are fully aware of the dangers of stereotyping as a reliable source of information. Interestingly, the majority are Polish participants, which in turn implies that most Spanish participants either have mixed feelings about cultural stereotypes—i.e., they think that a grain of truth might be found in them (a position that no Polish participants adopt)—or else openly accept them as a useful source of information (which only one Polish participant agrees on). The results therefore indicate that oppositional views on the value of stereotypes are particularly representative of the Polish participants. This seems to suggest, at least initially, that Poles are more sensitive to the potentially damaging effects of the stereotyping that all national identity discourses involve. Additionally, several posts by Polish students also suggest that they regard themselves as largely impervious to the stereotyping of the Other that results from national identity discourses.

However, answers to Q3 provided new nuances. When it comes to visiting another country, stereotypes seem to play a greater role among Poles than among Spaniards (25% of the Spanish group felt that negative stereotypes would not influence them). This may suggest that Polish participants tend to associate cultural stereotypes with travel options, whereas Spanish participants tend to separate their views on other countries and their travel options. One possible explanation may be that, whereas

Calvià is the municipality that receives the greatest number of international tourists in Majorca (BOIB 2015), Opole is still uncharted territory on mainstream tourist maps, which might explain Bendinat and Opole participants' having different perceptions of the phenomenon of tourism and, more specifically, the motivational factors behind tourists' destination choices. The Spanish participants are well used to sharing their space with countless foreign tourists with very limited knowledge of Spanish and, especially, Majorcan culture. This is a plausible explanation as to why a relevant number of the Spanish participants may have dissociated cultural stereotypes from holiday decision-making.

In addition, according to their answers, stereotypes also play a very limited role for Spanish participants in their decision to learn a new language. Conversely, a greater number of Polish participants express the view that positive stereotypes might motivate them to learn a foreign language, while even more acknowledge that negative stereotypes may put them off. These different patterns may signal different foreign language learning cultures in Spain and Poland. Several studies have found low motivation levels among Spanish EFL learners in their teens (González García 2004). Whereas in Spain learning English is an obligation, the political changes in Poland in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s led to changes in the country's foreign language learning policy. While previously Russian had dominated the foreign language market, the country reacted in the face of its newly found freedom by opening up to other foreign languages (Truchot 2002). It is within reason that the new generations of Poles would be far more motivated to learn such languages rather than Russian, which somehow came to represent Soviet oppression (Grave 2008). Consequently, sympathy towards the people associated with a foreign language may well play a far more important role among Poles than among Spaniards.

It is clear, therefore, that the topic under discussion is complex and conclusions should not be rushed into. When asked in general terms, Polish participants generally declare that they are aware of the power of stereotypes. However, when asked about a more specific dimension, many of them candidly acknowledge that, far from being impervious to stereotyped discourses, there are aspects of their lives which are largely affected by them. For their part, Spanish participants seem to be more practical in their foreign language choices. English—the world's most widely taught foreign language (Coleman 2006)—is universally taught across schools in Spain. As a result, their studying English at school may have little to do with motivation. Likewise, it seems that Spanish participants are not especially motivated to consider taking up additional foreign languages. As to how stereotypes may affect their choice of holiday destinations, they seemingly believe themselves to be less affected by stereotyped discourses than their Polish peers. As mentioned above, the status of Calvià as an international tourist destination may be behind this result. However, there may be more to it. Bernd Wächter (2000) suggests that national identity issues may have an impact on internationalisation programmes in education. In his own words,

[...] strong regional identities often hinder the development of an international outlook. For example, an insistence on a rarely spoken regional language as the mode of tuition tends to act as an obstacle to international cooperation in some of these regions. (Wächter 2000, 7)

Accordingly, different national identity feelings may have also played a role in the different patterns shown by Polish and Spanish participants when answering Q2 and, especially, Q3. In fact, the link that Wächter detects between a strong regional identity and the impact of IAH is all the more relevant in light of the following. The national identity issues discussed above (see section 4.1) led to the 1978 Constitution turning Spain into a federal state in all but name, divided not into federated states but “autonomous communities” in an attempt to reconcile the concepts of “unity and diversity” (Moreno 1997, 65). This ambiguous state model has in turn fostered two antagonistic readings. The political centre and right tend to view autonomous communities as mere regions, whereas at least some of the latter view themselves as key components of a multinational state.

In Majorca, Spanish-centred discourses are likely to encounter major opposition if only because of (1) the territory’s island status, and (2) the Catalan origin of its cultural and linguistic heritage. Overall, Majorcans have a strong sense of identity often resulting in ambivalent feelings not only towards a Castilian-centred vision of Spain but also Catalanness (Mestre i Sureda 2002, 99). This, in light of Wächter’s comments above, may partly account for the Majorcan participants’ different perceptions concerning national stereotypes and their influence.

As seen above, cultural stereotypes seem to be more widely accepted as valid or partly valid sources of information among Spanish than Polish participants, and such stereotypes seem to play a greater role in travel- and language learning-related decision-making among Polish participants. A possible identity-based explanation of this may be provided, and could involve Spaniards not taking into consideration stereotypes concerning foreign people since their feelings towards a, let us say, pan-Spanish identity are far more diverse, and possibly not quite so strongly felt, as the deeply-rooted, historically-based Polish identity expressed by the Polish participants. In a complementary manner, this strong Polish identity may well lead Polish participants to show themselves as more receptive to countries and languages associated to cultures they do not perceive as posing a threat to their conception of Polish identity. Such an explanation need not be incompatible with the more practical explanations provided above, namely the role of Russian in the Polish foreign language market and Majorca’s status as a major tourism destination.

At any rate, this information—and most especially that related to the very different national identity discourses currently in force in Spain and Poland—may partly account for the quantitative ethnocentrism-related data from the SDT. The data show that, at T1, in relative terms, Spanish and Polish participants, surprisingly, do not have the perception of being dramatically distant from each other. Also somewhat unexpected was

the fact that the TAK participants, who were studying Spanish as a foreign language, did not position themselves closer to the Spanish on the SDT than their Polish peers. The relatively short social distance that the participants perceive to exist between the Spanish and Polish imagined communities may, then, be related to the high expectations the *EIL in Poland and Spain* blog project may have raised among them, as well as to the increased level of trust that CMC is known to result in (Feng, Lazar and Preece 2004, 104).

Another interesting result is that, among all the foreign imagined communities listed in the SDT, participants generally feel closest to Britain (something that is maintained at T2, although not in the case of TAK participants). The participants' perception of their closer cultural proximity to British people rather than to French or German citizens, for example, was perhaps to be expected, since they all are EFL learners and, as such, possibly predisposed to showing a more integrative disposition towards a community of speakers of this target language (Dörnyei 2010, 96). What cannot fail to surprise, however, is that the cultural proximity that participants report feeling with regard to the British is generally higher than they feel exists between their respective imagined communities and the US at a time when a globalised, US-led mediascape (Thussu 2000) should make it easier for EFL learners to feel closer to the US. The traditional dominance of British English (and British-produced materials such as textbooks) in the European EFL market (Graddol 2000, 56-57) may have played a role here.

The most striking results, however, concern the fact that the values attached to most cultural dimensions in the SDT are generally higher at T2. This is the case of the distance that the Spanish participants express they perceive between themselves and fellow Spaniards. A tentative explanation here could be that the critical thinking skills fostered by the methodological approach under study may have resulted in the Spanish participants looking at their own country more critically.

Potentially more problematic, however, is the fact that the overall levels of ethno-relativeness diminish for all participants, as mean values encompassing all the cultural dimensions tested in the SDT are higher at T2 than at T1, although this is not statistically significant. This could be interpreted as attrition effects resulting from the running of the project throughout one academic year. However, other readings are also possible. Learning about cultural diversity need not result in the realisation that different cultures are not that different but, rather, in the appreciation of—and respect for—cultural difference per se, an idea that the constricting format of the SDT may not have enabled participants to express. Somewhat connected with this line of reasoning is David Block's interesting use of David Held's concept of "cultural cosmopolitanism" (2002) versus John Urry's notion of "aesthetic cosmopolitanism" (1995). Whereas the latter refers to one of the many side-effects of globalisation, namely the accrual of social and cultural capital on the part of "those with sufficient economic capital to afford" it by visibly consuming the Other (cuisine, sight-seeing, music, cinema, etc.), cultural cosmopolitanism is "construed as the positive disposition to engage and mix with other cultures" in a far deeper way "above and beyond nation-state loyalties" (Block 2010, 296). Thus seen, cultural cosmopolitanism

may be part and parcel of transcultural competence and, consequently, the higher SDT values obtained at T2, far from being a failure, may be taken as an indication that the transcultural approach to EIL under review in this research did begin to bear fruit.

5. CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this article points to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as an ideological process, potentially altering the learner's discursive framework. Most importantly, it points to innovative, transcultural, IAH-inspired methodological approaches bringing to the fore the ideological dimension of SLA, thereby potentially reshaping the learner's identity.

The largely content-based approach reviewed here exposed participants to cultural facts and values well beyond those dominant in their respective imagined communities, arguably placing emphasis on the differences between their countries of origin, namely Spain and Poland. These were indeed the cognitive objectives of this internationalised EIL curriculum, which were complemented by the attitudinal objectives that this research has attempted to survey.

The triangular design ensured a rich combination of both qualitative and quantitative data, pointing to (1) the dramatically different perceptions of national identity discourses held by the Spanish and Polish participants, and (2) how the participants' position with regard to such discourses changed during the study with respect to both their own and other imagined communities.

The results challenged the commonly held perception that transcultural competence may result in the individual perceiving themselves as culturally closer to members of other imagined communities. In fact, the results point to the gradual erasure of national imagined communities as transcultural competence develops, which opens up a brand new research strand, the exploration of which must be carried out with research tools other than traditional, national imagined community-based utensils like the SDT used in this research. Further research should therefore take this into account by (1) using larger participant samples from more countries (the low number of SDTs analysed is a major limitation of this study), (2) lengthening the duration of the study, and (3) involving older participants with whom different research methodologies could be employed—e.g., narrative life interviews—so as to obtain more detailed and coherent identity-related statements.¹⁰

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