

Critical approach to intercultural education and foreign language learning and teaching: neoliberal gender ideologies in textbooks of Spanish as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT: In line with the understanding of the role of critical pedagogy in intercultural language education, in this paper we focus on critical discourse and sociolinguistic analysis of contemporary textbooks of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL). We search for neoliberal gender ideologies in educational discourses targeting international audience of students of SFL. Even though new textbooks are said to promote the “feminization” of educational contexts (Gray 2010), we interpret them as sources of latent hegemonic influences favoring highly regulated and standardized neoliberal capitalist worldviews toward gender. Based on previous research of textbooks of SFL (Bori 2018; Kuzmanović Jovanović 2016), we herein present results of an instrumental qualitative case study (emancipatory focus group research) taking a critical stand toward neoliberal gender ideologies among predominantly female university students of Spanish at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade who are exposed to the above outlined teaching and learning materials. Our objective is to create a new educational space in our SFL classrooms in which contextualized knowledge construction takes place leading to the maturation of SFL users and teachers, who are “capable of changing their reality in ways related to formal and informal educational settings” (Filipović 2015: 105).

Keywords: intercultural language education, neoliberalism, gender ideologies, E/LE, contextualized knowledge construction

Una aproximación crítica a la educación intercultural y el aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras: las ideologías de género neoliberales en los libros de texto de E/LE

RESUMEN: En línea con el entendimiento del papel de la pedagogía crítica en la educación intercultural de lenguas, en este trabajo nos centramos en el análisis del discurso crítico y sociolingüístico de los libros de texto contemporáneos del español como lengua extranjera (ELE). Buscamos ideologías de género capitalistas neoliberales en discursos educativos dirigidos a la audiencia internacional de estudiantes de ELE. Aunque se ha dicho que dichos textos promueven la “feminización” de los contextos educativos (Gray 2010), en esta investigación los interpretamos como fuentes de influencias hegemónicas latentes que favorecen los puntos de vista neoliberales capitalistas altamente reguladas y estandarizadas hacia el

género. Basándonos en las investigaciones previas de libros de texto de ELE (Bori 2018; Kuzmanović Jovanović 2016), en este trabajo llevamos a cabo un estudio de caso instrumental cualitativo (en forma de un grupo focal emancipatorio), con el objetivo de desarrollar una visión crítica de las ideologías neoliberales de género entre estudiantes universitarias de ELE en la Facultad de Filología de la Universidad de Belgrado, que están expuestas a los materiales de enseñanza y aprendizaje descritos. Nuestro objetivo es crear un nuevo espacio educativo en nuestras aulas de ELE en el que tenga lugar una construcción del conocimiento contextualizada que conduzca a la maduración de las usuarias y maestras de ELE, “capacitadas para cambiar la realidad didáctica en contextos educativos formales e informales” (Filipović 2015, p. 105).

Palabras clave: educación intercultural de lenguas, neoliberalismo, ideologías de género, E/LE, construcción de conocimiento contextualizada

1. INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE, COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERCULTURAL (COMMUNICATIVE) COMPETENCE

We believe that it can be safely postulated that when Dell Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence in what he himself called a “programmatic” paper in 1972, he could not have envisioned the outreach and the effects that the adoption of this concept would have on the future development of a number of linguistic disciplines, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics to be the most prominent supporters of the relevance of the notion. Taking an anthropological perspective on language and efficient (successful and purposeful) communication, he explained in great detail that “(...) there are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical is one. Put otherwise, there is behavior, and, underlying it, there are several systems of rules reflected in the judgements and abilities of those whose messages the behavior reflects. (Hymes, 1972, p. 280). Hymes postulates that our knowledge about language is far more complex than specified by the system of grammatical structures and rules governing their organization. He claims that knowledge of culturally acceptable behavior had also to be accounted for by linguistic theory, and that it must include “the capacities of persons, the organization of verbal means for socially defined purposes, and the sensitivity of rules to situations” (Hymes, 1972, p. 288).

The concept of communicative competence has found its prominent position in applied linguistics and second language acquisition theories of the 1980s, precisely due to the fact that it places emphasis on communication, communicative events and message contents rather than on decontextualized grammatical accuracy of utterances: “For Hymes, the linguist’s task is not only the description of what a speaker knows about grammar, but also an accounting ‘for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical but also as appropriate’ (Humes 197, p. 5). This knowledge of appropriateness is knowledge of sociolinguistic rules” (Burns 1990, p. 30). In that period, second language acquisition theory, consequently, started paying attention to the concepts of context, intelligibility (Burns 1990, pp. 31-37), the importance of purposeful interaction and negotiation of meaning (Murphy 1986, Nunan 1991, Pica 1994, Foster 1998, Savignon 1983, Byram & Grundy 2003, among others).

Communicative language teaching then emerges as an umbrella approach which is concerned with understanding and applying in foreign language classroom practice a consistent understanding of language as communicative action (Habermas 1984). In other words, it addresses the concepts of language as communication, introduces the notion of diversity (inter and intracultural, individual and collective), and affirms the idea that “culture is recognized as playing an instrumental role in shaping speakers’ communicative competence” (see Burns, 1990, p. 104 for more detail).

The above outlined theoretical and methodological orientation in second language acquisition research brought about the connection between cultural studies and foreign language teaching. Byram & Esarte-Sarries (1991) discuss the notion of ‘relevance’ in foreign language teaching, aligning the needs of students and other stakeholders to the culturally-conditioned knowledge of the world that we bring into the foreign language classrooms: “Language is the main medium for expressing and embodying other phenomena. It expresses and embodies the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society, or part of it, share by virtue of their socialization into it and their acceptance of and identification with it. (...) Direct experience of another country involves not only the cognitive but also the affective dimension, of the personality” (1991, pp. 28, 30).

The notion of intercultural communicative (communication¹) competence in applied linguistics was brought into focus in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Byram, Nichols & Stevens (2001, p. 3) define it as a process in which “learners become aware of and analyze cultural phenomena of their own society as much as those of other societies” within educational contexts which allow for “the development of skills of analysis and integration of unfamiliar social and cultural data from a foreign society”.

Intercultural communicative competence, defined in qualitative and non-measurable terms as intercultural awareness became one of the cornerstones of European foreign language education policies and it is defined as: “Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’ (...) It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds (...) In addition to objective knowledge, intercultural awareness covers an awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes.” By developing this type of knowledge, foreign language learners develop “an appropriate intercultural competence” (CEFR 2001, pp. 103-104).

2. CRITICAL APPROACH TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

It was not without reason that we introduced Habermas’s notion of communicative action in the introductory section of this paper. He develops his “action theory” based on the concept of communicative competence in order to help us better understand “social interac-

¹ The term intercultural communication competence is used in communication studies and social anthropology. It is believed that it was first introduced by Hall in 1959 and is often defined as: “(...) communication “between people from different national cultures, and many scholars limit it to face-to-face communication” (Gudykunst, 2002, p. 179). The study of competence in an intercultural interaction is often influenced by the researcher’s definition of intercultural communication and conceptualization of competence.” (Arasaratnam & Doerfel 2005, p. 138).

tions in the domains important to cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization” (Habermas 1984, p. 5), primarily applying it in order to support his “critique of society” which is “emancipatory in aim” (Burns 1990, p. 97). His understanding of communication is that it should be participatory, cooperative accessible to each individual within a group: “Fundamental to the paradigm of mutual understanding is ... the performative attitude of participants in interaction, who coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world” (Habermas 1987, p. 296). In intercultural communication, this translates to the following interpretation of Habermas’s communicative principle: “If cultures are to be living with cultures, they must live with others, for a serious effort to understand the values and cultures of others is our only option for reflecting upon our own” (Warnke 2005, p. 140).

A serious question, however, arises if we take a critical view of what intercultural communication and intercultural competence actually mean in foreign language classrooms in the 21st century. In a paper discussing the possibility of application of a constructivist research paradigm to the analysis of context and culture in foreign language teaching, Wendt (2003, pp. 95-96) argues that traditional conception of culture in foreign language teaching has been based on “essentialist” notions of homogeneous systems, clearly discernible from other systems, while post-modern interpretations of culture take into account process and context oriented perspectives, especially in light of the fact that we live in the age of constant and massive migration and in “information society (in which) each individual participates in several cultures (...) (which) constitute themselves dynamically in discourse”.

This brings us into the realm of critical discourse analysis² and relates issues of social power, hierarchy and hegemony to contexts of foreign language classrooms. In such a context, assertions such as the following one also turn into serious topics for critical discourse analysis: “Intercultural learning is seen as a transgression of limits of socialization into primary communities and a move towards ‘the foreign’, which is accepted as potential ‘authority’ for ensuring viability (Wendt, 1993). Foreign language instruction can contribute to this by conveying the understanding that one’s own as well as the foreign cultures are constructs (‘construction awareness’)” (Wendt 2003, p. 97). And that is the research question we would like to investigate further in this paper: Are we actually certain that our foreign language classrooms function in accordance with and following the principles of critical pedagogy³ and constructivist approach to knowledge, which would make sure that our foreign language teachers and our students actually develop the above cited ‘construction awareness’ necessary to develop a relativist, critical perspective towards ‘target language cultures’, in times when the existence of social hierarchies based on neoliberal ideologies, in critical theory is often viewed as a 21st century “rationalism” (Harvey 2005)? Are we, as teachers and students, equipped to critically evaluate the fact that in most cases when the so-called

² “Critical discourse analysis investigates the role of discourse in the (re)production of social power, hegemony and domination by certain individuals and groups (...) over other members of the same group and/or over other groups applying interpretation of linguistic facts in order to identify and possibly eliminate social inequality, stereotypes and prejudice” (Filipović, 2015, p. 23); for further information, see, e.g., Fairclough, 1989/2001, van Dijk, 1993, etc.).

³ Critical pedagogy in intercultural language education addresses “the abuses of power in intercultural contexts, in the acquisition of languages and in their circulation” (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 1).

‘world languages’ (languages of former colonial powers such as English⁴, Spanish, French, Portuguese and German) are concerned, teaching materials actually often imply that a single set of social and individual values (individuality, personal growth and mobility across boundaries of social class, educational ranks, individual freedom of choice, etc.) is supported and promoted, without addressing issues such as social responsibility, leadership, heterarchy, multiplicity of points of view, individual and collective empowerment, etc.?

In the continuation of this paper, we develop a case study of neoliberal gender ideologies in textbooks of Spanish as a foreign language among Serbian (predominantly female) university undergraduate students majoring in Spanish, in order to illustrate the need to further develop the applications of critical theory and critical discourse analysis in foreign language teaching methodologies which should help both the teachers and the students develop critical intercultural communicative competence based on critical awareness of what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls ‘the danger of a single story’ (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story). Her Ted talk focuses on Nigeria and Mexico, but we strongly believe that there are many other parts of the world, Serbia included, which have been considered as the periphery, and not only in the eyes of the powerful and the dominant cultures, but, more importantly, in the eyes of the Serbian academic audience as well, with a serious consequence of being “entrapped in a ‘vicious circle of neglect and – some say – prejudice” (Gibbs, 1995: 92) which “smacks of First Worldism” (Gibbs 1995, p. 97)” (Filipović 2015a, p. 368).

3. CULTURAL HEGEMONY, NEOLIBERALISM AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

Nowadays, neoliberalism is used in many areas of social life as a universal term that encompasses and explains most of the contemporary phenomena, substituting other “master” concepts, such as globalization or capitalism (Larner 2003, p. 509). Neoliberalism is most often understood as either a unified set of policies or a political ideology (Larner 2003, p. 511). It is an economic project, a political ideology and the rationality linked to a specific form of governmentality (Prügl 2015, p. 617), and at the same time, “the common sense” of our societies (Harvey, 2005, p. 2), “a compelling causal force for a variety of outcomes largely judged to be negative” (Prügl 2015, p. 616). The core values it is preaching, such as individualism, entrepreneurialism, self-responsibility, or self-branding (Dardot & Laval 2014), have penetrated and transformed all the aspects of our social life, including feminism.

⁴ Questions related to issues of hegemonic aspects of learning and teaching English as a global lingua franca have been discussed in great detail in academic literature, ranging from those arguing that English as a global lingua franca is stripped of all cultural contents an implications and merely used as ‘language of communication’ rather than ‘language for identification’ (e.g., see Firth, 1996; Jenkins, 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Meierkord, 1998, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004; House, 2003, etc.), to those who believe that there exists a serious hegemonic ideology affirming advantages of the above position which is actually more “assumed than stated” (Tardy, 2004). In academic contexts, for instance, it has been claimed that the dominance of English as the medium of instruction actually favors “prevailing forms of cultural and academic hegemony” (van Dijk, 1994, p. 276) and is a consequence of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2006, 2009, 2013) and cultural chauvinism (van Dijk, 1994) (see Filipović 2015a for further discussion).

While the feminists of the second wave focused on the institutional bias against women, the change of the social and economic paradigm in the 1970s (from Keynesian welfare state to neoliberal minimal state), the process of globalization, and the alleged “triumph of democracy” brought up by the end of the cold war, gave rise to a new form of feminism, coined by some feminist scholars as “global feminism” (Eisenstein 2009, p. 12). Namely, gender politics seem to prevail all over the world, as women have become the core of politics of many national, international and transnational institutions, such as the UN, World Bank, IMF and others that promote poverty alleviation or gender equality (Cornwall et al, 2008, p. 2).

Different feminist scholars have warned about the harmful consequences of this symbiosis. Instead of challenging capitalism, liberal (global) feminism “is walking the halls of corporate and state power (...) and speaks a new language of gender balance and equality as an asset for business and economic development” (Prügl, 2015, p. 614). The core values and ideas of early feminist movements – the deconstruction of patriarchy and its oppressive structures – have succumbed to the neoliberal economic projects and interweaved them into rationalities and technologies of neoliberal governmentality (Prügl 2015, p. 617).

However, neoliberal policies have had other, more profound consequences for women all over the world. They resulted in a “feminization of labor, accompanied by deterioration of working conditions” (Cornwall et al, 2008, p. 2). As Hawkesworth puts it (2006, p. 202), today, “women are simultaneously hailed as resourceful providers, reliable micro-entrepreneurs, cosmopolitan citizens, and positioned as ‘disposable domestics’, the exploited global workforce, and as displaced, devalued and disenfranchised diasporic citizens.” One of the key words of the second wave of feminism, *empowerment*, was transformed by neoliberal ideology from collective struggle to individual improvement (Sardenberg in Cornwall et al, 2008, p. 3). The neoliberal governmentality has depoliticized and delegitimized feminist organizations, turning them into simple “service providers, reliant on contracts from the state or grant from the developing industry” (Cornwall et al, 2008, p. 3) and preventing them to perform their task of social mobilization. So, instead of mobilizing women into a collective and solidary struggle, “global” feminism often just promotes “individualist solutions to gender oppression” (Prügl 2015, p. 614).

Nevertheless, although neoliberalism has led to flexibilization, deterioration of working conditions, violation of international labor standards, informalization of work, and privatization of care (Cornwall et al, 2008, p. 2), it was not equally harmful for all the women. The processes at the core of neoliberal policies – globalization and liberalization of markets – opened new forms of work for many women, offering them economic independence and, thus, destabilizing patriarchal, pre-capitalist social structures (Cornwall et al, 2008, p. 3). However, even though gender has become central in national and transnational policies worldwide, and women gain prominent role in many domains of social and public life, the cooption of feminist agenda by the neoliberal ideology resulted in a new social hierarchy, where gender was transformed into an “effect of individual choices and competitive processes” (Hawkesworth 2012, 244). As Eisenstein (2009) argues, capitalism has seduced feminism allowing its liberal basis to become hegemonic. The emblematic left-wing politics and class-based analyses of the early second-wave feminism have been lost, making possible the cooption of feminist ideas by global elites (Prügl 2015, p. 618).

3.1. Neoliberal gender ideologies and foreign languages textbooks

The effects of this propagation of neoliberal values are visible in different forms of public discourse. Herein, we will discuss its impact and effects on foreign language textbooks. Critical feminist analysis of these didactic materials⁵ conducted extensively in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, indicated an important presence of stereotyped gender representations in these books, where males were over-represented, and with considerable protagonism over female characters (Sunderland, 2002). However, some recent analyses have shown the “feminization” of the content of these textbooks (Gray, 2010; Copley, 2017). From the end of the 1990s, the awareness of gender bias has significantly raised not only among teachers and students, but also among publishers and authors of these textbooks (Sunderland, 2002: 224, for EFL textbooks). In the contemporary, 21st century textbooks, the presence of male and female characters tends to be balanced, and stereotypical representations of both genders are generally being avoided, as well as the language that subordinates or undervalues women (cf. Kuzmanovic Jovanovic 2016 for SFL textbooks). This is exactly the remark that was made by almost all of the students who participated in our survey and the emancipatory focus group.

Nevertheless, in spite of the apparent gender balance in representations, there is a different kind of unbalance observable in the same textbooks. Namely, female characters that appear in these didactic materials are almost exclusively women who benefited from the neoliberal politics: empowered, strong individuals, with erased class differences. Women affected by negative consequences of the feminization of labor in neoliberalism, precarious workers and losers, are not represented in this kind of discourse (Kuzmanovic Jovanovic, 2018). Therefore, in spite of the undeniable progress in representation of women in contemporary L2 textbooks, these changes should be analyzed in a broader social context, as a part of expansion of hegemonic ideology of the neoliberal capitalism.

4. THE CASE STUDY – METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Our research on the possible effects of neoliberal gender ideologies in textbooks of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) on predominantly female university students majoring in Spanish at Faculty of Philology - University of Belgrade is constructed as a qualitative instrumental case study. We find this particular choice of methodology useful for the objective of our research, as our intention is to provide our readers with a contextualized account of our findings, which can further be used in a generative way – to develop new theoretical aspects of intercultural communicative competence which can then be incorporated into innovative foreign language methodologies (see Ritchie & Lewis (2003) for further account of social and educational aspects of qualitative research).

The starting point for our case study research was critical discourse analysis of neoliberal gender ideologies in textbooks of Spanish as a foreign language conducted by Kuzmanović Jovanović (2018) and Kuzmanović Jovanović & Đuričić (2015, 2016). Their corpus consisted of textbooks published by prestigious Spanish academic publishers between 2011 and 2015,

⁵ We have used data for EFL and SFL textbooks for our analysis.

which are used in language courses offered by the *Instituto Cervantes* in different parts of Europe and at the Department of Iberian Studies of the Faculty of Philology – University of Belgrade. As such, these textbooks are easily available to professors and students of SFL in Serbia (current and future transmitters of cultural models and ideologies linked to these didactic materials). The specific time span (2011-2015) has been chosen in order to facilitate a comparison with the previous periods, since an abundant corpora of investigation on gender ideologies in SFL textbooks from 1970s onwards is already available (cf. Instituto de la Mujer, 1996)⁶.

We purposefully choose to emphasize the title of our academic program (Spanish language, *Hispanic* literatures and cultures) in order to open an additional question regarding the presence or absence of Hispanic gender ideologies other than those present in modern-day Spain, as all the textbooks we use in our classrooms are published by Spanish educational publishing houses. In other words, we have opted for the concept of a case study which allows us to use a “multiplicity of perspectives” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 52) in our research in order to provide a more comprehensive account of our findings which can be used in the analysis of other educational contexts.

The participants in our fieldwork were junior and senior year students majoring in Spanish (13 female and 1 male) at the Department of Iberian Studies, Faculty of Philology - University of Belgrade. At the time of our fieldwork, they all attended our classes on language and society, discourse analysis and communicative Spanish (all taught completely in the target language). Initially, all students attending these courses were contacted on the Moodle platform (used in our regular teaching and learning activities at the Department) and these 14 young people responded positively to our invitation to participate in our case study. It should also be pointed out that the Covid19 pandemic induced lockdown was in place at the time of our fieldwork, so that the communication was carried out exclusively online, via email, while an emancipatory focus group was organized on the ZOOM platform. The survey was set up and completed in Spanish, while the focus group interview was carried out in Serbian, recorded, transcribed and translated into English. A sample of the survey is presented in Appendix 1. Images and initial discussion questions (distributed to our participants in advance) used in the ZOOM focus group are presented Appendix 2.

4.1. The survey

As the survey was carried out in Spanish, we decided to include our participants’ illustrative answers in the language of the survey in our analysis with no attempt to correct possible grammatical or stylistic errors. The answers were grouped according to three themes (definition of gender ideology, representations of male and female protagonists in textbook materials and the relevance of social class, education and ethnicity in gender representations), and analyzed accordingly.

The answers to the questions regarding the definition of gender ideologies and gender stereotypes indicate that our students possess a range of more or less academically based competences regarding these terms. In other words, their answers varied from those defining ideologies as:

⁶ According to the previous research, SFL textbooks were traditionally gender insensitive and replete with gender stereotypes (Instituto de la Mujer, 1996).

Theoretical/academic constructs:

La ideología de género puede ser un concepto o una filosofía que se usa para referirse a los estudios de género.

Prescriptive concepts:

Las ideologías de género tratan de establecer igualdad entre los géneros, y la idea principal es tratar todos en la misma manera, sin prestar la atención a su sexo/género.

Accounts of specific worldviews:

Las ideologías de género suponen las visiones diversas de cada una de las personas respecto a la relación existente entre los géneros. La ideología de cada uno influye en su manera de vivir las relaciones sociales en general.

Even though the above answers (which are illustrative for all 14 participants) suggest that they do have a sense of gender dichotomies and their impact on our everyday lives, when it comes to a critical approach to SFL teaching materials, the majority of them claim that the SFL contemporary textbooks have come a long way in order to make sure that there are no negative gender stereotypes present in their contents. Consequently, they claim that there are no apparent gender stereotypes in the textbooks they used in their university studies, and that there exist equal representations of male and female protagonists in didactic materials such as stories and learning activities. Only one female student provides a suggestion for further improvement of the textbook materials:

Creo que en los años recientes ha habido un esfuerzo consciente de alejarse de situaciones que se puedan interpretar como estereotípicas, así que no tengo ejemplos específicos (aunque sí me gustaría tener situaciones más “arriesgadas”, p.ej. referencias a sexualidad”).

Only two female students commented on the predominant use of the grammatical male gender (used as gender neutral, all-inclusive referent) in textbook activities:

“Pienso que prevalece el protagonismo masculino, porque en mayoría de los ejemplos en los manuales aparecen los textos que son escritos en primera persona singular masculina.”

“(D)urante mis estudios he notado también que se favorece el uso del masculino en ciertas profesiones, especialmente si la misma forma suele emplearse para ambos géneros. Por ejemplo se destacan: el juez, el cónsul, el capitán, el testigo, el gurú, el conserje, el modelo, el miembro, el entrenador...”

The only question which has drawn our students’ attention to possible negative gender stereotyping was the one referring to professions and female role models: the majority of the participants believe that there still exists a traditional division of labor by gender lines (women are presented as singers, teachers, writers, and housewives, while men are traditionally seen as lawyers, engineers, businessmen, etc.). And, more importantly, practically

all participants in the survey made a note regarding a homogeneity of social class, levels of education and ethnicity present in the textbook materials they have been in contact with:

“Entre las profesionales, las más comunes son definitivamente las mujeres de show business (aunque se puede preguntar si eso en parte es para hacer el manual un poco más “cercano” a los estudiantes jóvenes). Entre las mujeres en situaciones cotidianas, una gran parte está en el ámbito doméstico o consumista, y hay pocas “trabajadoras” en el sentido de trabajo como ‘obras manuales’”.

“De verdad, casi nunca se habla de una mujer pobre, o de una refugiada, una ladrona o pícara, o de una mujer que realiza o se dedica a los asuntos y trabajos que generalmente hacen los hombres. Lo más presentes son las mujeres jóvenes, alumnas o estudiantes; o las de edad y clase social media, que trabajan como maestras, profesoras, doctoras, son abogadas, etc. También se mencionan las cantantes y actrices famosas, que han logrado un gran éxito. Por otra parte, las atletas femeninas exitosas casi nunca se mencionan.”

“Podría mejorarse aún más al incluir más clases sociales como, por ejemplo, mujeres que trabajan en supermercados, oficinas de correos y mujeres que trabajan como obreras de la construcción.”

And finally, one participant commented on a lack of information regarding female role models from different part of the Spanish speaking world:

“No hay muchos textos sobre las mujeres de España o Hispanoamérica (tampoco otras) que sí merecen estar en los manuales para L2. Cada estudiante tiene que saber lo importante relacionado con la cultura/historia de la nación cuyo idioma estudia. Faltan más textos sobre las escritoras, científicas, heroínas históricas, cantantes, actrices hispanas.”

The answers of the one male student did not in any significant way vary from those of his female co-participants.

The results of the survey suggest a relatively high degree of homogeneity in our students’ perceptions of gender representations and functions in SFL textbooks they have encountered in their academic careers so far. However, the emancipatory focus group interview adds extremely important additional insight into their worldviews which are much more freely shared in a spoken form in an open dialogue.

4.2. The emancipatory focus group

As already stated, due to the Covid19 pandemic, the emancipatory focus group interview was carried out using the ZOOM platform. All 14 participants and both researchers took part in the group interview which lasted 40 minutes (due to the platform limitations for free-of-charge use).

The discussion was organized around four excerpts from the two textbooks used in the 3rd and 4th year of our communicative Spanish courses, *Nuevo Prisma B2* (EdiNumen) and *C de C1* (Difusión) (see Appendix 2 for the texts and questions used in the group interview). The main topics of the interview were the following: gender discrimination along with the issue of double marginalization (by gender and ethnicity, in Latin America and elsewhere); gender roles and the balance between professional and private life; presence of social class in gender representations; presence and impact of the neoliberal ideology of individual efforts as a prerequisite of success; and, finally, relevance and impact of the textbooks on students' attitudes and real-life experiences.

4.2.1. *Gender discrimination and double marginalization (by gender and ethnicity)*

We asked our students to comment on the text about girls' education in Peru (Acquaoni, R. et al, 2017, p. 109) in order to explore their perspective on gender discrimination combined with possible insight into double marginalization and stigmatization of young females students of different (non-white, non-European) ethnicities. It seems that they are quite aware of the different opportunities for boys and girls in today's societies. Some of them believe that gender discrimination is more accentuated in Latin America than in Europe:

Latin American countries still suffer from gender discrimination because they are poorly developed. I don't mean to be offensive, but I think the fact that they are so backwards in comparison to Europe is the cause of the lack of equality."

Others think that the discrimination is universal, yet some societies have developed more efficient ways to cover it up:

I think Latin American countries are more open and sincere, and the West just has a good propaganda, they also suffer from discrimination but they disguise it better, they have a better marketing. But I think they are hypocrites."

Our students are also aware of the intersection between gender and other types of discrimination (especially the one based on social class):

Here in Serbia the girls are discriminated both on the basis of gender and on the basis of their origin. At our department girls are being judged on the basis of what they wear or where they come from.

Only when prompted to consider the adverse effects of ethnicity in combination with gender, did they recognized the fact that in many parts of the world, Serbia included, there exists a serious stigmatization of females who do not belong to the majority ethnic, religious or linguistic groups.

4.2.2. *Gender roles*

In order to examine their attitudes towards gender roles, we asked our students to comment on the photo of a man and a woman who both appear to be working on their laptops

(Equipo Nuevo Prisma, 2015, p. 66). Our students made interesting remarks about their appearance and, consequently, the roles that men and women still have in our societies. They agree that a sharp division in gender roles still persists: men are dominant in the professional sphere, while women, even when they have access to it, are still dominantly care-oriented:

“When a woman is presented in a professional environment, she always tends to look cold and distant, and a man in the same situation always looks as a good businessman, who knows exactly what should be done.”

“Women are always more oriented towards their families, we always call our parents to make sure they are all right, while men are more relaxed, so in this photo I see a woman working on a laptop, but at the same time she is on the phone, talking to her parents, I think. On the other hand, it looks like the man in the other photo is enjoying the moment.”

4.2.3. Presence of social class in gender representations

Our students proved to be quite aware of the idealized, classless representations of both men and women in the textbooks. In their comments on the photo of several young people, students of SFL (Equipo Nuevo Prisma, 2015, p. 22), they generally emphasize the gap between these perfect images of joyful youth, and the reality. As one of them puts it:

“I have noticed that in all the exercise and illustrations in the textbooks, it seems that only an idealized reality is presented, which can sometimes affect our expectations of the real world in the future... It would be really good to add some real-life stories, it would help us, the students, to have more realistic expectations.”

4.2.4. Presence and impact of the neoliberal ideology of individual efforts as a prerequisite of success

The example of the life story of a Cuban ballet dancer, Vienguay Valdés (Equipo Nuevo Prisma, 2015, p. 48), in which the individual efforts are accentuated as a prerequisite for professional success, was used as a light motif for the discussion about the presence and impact of a neoliberal ideology in the SFL textbooks which views individualism as its important element (cf. Babaii & Sheikhi, 2018). Our students generally appreciate stories similar to the one we used in the focus group interview, find them interesting and important, and do not link them to a specific kind of ideology. Yet, they are aware of the fact that these stories are not significant for them or linked to their personal experience.

“Why the authors of the textbooks always insist on presenting us the stories of 1% of super successful people, like actors or painters, why a story of a professor who defended a PhD and worked all her life is not considered worthy and inspiring? Stories like this [of a successful ballet dancer] are good and important, but not very likely to happen to us, not very realistic.”

“I think that the story of celebrities are chosen in order to make the textbooks more attractive, but I think more realistic stories are needed.”

4.2.5. Relevance and impact of the textbooks on students' personal attitudes and real-life experiences

Finally, we wanted to see if our students are aware of possible impact that these textbooks and other didactic materials used in the SFL classroom have on their attitudes and perspective. The discussion suggests that they do not pay much attention to the content or the ideological background of texts and illustrations in the textbooks. However, they all agreed that the participation in our study and the emancipatory focus group discussion somewhat changed the way they perceive the contents that they have been using in their study of SFL and made them more aware of the possible underlying messages they might have been adopting uncritically. In their words:

“I have noticed that all the textbooks that we have used are pretty much alike, I don't pay attention to their content, I just go through it but now I realize that really many social groups or situations are not represented in them, they just give us an idealized image of the reality.”

“I am really inspired by this conversation to start thinking more deeply on the content of the textbooks.”

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This instrumental case study, consisting of a survey and an emancipatory focus group interview strongly suggest that SFL textbooks, despite their explicit efforts to eliminate gender bias from their contents, still contain materials which may be problematic on several levels in terms of gender stereotyping, female marginalization and possible negative impact they exercise on their end users. However, the results of our analysis indicates that even students who do not have any type of formal training in the areas of critical pedagogy, critical theory and critical discourse analysis (and who consequently may not possess theoretical apparatus needed for a thorough critical analysis of the SFL contents), when prompted, can be very open minded and constructive in their interpretations of possible problematic issues related to gender roles and gender relations, as well as the intersections between gender, social class, age and ethnicity.

Our hypothesis for this research was based on the preliminary results of the SFL textbook analysis (taken as the basis for our fieldwork), which confirm that there has been a major shift in gender representations in the contemporary SFL textbooks; not only their content is more gender sensitive and gender stereotypes are avoided, but the male protagonism has been replaced by “feminization” (cf. Grey, 2010) of these didactic materials. However, we believe (and our results support this belief), that it is not enough to simply add more female characters in the textbooks and show both men and women in non-traditional roles in order to truly change the dominant cultural model. We also postulate that the observed feminization

of these didactic materials is not a definite proof that the sexism has been eradicated in our contemporary Western societies.

In order to understand the true limitations of the supposed feminization of textbooks, we must bear in mind that a key element in this new kind of gender representation is an emphasis on individual will and self-action (Copley 2017, p. 14). The women represented in these books are generally white, young, middle class, and have a relatively high degree of control over their lives. On the other hand, in contemporary textbooks there are very few – or none – women from lower social classes, especially from the working class (Copley 2017, p. 15), of different ages or varied ethnic, religious or linguistic backgrounds. For instance, some available analysis of SFL textbooks show that only sporadic examples of working-class women, such as, for example, taxi drivers or nurses can be found (Kuzmanović Jovanović & Đuričić, 2015, p. 111), although experiences of female workers could also be a good basis for acquiring language competences through diverse didactic materials.

The survey and the emancipatory focus group interview that we carried out with junior and senior year students of Spanish linguistics at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade confirm the shift in gender representations in the SFL textbooks. Our students affirm they have not noticed that women are underrepresented or have less protagonism than men. However, as already pointed out, they do notice that the gender roles in these didactic materials are still quite stereotypical and uniform. In other words, the perceived feminization of the textbooks can be interpreted as superficial and, in fact, a consequence of the influence of neoliberal ideologies that impose the ideal of independent, successful, enterprising individuals, both men and women. Therefore, although gender-sensitive textbooks are undoubtedly an important advance in the construction of foreign language classrooms, critical pedagogy approach to foreign language education needs to be further employed in our teaching and learning practices as it creates another important social space open to debate, fruitful exchange of ideas, maturing of critical thinking and, ultimately, a fairer educational system.

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APPENDIX 1

A sample of the survey

La encuesta para estudiantes de ELE en la Facultad de Filología de Belgrado.

La encuesta será usada sólo para reunir datos para un artículo sobre las ideologías de género en los libros de texto de ELE. Vuestras respuestas ayudarán a mejorar significativamente la comprensión del tratamiento del sexismo en los manuales de ELE que se utilizan para la enseñanza de la dicha lengua en la Facultad de Filología de Belgrado. Gracias de antemano.

SEXO:

AÑO DE ESTUDIOS:

1. ¿Cómo definirías las ideologías de género y los estereotipos de género?
2. ¿Has notado algunos estereotipos de género en el material didáctico que usas en tu clase de ELE? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, por favor, pon algunos ejemplos.
3. ¿Piensas que ambos sexos están igualmente representados en los textos e ilustraciones en los manuales que usas o prevalece el protagonismo masculino? Por favor, elabora tu respuesta.
4. ¿Faltan representaciones de mujeres y de sus aportaciones a la humanidad y a la cultura universal o hispana en los manuales de ELE? Elabora tu respuesta, por favor.
5. ¿Has notado alguna variación en la representación de mujeres en los manuales de ELE (mujeres de diferentes profesiones, clases sociales, nivel de 'éxito' en la vida etc.)?
6. ¿Qué tipo de mujer es el más presente en estos materiales didácticos (artistas, mujeres de *show business*, personajes históricos, trabajadoras, madres, consumistas, etc.)?
7. ¿Has notado que las representaciones de diferentes grupos sociales que encuentras en tus manuales y clases de ELE tienen algún impacto en tu vida real? Es decir, lo que ves en los libros de texto y escuchas en tu clase, ¿tiene alguna importancia para ti? Elabora tu respuesta, por favor.
8. ¿Crees que es importante usar el material didáctico sensible (a género, clase, raza etc.) en la clase de L2 (lengua extranjera)? ¿Los materiales didácticos tienen repercusiones en la vida social real? Elabora tu respuesta, por favor.

Si tienes algunas dudas o sugerencias, no dudes en ponerte en contacto con nosotras:

APPENDIX 2
TOPICS FOR EMANCIPATORY FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

PREGUNTAS PARA LA DISCUSIÓN

ESCUELA Y DESIGUALDAD

Con la Ley 1253, el Estado garantiza el derecho al acceso que todo niño o niña de la población peruana tiene a la educación primaria, en un 100% gratuito, en un aula que le permita desarrollar sus capacidades y habilidades de la mano de su profesor y profesora, y que ellos y ellas aprendan a leer, escribir y hacer matemáticas.

La desigualdad del acceso a la educación primaria es un desafío que, por lo común, se resuelve con el apoyo de la familia y la comunidad. Sin embargo, hay niños y niñas que no tienen acceso a la educación primaria. ¿Por qué?

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PREPARAR EL DOCUMENTO

PROBLEMAS

Ca El documental te recuerda del silencio trata sobre la problemática de las niñas en las escuelas rurales del Perú. ¿Cuál crees que puede ser esa problemática? En parejas, haz una lista de posibles problemas.

ENTENDER EL DOCUMENTO

DESGUALDAD ENTRE NIÑOS Y NIÑAS

Ca Vas a ver el comienzo del documental. Toma notas y describe la diferencia entre la actitud de la niña y la del niño. ¿a qué crees que se debe?

Ca Lee esta frase extraída del documental y comenta con un compañero cuáles crees que son esas razones. Escríbelas en la tabla. Después, ve el video y toma notas. (Las hipótesis sean correctas)

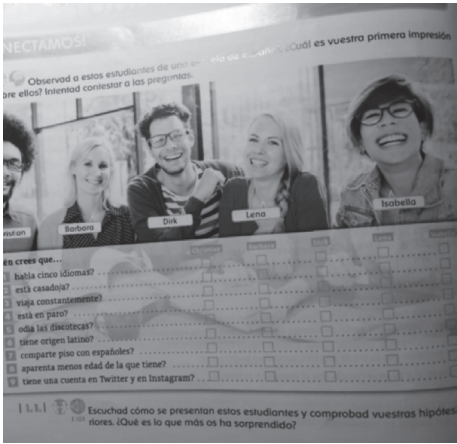
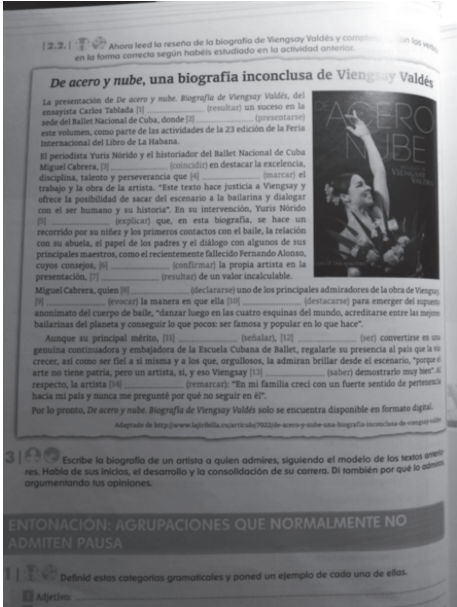
"Gran parte de los factores que desencadenan esta apatante realidad [la desigualdad de género] se desarrollan durante la etapa escolar"

Factores que demuestran desigualdad de género en la escuela	
Antes del video	Después del video

El texto ‘Escuela y desigualdad’ (Acquaoni, R. et al. (2017). *C de CI*. Difusión. p.109) – leer y reflexionar sobre el ejercicio C. 1. ¿Cuáles son las diferencias entre las oportunidades para los niños y las niñas en nuestras escuelas? ¿La situación de Perú es parecida, o no, según el texto? ¿Cuál crees que es la fuente de desigualdad entre los niños y niñas indígenas?

Estas son algunas de las fotografías que se han presentado a concurso. ¿Cuál quiere representar el fotógrafo en cada una de ellas?

Dos fotos, un hombre con el ordenador portátil y una mujer hablando por teléfono (Equipo Nuevo Prisma (2015). *Nuevo Prisma B2*. Edinumen, p. 66) - ¿Crees que estas dos fotos representan de una forma fidedigna las relaciones de género en la sociedad contemporánea? Los personajes de las fotos, ¿son representantes típicos de su género? ¿Qué tipo de imágenes de mujeres y hombres te gustaría ver en los manuales de ELE? ¿Te parece que en los manuales que usamos las representaciones de géneros son fieles a la realidad?

 <p>¡Conectamos!</p> <p>Observad a estos estudiantes de una escuela de español. ¿Cuál es vuestra primera impresión sobre ellos? Intentad contestar a los preguntas.</p> <p>en crees que...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> habla cinco idiomas? <input type="checkbox"/> está casado? <input type="checkbox"/> viaja constantemente? <input type="checkbox"/> está en paro? <input type="checkbox"/> odia las discotecas? <input type="checkbox"/> tiene origen latino? <input type="checkbox"/> cumparte piso con españoles? <input type="checkbox"/> aparenta ser más edad de la que tiene? <input type="checkbox"/> tiene una cuenta en Twitter y en Instagram? <p>Escuchad cómo se presentan estos estudiantes y comprobad vuestras hipótesis. ¿Qué es lo que más os ha sorprendido?</p>	<p>El texto ‘¡Conectamos’ (fotos de cinco jóvenes, estudiantes de español) (Equipo Nuevo Prisma (2015). <i>Nuevo Prisma B2</i>. Edinumen, p. 22) - ¿Cuál es la impresión que te dejan las imágenes de estos jóvenes? ¿A qué crees que se dedican, además de estudiar el español?</p>
 <p>Ahora leed la reseña de la biografía de Viengsay Valdés y completad los espacios en la forma correcta según habéis estudiado en la actividad anterior.</p> <p>De acero y nube, una biografía inconclusa de Viengsay Valdés</p> <p>La presentación de <i>De acero y nube: Biografía de Viengsay Valdés</i>, del ensayista Carlos Tablada [1] (resultar) un suceso en la sede del Ballet Nacional de Cuba, donde [2] (presentarse) este volumen, como parte de las actividades de la 23 edición de la Feria Internacional del Libro de La Habana.</p> <p>El periodista Yuris Noriedo y el historiador del Ballet Nacional de Cuba Miguel Cabrera, [3] (enfatizar) la excelencia, disciplina, talento y perseverancia que [4] (marcar) el trabajo y la obra de la artista. “Este texto hace justicia a Viengsay y ofrece la posibilidad de sacar del escenario a la bailarina y dialogar con el ser humano y su historia”. En su intervención, Yuris Noriedo [5] (explica) que, en esta biografía, se hace un recorrido por su niñez y los primeros contactos con el baile, la relación con su abuela, el papel de los padres y el diálogo con algunos de sus principales maestros, como el recientemente fallecido Fernando Alonso, cuyos consejos, [6] (confirmar) la propia artista en la presentación, [7] (resultar) de un valor inabarcable.</p> <p>Miguel Cabrera, quien [8] (declarar) uno de los principales admiradores de la obra de Viengsay [9] (evocar) la manera en que ella [10] (destacar) para emerger del supuestamente anónimo del cuerpo de baile, “danzar luego en las cuatro esquinas del mundo, acreditarse entre las mejores bailarinas del planeta y conseguir lo que pocos ser famosas y populares en lo que hace”.</p> <p>Aunque su principal mérito, [11] (detallar), [12] (ser) convertirse en una genuina continuadora y embajadora de la Escuela Cubana de Ballet, regalarle su presencia al país que la vio crecer, así como ser fiel a sí misma y a los que, orgullosos, la admiran brillar desde el escenario, “porque arte no tiene patria, pero un artista, sí, y esa Viengsay [13] (haber) demostrado muy bien de respecto, la artista [14] (remarcar): “En mi familia crecí con un fuerte sentido de pertenencia hacia mi país y nunca me pregunté por qué no seguir en él”.</p> <p>Por lo pronto, <i>De acero y nube: Biografía de Viengsay Valdés</i> solo se encuentra disponible en formato digital.</p> <p>Adaptado de http://www.laprensa.es/articulo/76223de-acero-y-nube-una-biografia-inconclusa-de-viengsay-valdes</p> <p>Escribe la biografía de un artista a quien admires, siguiendo el modelo de los textos anteriores. Habla de sus inicios, el desarrollo y la consolidación de su carrera. Di también por qué lo admiras argumentando tus opiniones.</p> <p>ATENCIÓN: AGRUPACIONES QUE NORMALMENTE NO ADMITEN PAUSA</p> <p>Define estas categorías gramaticales y poné un ejemplo de cada una de ellas.</p> <p>Adjetivo</p> <p>Adverbio</p>	<p>El texto ‘De acero y nube, una biografía inconclusa de Viengsay Valdés’ (Equipo Nuevo Prisma (2015). <i>Nuevo Prisma B2</i>. Edinumen, p. 48) – leer y reflexionar sobre el mensaje del texto. ¿Cuál es la impresión que te deja la trayectoria vital de esta artista? ¿Te ha inspirado? ¿Crees que es suficiente esforzarse mucho para triunfar en la vida? ¿Te parece que la biografía de esta artista muestra de una forma fidedigna la posición de la mujer en la sociedad contemporánea?</p>