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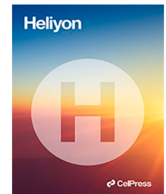

Critical approaches to English language teacher education: A narrative inquiry into trainee teachers' experiences as speakers of English[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Working within the framework of critical language teacher education, this article concerns itself with the disenfranchising experiences of a group of trainee English language teachers as speakers of English in the world. It presents the results of a mixed-method narrative inquiry carried out with 198 trainee teachers studying undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the South of Spain. Both a questionnaire and structured interviews were used to collect participants' narratives of the disenfranchising experiences they have had as English speakers, their reflections on the factors that played a role in those experiences and their tools to manage them. The ATLAS.ti program was used to carry out the content analysis of the narratives, using both deductive and inductive categories. Results point to the need to address the interrelation of language, power and identity as part of teacher training programs and adopt a critical perspective in English language teacher education in order to equip future teachers to better understand communication and the factors that play a role in it, balance power inequalities in communicative interactions and deal with disenfranchising experiences as English speakers in the world.

1. Introduction

The literature on language teacher education, where English language teaching (ELT) and teacher training occupy a salient position, has commonly focused on issues such as competence development and core pedagogical issues in ELT (the teaching of systems and skills, methodologies and techniques, planning, materials design, evaluation and assessment) [1]; as of late, interest in areas such as language teacher identity (LTI) has become more conspicuous [2]. However, the question of language teachers' experiences as speakers and how these interrelate with identity issues has only been broached more recently by researchers working within the burgeoning field of critical language teaching and critical language teacher education, which has placed the focus on the relationship between LTI and issues of power, age, professional status, social status, academic status, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/origin, religious beliefs and disability [3–10]. From a critical perspective, this article analyzes the narratives of the disenfranchising

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experiences of a group of trainee English language teachers from Spain, their reflections on the factors that played a role in those experiences and their tools to manage them. Ultimately, this study aims to draw attention to the need to address the interrelation of language, power and identity as part of teacher training programs and adopt a critical perspective in English language teacher education (ELTE).

The adoption of a critical perspective in ELT and ELTE draws on the work of Paulo Freire [11], who, from a materialistic stance, analyzed the oppressor-oppressed tensions in society, positing education as an emancipatory force in it. Freire's ideas are relevant in the field of English language teacher education as the expansion of English (and of the teaching and learning of English) in the world is so inextricably enmeshed with the history of colonialism [12], cultural and linguistic imperialism [13] and global capitalism [14]. The main implication of this is that English language teaching is not an activity that can be carried out in an ideologically or politically neutral way: it is a political act in itself that has consequences for learners and teachers, their social environment and the linguistic ecosystem of the communities to which they belong. Therefore, a social justice perspective is required to deal with such effects, ensuring the integrity of learners, their cultures and languages. There are three main principles of the critical approach that are germane to the present study, namely: an interest in local contexts, "problems, and issues and [ways to] see responsiveness to the particularities of the local" [15] and how the local can shed light on global issues; a concern for the identification of unequal power relations and the sources of oppression [5]; and an understanding of education as "a site for the disruption of oppression and even liberation" [16, p. xvi]. In this way, a critical perspective can help illuminate some of the tensions inherent in the process of identity development that trainee teachers go through as they learn, learn to teach and use English.

Working within the framework of critical language teacher education [16], this article presents the results of a narrative inquiry carried out with 198 trainee teachers studying undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Southern Spain. The following research questions (RQ) guided this study:

RQ1. Have participants ever felt disenfranchised as English speakers in the world? If so, what are the most common contexts in which these experiences occurred?

RQ2. What factors bore upon participants' disenfranchising experiences as English speakers?

RQ3. Were participants better prepared at the time of the study to respond to this type of situations? How?

2. Literature review

2.1. Language teacher identity

Recent studies have drawn attention to the fluid, shifting and multifarious nature of identity, described as a "multifaceted and multidimensional construct" [17] that is "dynamic" [18] and "continuously evolving" [20, p. 13)]. Indeed, different factors have been identified as playing a role in identity construction, including personal [19] and educational backgrounds as well as social, cultural and professional environments. So, identity is not "one's core self" [20], but a construct that includes experiences, beliefs and perceptions of oneself and others in a variety of realms [21]. In the case of LTI, it may be argued that the way/s a teacher approaches their profession both shapes and is shaped by their experiences, beliefs and perceptions, not only in the professional realm, but in the personal and social realms too.

In this regard, a poststructuralist perspective is helpful for laying bare the complexities and tensions that emerge between conflicting experiences, beliefs and perceptions in the process of teacher identity construction. Le Huu Nghia, Ngoc Tai [22], for example, use the concept of "lived experiences" to incorporate a constructivist and social conception of teacher identity, whereas Torres-Cepeda, Ramos-Holguín [23] refer to "personal epistemologies" and "communities of practice" to underscore the interrelation of the personal and professional realms. Barkhuizen [24] has analyzed the varied dimensions of LTI, providing the most comprehensive definition to date:

Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical – they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material and technological world. LTIs are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying. They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. [2, p. 4].

Following a similar idea, and more recently, Dugas [27, pp. 247–248] puts forth a threefold framework for understanding LTI: the first component is psychological, where the family and the sociocultural context play a key role; the second component is behavioral, which includes one's demeanor and use of language when interacting with others; the third one is relational, concerned with how one is perceived by others. These complexities are captured in the analysis below, where identity is explored as a lived historical category, affected by and affecting ways of knowing, interacting, feeling, thinking and being in the world.

A vast amount of the literature on LTI has focused on teachers' linguistic identity in the foreign language as central to the process of LTI construction [22–26]. This interest has led to discussions of communicative competence and "native-speakerism" [27]. According to Villegas-Torres, Mora-Pablo, language teachers "suffer because of the lack of proficiency in the second language" [20, p. 23]. However, the degree to which this lack of proficiency is an accurate reflection of their actual communicative competence or a "representation" [28] is open for debate. For example, Holliday [27] sees native-speakerism as an ideology that has negative effects on LTI, as it relies primarily on idealized views of the native speaker (construed mainly as a white middle-class monolingual speaker of Received Pronunciation) that circulate in institutional, educational, political and social discourse. From a poststructuralist perspective, Pederson [29] states that the native speaker is an idea that exists "in discourse, or in the minds of subjects within discourse" [31, p. 6]

but that nevertheless "continues to exert real power in local, national, and international EFL contexts. [. . .] It exists in practice in terms of government policy and rhetoric, in the everyday experience of teachers and students, and in testing regimes" [31, p. 8]. In the case of trainee teachers, the native speaker construct has negative effects on their identity construction, their self-concept and self-esteem as teachers [30]. In teacher training programs, the epistemological and pedagogical (f)utility of the term is rarely discussed in a critically and academically informed manner. Also, the focus on teachers' linguistic identity in the foreign language has contributed to perpetuating monolingual ideologies that were already dominant in the ELT arena, preventing a more incisive discussion of teachers' identities from a multilingual and poststructuralist perspective. Indeed, Sarasa, Porta [31] contend that "language is a complex repertoire of resources deployed for communication and identity construction" [33, p. 145] and that identity construction "is *located* in language" and "*expressed* in language" [33, p. 145]. For Norton [32], language is a social practice in which one's own identities, desires and negotiations unfold. In this way, from a multilingual perspective, it would be as difficult to separate the languages in which and through which identity is located and expressed as it is to compartmentalize the different realms where identity develops. By embracing the multilingual stance, the present study aims to transcend the monolingual ideologies upheld in previous research on LTI.

Finally, studies that incorporate a critical lens have helped illuminate further the question of LTI. These have gone beyond the focus on linguistic identity to engage with issues of power and other aspects of speaker identity, such as: age; professional, social and academic status; gender and sexual orientation; ethnicity/origin; religious beliefs; and disability [3–10]. Furthermore, other studies concerned with speaker identity have recently drawn attention to the complex relationship between speaker identity and place [33] and between language, identity and discrimination [34]. The narratives presented below capture particular moments like snapshots where these aspects emerge as central to participants' experiences as English speakers in the world.

By bringing together a poststructuralist, multilingual and critical stance, the present study underscores the nature of LTI as "multiple, changing and a site of struggle" [34, p. 81], where conflicting experiences beliefs and perceptions contend in a variety of contexts. In doing so, the study draws attention to a dimension that is often disregarded in the literature on LTI, trainee teachers' identities as speakers in a broad sense, and takes into account not only linguistic identity in the foreign language but a series of identity factors (age, professional/social/academic status, gender, ethnicity/origin, etc.) that affect the ways they approach communicative interactions as English speakers in a variety of contexts. Finally, it also considers previously neglected aspects such as: trainee teachers' assumptions and beliefs regarding language and communication, including the languages and varieties they and their interlocutors speak, and their awareness of and capacity to manage the identity factors that play a role in communicative interactions.

2.2. Communicative language competence

The ideas that trainee teachers hold about language and communication and the ideologies that underlie these ideas have a direct impact on how they approach communicative situations. At the same time, this may have an effect on what they (will) do in the classroom: the ways they teach language, what they teach about language and what they teach language for [35]. Trainee teachers' ideas about language and communication derive from their own experiences both as speakers (of their L1/s and other languages they may speak) and as learners (what and how they have been taught) [24]. Regarding the latter, teachers, syllabuses, materials and reference documents, among others, also contribute to the formation of certain ideologies. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* [36,37], which was instrumental in the consolidation of current communicative premises in language teaching, places communicative language competence (CLC) at the center of the descriptors of linguistic attainment. According to the *CEFR*, CLC is the set of knowledge and skills required "to use a language for communication," that is, "to act effectively" using linguistic means [38, p. 1] and it is considered a macro-competence made up of three subcompetences: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic subcompetences [39, p. 129]. CLC is a central concept in language teacher education, as trainee teachers not only need to develop CLC in the foreign language [38], but they also need to know what CLC is and how to develop and assess their students' CLC [1,36]. In this regard, structuralist conceptualizations of communication and CLC may be limiting, not allowing trainee teachers to fully understand what communication entails and the factors that play a role in it beyond purely linguistic ones.

Before the publication of the *CEFR*, linguists had drawn their attention to sociolinguistic, contextual and discursive competence. More recently, there are authors who have questioned the very notion of competence [39], and authors that have put forward new conceptualizations of CLC that include components such as intercultural, emotional and critical competence.

On the one hand, intercultural competence is a prominent construct in the *CEFR* [37], which points to Beacco et al. [40] as a reference text for defining, planning and implementing a plurilingual and intercultural curriculum: "Intercultural competence [. . .] is the ability to experience otherness and cultural diversity, to analyze that experience and to derive benefit from it" [42, p. 10]. Notwithstanding, the *CEFR* [37] presents intercultural competence as distinct from communicative competences [39, p. 31] and, in spite of efforts to strengthen the intercultural component in foreign language education, language courses still fail to incorporate it successfully, due to: a tendency to focus on language form over intercultural communication; anecdotal, reductionist, clichéd, ideological and prescriptive approaches to cultural content in the classroom; assumptions that communicative competence may be developed independent from intercultural competence [41–44].

On the other hand, emotions are mentioned in several descriptors in the *CEFR* [37]: for example, expressing and understanding emotional language and handling emotional reactions. However, as a concept, emotional competence is absent from the document, and only referred to in relation to mediation activities, where it is argued that emotional intelligence is needed "in order to have sufficient empathy for the viewpoints and emotional states of other participants in the communicative situation" [39, p. 91]. In the literature, emotional competence is a more complex construct that intervenes in all kids of language activities, not only mediation ones, and it also includes aspects such as the capacity to identify emotions in oneself and channel them through linguistic means, and to anticipate and deal effectively with situations where emotional factors are central [45]. In the language classroom, emotional

competence is often absent because: it is seen as a personal rather than as a social category; it is treated as a cross-curricular rather than a linguistic competence; assumptions that communicative competence may be developed without emotional competence [45–48].

Finally, critical competence is only rarely included in conceptualizations of CLC. It emerged as a concept in the 1980s and has gained momentum since the 2000s. Critical competence entails the awareness and understanding of: power relations as they transpire through language use; power asymmetries in communicative interactions on account of identity factors; linguistic facts and norms and how they shape and are shaped by social inequalities, contributing to the oppression of certain groups [49]. At the same time, it involves critical skills, that is, being able to use language to: question, resist and transform social and linguistic givens (models, conventions and norms); make responsible choices regarding the use or transgression of those models, conventions and norms; handle power asymmetries in communicative interactions; participate as active and responsible members of the target language (TL) community [11,39,50]. Critical competence is seldom trained in the language classroom because it often clashes with the requirements of the formal curriculum and standardized testing, and only critically oriented teacher training manuals and programs tend to include.

The analysis presented below makes use of this sixfold conceptualization of CLC that includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, intercultural, emotional and critical competences. This framework is useful for exploring participants' assumptions and beliefs regarding language and communication. Also, it helps assess participants' communicative tools to identify and manage the identity factors that play a role in the communicative interactions described in their narratives. Herein lies the importance of including specific training in critical and reflective practice in language teacher education [16,51,52].

3. Method

The present study is framed within the tradition of the critical school, whose main purpose is to use research to reduce different "forms of alienation, discrimination, injustice, exploitation, and marginalisation" [53]. It adopts a social justice approach that regards trainee English language teachers as: legitimate members of the communities of the languages they speak; active members of the English-speaking community with responsibilities as English speakers in the world; and speakers with a series of identity traits that affect the communicative interactions they participate in, both in and outside the classroom. By shedding light on trainee teachers' disenfranchising experiences as speakers of English and exploring educational routes to understand and manage such experiences, this study also underscores the idea that education is a site for liberation [54]. This required the design of a mixed-method study, since both quantitative and qualitative data had to be collected and analyzed in order to better understand the nature of these experiences. The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Ethics Committee for Experimentation of Universidad de Sevilla and the Code of Good Practice in Research, approved in 2017. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

3.1. Sample

The sample was composed of a group of trainee teachers studying undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in the South of Spain. The main author, who was also the students' teacher trainer at the time, informed them about the research and selected those who wanted to participate, a total of 198 participants. Of these, 83.84 % were women and 16.16 % were men, and their mean age at the time was 23.4. All had Spanish as their L1 and most (77.78 %) spoke Andalusian, the variety spoken in Southern Spain. They all shared a similar speaker profile as middle-class, mostly Mediterranean-looking (i.e. perceived as foreigners in English-speaking countries), mostly straight and able-bodied young people. They had studied English as a foreign language for an average of 15.3 years and their average level of English was Upper-Intermediate (B2, according to *CEFR*), with the majority of students (66.67 %) having this level or above. Upper-Intermediate (B2) and advanced (C) levels are considered functional levels of language use. All the participants had done internships in schools teaching English as a foreign language as part of their training, some (12.63 %) had previous experience teaching in the private sector and only a few (4.55 %) had more than one year's experience teaching in public schools.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection was carried out between 2018 and 2021. Both a questionnaire and structured interviews were used to collect data. First, the questionnaire was administered, which contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions, and delivered both quantitative and qualitative data. In the questionnaire, participants were first asked to think of a recent communicative situation where they had to use English and felt they were not in a position of power. Then, they were asked several open-ended questions (Appendix I). These questions helped participants build their narratives and rendered qualitative data; the last question helped determine the communicative tools with which participants were now equipped to face the situation. Finally, participants were asked to identify the factors that, in their view, had played a role in that situation. In order to answer this question, participants were given multiple answers from which they could choose as many as they considered appropriate. The answers were based on the theoretical conceptualization of CLC outlined above: language (including linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors), culture, emotions and identity factors (age, professional status, social status, academic status, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/origin, religious beliefs and disability). The questionnaire was validated through a pilot testing performed with a similar group of participants in 2017. This pilot test helped fine-tune the questions: for example, "where did it happen?" was added as it was not always clear from the narratives. As part of the validation process, the sample was consulted regarding initial results, which also determined the need to carry out interviews: 28 participants were selected whose answers to the questionnaire required further clarification. So, once the questionnaires were analyzed, structured interviews (Appendix II) were conducted with those 28 participants. The interviews provided qualitative data

only, served as a second data source and were conducted only when they were needed to corroborate, expand on and contrast the information obtained in the questionnaire.

3.3. Data analysis

The ATLAS.ti program was used to analyze participants' narratives, provided both in the questionnaire and the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for a more precise analysis. Quantitative data for RQ1 regarding the TL contexts in which participants' disenfranchising experiences had occurred were calculated using a series of ad hoc categories derived from the narratives. These ad hoc categories were: "Academic setting," "Accessing services," "Socializing," "Study abroad program," "At work," "In bureaucratic procedures," and "Other." These were crossed with the categories "In interaction with somebody perceived as an L1 English speaker," used when participants stated that the interlocutor "was from" a TL country/background or "spoke" the language of a TL country, and "In interaction with somebody perceived as a native speaker," used when the term "native" appeared explicitly in the narratives.

Quantitative data for RQ2 regarding the factors that bore upon participants' disenfranchising experiences were calculated using deductive categories based on the conceptualization of CLC outlined above: "language" (including linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors), "intercultural factors," "emotional factors" and "critical/identity factors" (age, professional status, social status, academic status, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/origin, religious beliefs and disability). Regarding qualitative data for RQ2, in order to further explore the nuance of the data, a qualitative content analysis of participants' narratives (both in their open answers to the questionnaire and the interviews) was performed using those categories too. As former learners of English as a foreign language ourselves, we were aware that speakers involved in such disenfranchising experiences may overemphasize the importance of certain factors and overlook others. Therefore, we sought to identify and explore possible mismatches between the factors explicitly identified by participants and those revealed in the qualitative content analysis of the narratives: for example, it could be inferred that identity factors (such as age, profession, gender or origin) had born upon the disenfranchising experience if these were mentioned in the narrative, regardless of participants' capacity to explicitly identify them in the questionnaire. Regarding the category "ethnicity/origin," narrative cues included references to provenance, race, language variety or accent.

Finally, quantitative data for RQ3 regarding participants' communicative tools to respond to those situations were calculated using a combination of deductive categories based on the conceptualization of CLC described above and inductive categories derived from a qualitative content analysis of participants' answers to the question "What would you do differently now?" The following categories emerged in this qualitative content analysis: "Linguistic tools" (participants who considered that their English was "better" now or knew "more English" to face the situation); "Sociolinguistic tools" (participants who stated that they would be "more polite" or "less rude" now); "More experience/confidence" (participants who felt they were more "experienced" or "confident" to face the situation); "Nothing/The same; " "Fight" (participants who would "say" or "reply" something different, confronting or exercising power over the interlocutor); "Flight" (respondents who would "avoid" the interlocutor or "leave" the situation); "More in-depth analysis of the situation" (respondents who had developed a more in-depth understanding of the situation in terms of intercultural, emotional and critical competence when "culture," "feelings" or identity factors were mentioned in the narratives).

4. Results and discussion

For the purpose of this study, the results section has been divided into three major blocks, corresponding with the research questions (RQ) stated above.

4.1. RQ1. Have participants ever felt disenfranchised as English speakers in the world? If so, what are the most common contexts in which these experiences occurred?

All the participants in this research had had a recent experience in which they had felt disenfranchised as English speakers in the world. Their narratives of these experiences provide information about the most common TL contexts in which these experiences occurred: accessing services (40.91 %), academic setting (16.67 %), study abroad programs (8.59 %), socializing (7.07 %), the workplace (6.06 %) and bureaucratic procedures (5.05 %). Other contexts (15.66 %) included cycling/driving, being approached by strangers on the street, and asking for or giving directions. Furthermore, in the majority of the narratives (79.29 %) participants perceived their interlocutors as L1 English speakers (either "being from" a TL country/background or "speaking" the language of a TL country –in all the cases, they were inner-circle countries) and 35.86 % of the narratives explicitly mention native speakers. This is significant, as encounters with native speakers are becoming increasingly rare: there is research that suggests that most verbal exchanges in English do not actually involve native speakers at all [55]. This is so because most speakers of English in the world speak it as an additional language, rather than as their L1 [56]. So, the fact that so many narratives include references to native speakers and interlocutors perceived as L1 English speakers is indicative of the power that monolingual ideologies and their idealized representation of native speakers continue to uphold [27]. As an idealized and essentialist representation, the native speaker is a construct that has negative and disempowering effects on speakers of English as an additional language. And, as participants' narratives suggest, this construct continues to exert a powerful influence on trainee teachers' disenfranchising experiences, something that is also attested to in the literature [27,29,30].

Accessing services in English-speaking countries is the most common context in which participants' disenfranchising experience occurred: in 40.91 % of the narratives, participants reported that not being perceived as members of the English-speaking community

made it difficult for them to access certain services, mostly in restaurants, train/bus stations and shops. It is not uncommon to see examples of speakers of English as a foreign language struggling to access the services of the TL community because their competence is perceived as formally incorrect [57,58]. Then, 16.67 % of the experiences happened in interaction with lecturers in academic settings where English was used as a medium of instruction. Finally, there is a variety of other contexts for these experiences (study abroad programs, socializing, the workplace and engaging in bureaucratic procedures), all of which are common contexts in which language learners get opportunities to use and access the TL as members of the TL community. In the case of trainee teachers, it is relevant that social contexts that are non-work related figure so prominently in their disenfranchising experiences. This is something that has been pointed out by the literature, which has drawn attention to the importance of the social realm [21] and "social interaction with [. . .] the wider community" [2] for the formative experiences of language teachers, and to the ways teacher identities are played out in the social interactions in which they participate [7,25,59].

4.2. RQ2. What factors bore upon participants' disenfranchising experiences as English speakers?

When asked to identify the factors that played a role in these situations, participants were given a series of options based on the sixfold conceptualization of CLC outlined above (participants could choose as many factors as they thought appropriate): linguistic factors (identified to play a role in 73.36 % of the narratives); age (47.3 %); emotional factors (40.3 %); academic status (31.19 %); professional status (30.93 %); intercultural factors (28.78 %); social status (15.03 %); gender (14.94 %); ethnicity/origin (9.87 %); religious beliefs (2.92 %); sexual orientation (1.19 %). The only factor that was not identified as playing a role in any of the narratives was disability.

These results show that linguistic factors, including linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors [37], rank the highest, according to participants. This is in keeping with recent research on the weight still afforded to linguistic factors by language teachers in their self-perceptions [60,51]. Furthermore, the results of a previous study corroborate this: students mostly worry about linguistic aspects when they speak English, they focus on these aspects as a source of ridicule and associate language with power and status, or lack thereof. Another factor of which participants were very aware is age, something to be expected as this was, overall, a very young cohort; also, the fact that an important number of these experiences occurred in interaction with lecturers, who are generally older, and in academic settings may account for this. Emotional factors were also identified as playing a role in a significant number of narratives, showing the effects of socio-emotional education [61]. Then, there is a cluster of three factors identified in a similar number of narratives: academic status, professional status and intercultural factors. Regarding academic status, there is a tendency among participants to identify academic status with proficiency in English: in this way, linguistic factors were explicitly pinpointed by participants in the questionnaire, whereas academic status was mentioned as a corollary in the interviews. Indeed, previous research has identified academic status as a grappling factor in trainee teachers' experiences [21]. With respect to intercultural factors, these were more commonly identified by participants with a higher level of English. This is indicative that intercultural competence is still rather absent from regular classroom practice at lower levels [41–44].

Finally, the cluster of identity factors that make up critical competence ranks really low: social status, gender, ethnicity/origin, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and disability. There are two main reasons that account for this: on the one hand, and as seen above, these factors are barely present in structuralist configurations of CLC, which provide the dominant framework for ELT; therefore, only rarely do these factors find a way into the English language classroom, or are learners made aware of their role in communication [39] [49] [50] [62]. On the other hand, this was a rather homogeneous sample: as stated above, most participants in the study shared a similar speaker profile (young, middle-class, Mediterranean-looking, mostly straight, able-bodied, Andalusian speakers) in a context (Southern Spain) where these identity traits are dominant, regularly treated as the norm and, consequently,

Table 1
Qualitative contrastive analysis of the mismatch between the factors identified by participants as playing a role in their disenfranchising experiences and the factors revealed in the qualitative content analysis of the narratives. An excerpt from participants' narratives and the contexts in which the experiences occurred are also provided.

Example	Context	Narrative	Factors identified by participants	Factors inferred from narratives
1	Accessing services (restaurant)	*I was at a restaurant and native speakers laughed at my accent and my use of grammar.*	Language Culture	Ethnicity/origin Emotion
2	Accessing services (underground station)	*My interlocutor was one member of the Tube's staff. He did not want to speak with my parents due to their low English level. I had to intervene at the conversation to tell him that he was being rude.*	Professional and academic status Language	Ethnicity/origin Professional status
3	Accessing services (shop)	*The shop sold expired chocolates and sweets and when I realized it, I had already bought in this place. When I return to claim my money back, the depend told me that she could not because the boss was not there.*	Language Culture Emotion	
4	Academic setting	*I didn't know how to speak English because I didn't pronounce some words with a British accent.*	Language Culture Emotion	Academic status Ethnicity/origin
5	Study abroad program	*One of the members of my hall of residence said that the Andalusian accent was not the most appropriate one to learn if you were interested in learning Spanish.*	Language	Emotion Social status Ethnicity/origin
6	Socializing	*I couldn't say anything because he spoke with a very close accent and really fast. I got really nervous and he stared at me all the time with a grumpy face.*	Language Age	Emotion Ethnicity/origin

made "invisible" [63]. With the exception of social status (which participants may have felt they lacked due to their age and academic status) and gender (since most participants were women), their privileged position in Andalusian society may go unnoticed to them. Both lack of critical training and invisible privilege may account for participants' inability to see how identity traits situate speakers differently as contexts and relations shift [21].

The factors commented on above are those that participants explicitly identified as playing a role in their experiences of disenfranchisement. However, a more nuanced approach was needed that did not rely exclusively on participants' capacity to explicitly identify such factors. Indeed, a qualitative content analysis of the narratives in both the questionnaire and the interviews revealed further factors that had not been explicitly identified by participants. Table 1 shows this analysis, including some examples taken from participants' narratives together with a contrastive analysis of the factors identified by participants and those revealed in the qualitative content analysis. The examples have been chosen based on frequency (the most common contexts for participants' disenfranchising experiences) and relevance (the most illustrative examples are provided, where those mismatches are clearly visible).

In all of the examples in Table 1 participants unmistakably identified linguistic factors as playing a role in their disenfranchising experiences, something that is frequently found in the literature [51]. However, they missed other factors such as ethnicity/origin, emotional factors, and professional, social and academic status. Indeed, ethnicity/origin is key to understanding participants' experiences and the ways such experiences were narrated; in many of those experiences and narratives, English was used to channel discriminatory comments or attitudes in processes where participants were othered, that is, treated as essentially different or not belonging to an idealized dominant group. In the first example, the explicit reference to "native speakers" and their reactions to the participant's accent and grammar does not (or not only) reveal information about foreign language competence, but rather about the participant's ethnicity/origin, who felt she was not perceived as a legitimate member of the TL community. This is one of the consequences of what Badwan [33] refers to as the expectations that are "usually linked to the pairings of language and nation, language and ethnicity, language and locality" [35, p. 153] and hence her contention that language needs to become "unmoored." One byproduct of this moored understanding of language is the native/non-native speaker dichotomy, and a particularly pernicious manifestation of it is social inequality. Indeed, previous research on the native/non-native speaker constructs demonstrates that this dichotomy often reveals issues of xenophobia, rather than of formal competence [27], and that it has negative effects on teacher identity development [30]. Ethnicity/origin, as well as emotional factors, also played an important part in the second example: throughout the narrative, the participant showed strong emotional reactions due to the fact that it was his parents who were involved in the situation, and this prevented a more accurate interpretation on his part. Also, even if the narrative focuses on the parents' "low English level," issues of ethnicity/origin emerge as the parents are clearly not from the place where they are. It is again the association of language and place that creates certain expectations regarding linguistic competence [33]. This association in turn has strong emotional consequences for all the agents involved: in the participant's narrative, the member of the London Underground staff is impatient, the parents are confused and the participant is visibly upset, even as he recounts the event. Quite similarly, emotional factors played an important role in the third example. These emotional factors are not, however, the result of a lack of linguistic competence [45], but of the participant's lack of awareness of professional status (and power imbalances emerging from status differentials) as a factor affecting communication: the fact that she is not aware that the shop assistant was not authorized to do the refund is responsible for her feelings of disenfranchisement and her fears that she was being tricked.

Now, a more nuanced variant of the native/non-native speaker construct has to do with specific varieties of the TL being considered as more prestigious or desirable than others [33,34]. This is the case of the fourth example, where the participant identified speaking English (and, in this specific context, being educated) with having a British accent, and felt disenfranchised on account of this. Again, issues of origin as they interweave with power and legitimacy emerged in this narrative. Indeed, idealized views of inner-circle varieties, the powerful influence of cultural imperialism and images of Britain as the guarantor of the integrity of the English language, all of which are recurrent tropes in EFL classes [30], often contribute to the discrimination of othered cultures, varieties and speakers of English [34].

Another instance where ethnicity/origin played a central role is the fifth example. This example is representative of a series of narratives in which participants recounted experiences of disenfranchisement due to their Andalusian origin, underscoring the translingual nature of speaker identity [64]. Andalusia is the Southernmost region in mainland Spain: a traditionally rural and impoverished region, Andalusia nevertheless boasts a rich cultural heritage and its own variety of Spanish, with distinctive phonetic, lexical and morphosyntactic traits. Speakers of Andalusian are subject to social and linguistic stereotypes in the media and society at large: they are often portrayed as lazy and uneducated, and their language is ridiculed for being a sort of a defective (and sometimes unintelligible) version of Spanish [65]. Again, although such occurrences are connected with issues of ethnicity and origin that have both social and emotional consequences for speakers, they are often seen and presented exclusively as a linguistic issue. Indeed, reflecting on this experience as a purely linguistic issue made it difficult for the participant to analyze the situation more accurately.

The final example in Table 1, which recounts the encounter between a female participant and a black man, shows that the processes of othering that have been described above work both ways: in the sixth example, the participant is overwhelmed ("I couldn't say anything") by a variety of English ("he spoke with a very close accent and really fast") and an attitude ("stared at me [. . .] with a grumpy face") that challenged her formal, emotional and racial expectations of the interaction, as she encountered an interlocutor that, in her own narrative, differed significantly from the (white middle-class cooperative) models she had been exposed to as a learner. In this regard, the literature has often drawn attention to the discrimination suffered by learners and speakers of English as a foreign language [57,58]. The examples presented above attest to this. As a counterpoint, an example like number six demonstrates that English language teaching and learning is also contributing to perpetuating racist attitudes by safeguarding the position of already dominant (i.e. white) sections of society [28], even when teachers and learners themselves are not part of those dominant sections.

In all the cases commented on above, a lack of critical awareness of the identity factors (especially ethnicity/origin, but also

professional, social and academic status) and the emotional factors that play a role in communicative situations [45–48] accounted for participants' interpretations of these disenfranchising experiences.

4.3. RQ3. Were participants better prepared at the time of the study to respond to this type of situations? How?

In order to understand how prepared participants were at the time of the study (as opposed to at the time of the experience) to respond to such situations, balance power inequalities in communicative interactions and pre-empt disenfranchising experiences, they were asked what they would do differently if faced with a similar situation: 23.65 % of participants reported that their English was better now and therefore had more linguistic tools to face the situation ("Linguistic tools"); 18.92 % of participants felt they were more experienced/confident to face the situation ("More experience/confidence"); 18.92 % considered that there was nothing they could do to change the situation, or they would do the same ("Nothing/The same"); 11.49 % reported they would use their newly gained power to verbally pound the interlocutor ("Fight"); 10.14 % stated they would simply flee the situation or avoid it altogether ("Flight"); 5.4 % stated they would be more polite or less rude now ("Sociolinguistic tools"); finally, 11.5 % did a more informed and in-depth analysis of the situation in terms of intercultural, emotional and critical competence ("More in-depth analysis of the situation").

As seen in the figures above, a significant number of participants reported that their level of English had improved since the experience and felt therefore more prepared to manage the situation. This makes sense since, according to participants, linguistic factors accounted for most of these experiences. In light of this, a higher level of English does, in their view, help them deal with this kind of situation more effectively. For example, one participant stated: "I think that with my actual level of english im much more able to have a real conversation with people, I would be able to introduce myself correctly and be my self a 100 %." However, this assumption exposed a few issues in the interviews: for example, while participants in the B levels contended that reaching the C levels certainly equipped them better to respond to these situations, participants already in the C levels acknowledged that, even if they felt they were better equipped, they were likely to encounter this kind of situation again as they could never be "native speakers." This responds to what is known as "the myth of language learning" [62, p. 614] [30]: the widespread idea, fostered by both popular and institutional discourse, that English language learning contributes to the reproduction and redistribution of socioeconomic, political and cultural power [13,66]. Furthermore, this myth perpetuates idealized and essentialized [30] models of language use that have a negative effect on teachers and learners [60,27,51]. At the same time, all the participants agreed that they had also faced similar situations in their L1 (for example, being discriminated against on account of their Andalusian origin). This is indicative that linguistic factors were not as central to these disenfranchising experiences as participants made out initially.

Then, there were participants who felt that they were more experienced and confident at the time of the interview (as opposed to when the disenfranchising experience occurred), and so they would do things differently: in some cases, this referred to gathering the courage to ask for clarification, or to ask the interlocutor to rephrase or speak louder (i.e. the usual tools that are taught in the English language classroom), which are insufficient when dealing with situations where factors other than purely linguistic ones play a role. In some other cases, "more confidence" actually meant for them a higher level of English, or both ideas were intimately connected, as in the following example: "Right now I have a lot more confidence in myself. I have also practiced a lot more so I could establish a conversation without much stress." Previous research confirms that there is a correlation between teachers' level of English and their confidence and self-esteem [60]. Also, there were participants who showed instinctive reactions (i.e. fight or flight responses). The following is an example of a fight response: "I would tell them that they should not laugh at me if they do not speak any language other than English." This is in stark contrast with the following flight response: "I wouldn't talk to that man again." This is relevant, as fight or flight responses are indicative that participants perceive their academic and/or formal training in English to be inadequate or ineffectual to respond to this kind of situation.

Finally, there were also participants who did a more informed and in-depth analysis of the situation, including critical reflections on power structures and relations and identity issues. They also provided verbal strategies they would use to balance the power asymmetries in the interaction. It was precisely the participants who had developed communicative competences beyond the purely linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic realms who were capable of providing a more collected, cogent and accurate account of what had happened, and a more in-depth analysis of the situation in terms of the intercultural issues that emerge in communicative interactions: "Asking people if they are finished and are leaving their table is not acceptable outside of Spain, and doesn't sit well with people, so I'd think twice before doing it again." Other participants drew attention to the role of empathy in successful communication: "I would step into his shoes to understand that he'd probably be uncomfortable too to see that I can't understand him." Lastly, there were narratives that incorporated an understanding of how gender awareness can help speakers deal with power asymmetries more effectively: "Maybe today my answer would have been similar but I would have said 'no' because I didn't want to, not with the excuse that he was my boss so that he wouldn't get mad at me." In all these cases, participants provided specific strategies and/or explicit instances of language they would use to manage the power imbalances in the interactions. In this regard, they not only seemed to have a better command of English or a higher level of communicative competence but, more importantly, a more acute understanding of language and communication, the ideologies that underlie particular language uses and the factors that play a role in communicative interactions. In the literature, it has been argued that this critical understanding can influence teachers' practice [24], since what they teach about language, how they teach it and what they teach it for is connected with who they are and how they came to be, and the experiences they have had, not only as trainee teachers but as speakers too [19]. In this regard, this analysis has shed light on how trainee teachers' ideas about language and communication and their perceptions of their (and their interlocutors') identities affect the way they approach communicative interactions and interpret their experiences of disenfranchisement as English speakers in the world. The analysis of participants' tools to identify and manage the factors that play a role in communication also points to the need to incorporate specific training in critical and reflective practice in language teacher education [16,51,52] in order to equip trainee

teachers better to deal with power asymmetries in communicative interactions.

5. Conclusions

Adopting a poststructuralist, multilingual and critical stance, this study has drawn attention to trainee English language teachers' experiences as speakers and how these interrelate with identity issues, going beyond linguistic identity in the foreign language to explore the different identity factors (age, professional/social/academic status, gender, ethnicity/origin, etc.) that affect the ways they approach communicative interactions as English speakers in a variety of contexts. This analysis of trainee teachers' narratives has revealed that their ideas about language and communication (including the languages and varieties they and their interlocutors speak) and their perceptions of their and their interlocutors' identities bear upon the way they live, narrate and understand their experiences of disenfranchisement. Considering that these assumptions and beliefs may also have an effect on teaching practice [24,35], further research is needed into how trainee teachers' identities and their own language ideologies are transferred in the classroom.

This study has shown that feeling disenfranchised, discredited and/or undermined as English speakers in the world is an experience shared by trainee English language teachers, who have felt either as displaced members of the community of English speakers or lacking ownership and legitimacy over the language. In spite of the fact that our sample was mostly composed of women participants (83.84 %), which may be seen as one of the limitations of the study, our results are relevant in the European context, where 72 % of primary and secondary teachers and 80 % of education degree students are women [67,68]. The most common TL contexts for these experiences were social contexts such as accessing services and socializing, and academic contexts such as academic settings and study abroad programs, which underscores the role that social realms play in trainee teachers' experiences as speakers of English in the world. In the majority of these cases, the interactions were with interlocutors perceived as L1 English speakers, many of whom were described by participants as "native speakers." This is relevant because it demonstrates that the native speaker construct still exerts a powerful influence on trainee teachers' experiences of disenfranchisement. This study has also shown that, when analyzing the factors that played a role in those disenfranchising experiences, there is a mismatch between the factors explicitly pinpointed by participants and those inferred from their narratives: participants tended to overemphasize the importance of linguistic factors (i.e. level of English), while their narratives suggested that emotional and identity factors (especially ethnicity/origin, and professional, social and academic status) were key to the power imbalances between the interlocutors, and to the analysis and interpretation of the experience itself. Such a mismatch points to a lack of appropriate theoretical frameworks for studying and understanding communication in teacher training programs, where CLC should incorporate, together with linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, intercultural, emotional and critical ones. The lack of a critical perspective in language and teacher training programs is further corroborated by the fact that, when probing participants' tools to respond to such situations, only few of them did an informed and in-depth analysis that included reflections on power structures and relations, identity issues and explicit mechanisms to balance power asymmetries in communicative situations. This analysis demonstrates that a higher level of English does not equip learners to understand and interpret in an informed manner what happens in communicative interactions, nor does it provide the tools needed to identify and counter power inequalities in such interactions.

In view of this, ELT and ELTE need to incorporate a critical perspective that addresses the interrelation of language, power and identity in real communication through critical and reflective practices based on trainee teachers' own experiences as speakers. Practices such as autoethnographic writing [51] and the theater of the oppressed [69] can help create safe spaces for trainee teachers to explore their (and their interlocutors') identity positions in communicative interactions, become aware of and reflect upon the factors that impinge upon their experiences of disenfranchisement, and develop communicative tools (especially, intercultural, emotional and critical ones) to manage more successfully such experiences so they can become empowering. They can also help trainee teachers understand communication better and develop more inclusive ideas about language and communication, transcending monolingual ideologies such as the native/non-native speaker construct and associations between language and place [33] and between particular language varieties and status [34]. Doing this, ELT and ELTE can truly become sites for liberation [54], working towards social justice and against discrimination.

Ethics statement

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Ethics Committee for Experimentation of Universidad de Sevilla and the Code of Good Practice in Research, approved in 2017.

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Data availability statement

No data availability. The data that has been used is confidential.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Yiyi López Gándara: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sara Isabel Rendón-Romero:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Appendix I. Questionnaire

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect information about the experiences of trainee English language teachers as speakers of English in the world. Your identity and personal information will not be disclosed and the information provided will be used for research purposes only. If you agree, please answer the following questions:

1. Age:

   −21.
   −22.
   −23.
   −24.
   −25.
   - Other (please specify).

2. Gender:
- Woman.

   - Man.
   - Trans.

- Other (you may specify).
3. Is Spanish your first language?

   - Yes.
   - No.

4. If your first language is not Spanish, please state your first language/s.
5. Is Andalusian your variety of Spanish?

   - Yes.
   - No.

6. If your variety of Spanish is not Andalusian, please state your variety of Spanish.
7. You consider your socio-economic status as:

   - Low.
   - Middle.
   - High.

8. Do you consider that you look typically Andalusian/Mediterranean?

   - Yes.
   - No.

9. In English-speaking countries, do you think you are easily identified as Spanish or Southern European?

   - Yes.
   - No.

10. You consider you are:
  - Straight.
  - Gay.
  - Bisexual.
  - Asexual.

- Other (you may specify).

11. Do you consider that you have any kind of disability?

- Yes.
- No.

12. How many years have you studied English?

–10.
–11.
–12.
–13.
–14.
–15.
–16.
–17.
–18.
- Other (please specify).
13. What is your certified level of English?
- A1.
- A2.
- B1.
- B2.
- C1.
- C2.
- Other (please specify).

14. What is your experience teaching English as a foreign language? (you may choose more than one answer):
  - I have done internships in schools at least once as part of my training.
  - I have taught in the private sector for at least one school year.
  - I have taught in the public sector for at least one school year.
15. Think of a recent communicative situation in which you had to use English and felt you were not in a position of power:

15a. When did this happen?
15b. Where did it happen?
15c. Who was involved?
15d. What did your interlocutor say?
15e. What did you say?
15f. What happened in the end?
15g. What would you do differently now?
15h. What factors do you think played a role in this situation? (you may choose more than one option):

- Language (including linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors).
- Culture.
- Emotions.
- Age.
- Professional status.
- Social status.
- Academic status.
- Gender.
- Sexual orientation.
- Ethnicity/origin.
- Religious beliefs.
- Disability.

Appendix II. Questions used in the interviews (these questions were based on the answers from the questionnaire and were intended exclusively to address information that was not clear in participants' answers to the questionnaire).

1. General questions to clarify what participants wanted to say:

1a. What did you mean?

1b. Why was this important?

1c. Can you provide an example?

2. General questions to corroborate/contrast researchers' interpretation of participants' narratives:

2a. When you say [. . .], do you mean that [. . .]?

2b. Would it be correct for me to say that [. . .]?

2c. Is this relevant because [. . .]?

3. Specific questions to clarify or expand on the information obtained in the questionnaire (these were created ad hoc from participants' narratives):

3a. Why is it important that they were native speakers?

3b. Is there anything they said or did that indicated they were laughing at the way you spoke English?

3c. Is there anything he said or did that indicated he did not want to talk to them?

3d. Why do you think she said that?

3e. How do you feel about what happened?

3f. What do you mean you couldn't speak English?

3g. Was this the only time you've heard something like this?

3h. What kind of accent was that?

3i. How is your English better now?

3j. Do you think something similar could happen to you now?

3 k. Has something similar happened to you in Spanish too?

3 l. What do you mean you are more experienced or confident now?

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