

MAYORMENTE LAS NENAS: GENDERED DISCOURSES IN ONLINE AND OFFLINE
EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

by

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Abstract

This ethnographic case study explored the ways in which gendered discourses were enacted by students in an English language classroom and their corresponding educational weblogs. The participants were 18 pre-basic English students from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. Data was collected through six months of classroom and weblogs observations and through semi-structured interviews with a subsample of participants. This study was framed through a feminist poststructuralist paradigm and employed critical discourse analysis methodology to address the participants' gendered discourses across contexts. The analysis of the participants' discourses in the classroom and their weblogs demonstrated these were markedly patterned by gender. In the classroom, females engaged in conventional modes of classroom participation while males were characterized by unconventional modes. Similarly, in the weblogs females modified the visual components of their weblogs and posted more entries; whereas, males preserved their weblogs in their original layout and barely published any entries.

Resumen

El presente estudio exploró los actos discursivos producidos por un grupo de estudiantes en un salón de inglés y en sus ‘weblogs’ creados para el mismo curso. Los participantes fueron 18 estudiantes de inglés pre-básico de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez. La información fue recopilada durante un periodo de seis meses que incluyó observaciones en el salón de clase y en los ‘weblogs’. Además, se hicieron entrevistas con un grupo selecto de los participantes. Este estudio fue desarrollado siguiendo un marco feminista posestructuralista donde se utilizaron métodos de ‘análisis discursivo crítico’ para explorar los actos discursivos de los participantes en ambos contextos. El análisis de las observaciones en el salón de inglés y los ‘weblogs’ reveló que los actos discursivos de los estudiantes se vieron influenciados en gran manera por su género. En el salón de clase, las féminas se identificaron con modos de participación “tradicionales,” mientras que los varones se caracterizaron por participar mediante modos poco tradicionales. De igual manera, en los ‘weblogs’ las féminas modificaron el aspecto visual de sus ‘weblogs’ y publicaron un mayor número de entradas. Los varones, por otro lado, mantuvieron el aspecto visual de sus ‘weblogs’ en su estado original y apenas publicaron entradas.

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List of Abbreviations

ELA: Estado Libre Asociado¹

PIP: Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño²

PPD: Partido Popular Democrático³

PNP: Partido Nuevo Progresista⁴

UPR: Universidad de Puerto Rico⁵

UPRM: Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez⁶

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

¹ Free Associated Party (literal)- Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (official translation)

² Puerto Rican Independence Party

³ Popular Democratic Party

⁴ New Progressive Party

⁵ University of Puerto Rico

⁶ University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

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Chapter I: Weblogs, Classrooms and Gender: A National Perspective

My bad teacher of English

In tenth degree when I arrive at the High School the teacher of English receive us as if we be American everything was in English. If you want to go to the bathrooon or drink some water you have to to ask in English. That create me a traumatic during all the year. The English for me was impossible, that did me damage. It was my more worse experience with the English.

My good teacher of English

Is was when among to the university. The first day, I went to the classroom she did not speak anything of Spanish I put myself nervous and the teacher was given account, I approach me and I explain me like can to learn and to understand easy the language. The teacher help me so much that now I fell secure of what I do and write. She inspire me to have confidence to want to learn English.⁷

Daniel's experience learning English is a micro level representation of the phenomenon of English education in Puerto Rico. His selection of words such as 'bad', 'traumatic', 'impossible', 'damage' and 'worse experience' denote the negative experiences that have accompanied the teaching of English in Puerto Rico for the course of decades. The adherence to poorly contextualized language policies from the part of the Department of Public Instruction and the implementation of dated teaching strategies by teachers of this subject has indelibly stained our children's experience with what is, according to laws in this territory, their second language.⁸

My own experience learning English in Puerto Rico was not very different from what Daniel expressed in the above quoted weblog posting. My first nine years of formal public English education in Lares, a traditional rural town in the mountainous central regions of Puerto Rico, can only be described as permeated by a rigid set of drills that encouraged student passivity

⁷ Weblog posting retrieved from Daniel's weblog (one of my participants) in response to the prompt *My Experience Learning English*.

⁸ Chapter II provides a detailed account of the language policies that have been implemented in Puerto Rico as well as territorial laws regarding English in Puerto Rico.

and teacher authority, while failing to include contextualized content and materials. During this stage of my life, my teachers believed in the paper, textbook, and chalkboard method; I never listened to music, watched a video, nor used a computer in any classroom. Neither did I have a show and tell or pop-up speech in my English classes. In fact, my peers and I barely spoke in class, unless it was to answer the teacher's questions. My tasks as an English learner were quite simple: read stories, define the words written in bold within the text, and complete quizzes and exams. Particularly, I remember my ninth grade teacher, *Mister P*, who obligated me to read stories about illegal immigrants in the United States and snow, phenomena of no relevance to my reality as an adolescent living in a rural Caribbean town. As I reflect on this period, a strong sentiment of frustration strikes me, as I ponder on how many children are still taught English in this manner.

As I transitioned into high school in Lares, a large school which serves as the epicenter of adolescent learning in Lares, as it is the only high school in the town, I saw for the first time that a teacher could transform a student's life. It was strange for me to be challenged and encouraged to strive in an English class. This teacher, *Mister O*, showed me that learning English, just like acquiring any other language, meant access and understanding of a wide array of knowledge that was previously unreachable. Moreover, his selection of classroom activities and materials was meaningful and commendably creative. Every day, I waited anxiously for what I would be learning in *Mister O's* class. He would often take us to a laboratory in another building that was equipped with what I considered to be innovative materials: a projector, a screen, a television, and a computer. It was in this setting that I learned that movies, music, and computers could also aid in the acquisition of a language, and the exploration of daily life events. *Mister O* showed me

that electronic equipment and activities that I took part in on a daily basis could become sources to improve my language learning skills.

Even though my research is not autobiographical, I cannot deny that my personal educational experiences as an ESL student sparked my interest in learning about English education, educational technologies, and educator's roles in the development of curricula that actively engages students. These childhood and adolescence experiences convinced me that there was a need for educators to learn about creative and innovative ways to break away from old-fashioned teaching techniques that most of the times fail to engage pupils in the language learning process. This is how I found myself leaving Lares and a few years later graduating, from a university in a nearby town, with a Bachelors degree in English Education with a specialization in multimedia technology. Right after this, I enrolled in graduate studies in another institution where I became passionate about gender related research and feminist theory. This journey led me to this project that interlaces English education and educational technologies from a feminist stance.

Contrary to my schooling experiences in a small rural town, I have witnessed as an undergraduate and graduate student as well as an educator that it has become a trend in educational settings to incorporate various technologies with the goal of complementing lessons and motivating students. Lately, I have been particularly intrigued by the implementation of weblogs in the English language classroom. More specifically, I have been interested in the extent to which weblogs can aid in the process of engaging students or fail to serve as an effective educational activity for this population. It is this growing trend and my own personal trajectory in relation to English education in Puerto Rico that uniquely informs this study.

A Timeline of Weblogs

It is often claimed that the term weblog was coined in 1997 by Jorn Barger, who originally introduced these webpages as “link-driven sites.”⁹ These sites provided guidance to internet users so that they could access sites to find specific information. At a time when databases and search engines were neither well developed nor widely available it was difficult to locate websites, and weblogs appeared to aid in this process. However, soon after their introduction these webpages started to morph and attract the attention of the masses; weblogs thus acquired new qualities and purposes. For instance, internet users personalized these sites and were using them to share a wide array of journal-like entries with the world. After a decade, these websites have received a shortened name, blogs, and have continued to gain attractiveness in the popular stream. Although weblogs are created for different purposes, which I describe further in this section, there are some characteristics that differentiate them from other online platforms. Weblogs usually have a banner or title, an area where the blogger publishes postings, and a side bar. The area designated for the postings, displays them in reverse chronological order from the most recent to the most dated, usually including a title for each entry, the date on which it was published, the content of the posting itself, and the comments made by the blogger’s readership. The side bar, often located to the right side of the weblog, usually includes a search bar, a pages section such as ‘About Me,’ an archive where entries are filed by the month of their publication, categories where the entries are labeled by topic or area, and a blogroll where the blogger provides links to other weblogs.

⁹ For a complete timeline of the development of weblogs please visit Rebecca Blood’s website at: http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html.

Weblogs in the Popular Stream

Several studies have placed emphasis on the benefits of weblogs as a type of media discourse that fosters communication, interaction, and self-confidence in the popular stream. A study conducted by the *Pew Internet & American Life Project* (2006) discovered that more than half of the population of popular stream bloggers who were surveyed had never shared the topics and experiences that they posted in their weblogs anywhere else; weblogs were therefore an important means for publishing and communicating their experiences and thoughts. Another popular stream-based study carried out by Vaezi (2007) examined, through the use of an online questionnaire, the effects that weblogs had in relation to social capital. Among the findings of this study Vaezi reports that weblogs fostered the following components of social capital: social connections, reciprocity and trust among the blogger's community.

However, without denying their usefulness and benefits, weblogs have also presented certain disadvantages in the popular stream. As a mode of discourse there has been a tendency in weblogs to promote practices of marginalization; at times female bloggers have been silenced and discriminated against, while male bloggers have been favored. In her doctoral dissertation, provocatively titled *Where are the women?*, Ratliff (2006) reports that there was strong gendered play occurring in popular stream weblogs. According to Ratliff: "with weblogs, each blogger must gather and build an audience...who reads the weblog because they like the blogger and respect his or her views on a range of issues and topics" (p. 79). Ratliff concluded that women who talked about their home or children were pejoratively labeled and given no importance, while women who made erotic postings and included revealing pictures were noticed and received high numbers of postings. Accordingly, based on the necessity of maintaining an audience, male bloggers carefully selected topics and issues to be discussed in their blogs,

avoiding rhetorical practices that seemed similar to diaries, which were considered female oriented. Moreover, they (male bloggers) would cautiously consider their blog's layout. Ratliff claimed that "the visual design a blogger creates is an important part of the overall presentation of the self online" (p. 80). Due to the blogger's interest in projecting an appealing identity to his/her readers and since the dynamics of online representation are different from those of face-to-face meetings, bloggers resorted to text, images, and graphics to lure a desired audience.

Further studies, such as the one conducted by Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) on high ranking bloggers, have considered the ways in which bloggers engage in self-presentation and utilize impression management techniques. Their study revealed that most of these high ranking bloggers, or 70.8% of the participants, were men who presented themselves to their audience as being competent and likeable. Moreover, their study indicated that male and female "A-list blogs" varied in genre, since male bloggers were more inclined towards the traditional filter blog¹⁰ while female bloggers maintained a diary/journal blog.¹¹ Unfortunately, Trammell and Keshelashvili's sample was predominantly male, which substantially limited the exploration of how a female population might perform self-presentation and use impression management techniques. To synthesize, recent literature on the popular stream has placed strong emphasis on the study of gender in weblogs (see Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Sevick, 2005; Huffaker, 2004a).

Weblogs in Educational Settings

Another setting that weblogs have infiltrated is education. Similar to scholarly interest in popular stream weblogs, educational weblogs have become a center of inquiry for scholars and educators. Parallel to the study of weblogs in popular stream, research and projects that incorporate weblogs in educational settings have demonstrated both benefits and drawbacks to

¹⁰“The filter blog contains links to content the author finds from surfing the Web. Filters contain little original content and are known for pointing out to news items” (Trammel & Keshelashvili, 2005, p. 971).

¹¹ “Personal journals express the blogger's thoughts and daily activities” (Trammel & Keshelashvili, 2005, p. 971).

their users. Numerous projects and studies across a broad spectrum of educational sites and grade levels have examined the benefits of weblogs as an online communication tool that transforms education by aiding students in writing, literacy and other cognitive skills (see Halsey, 2007; Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Jones, 2006; Huffaker, 2004b; Oravec, 2003; Oravec, 2002). Halsey (2007) carried out an innovative and successful project with a group of elementary level students. Her project consisted of preparing a small package of tools that included a soft toy, a digital camera, pens and pencils, and instructions for both parents and students; this package was assigned in turns to each student. The students' task was to develop a story from the toy's point of view regarding after school life and then post it to the course's weblog. This project was significant because it involved the school and the parents, who were interested in the children's lives after school, as well as the students themselves who wanted to take the package home one more time.

Similarly, studies and articles at other educational levels have also focused on the benefits of weblogs for writing instruction and literacy. In higher education, a study conducted by Jones (2006) reports that the use of a weblog with undergraduate students who had English as a second language proved to be effective in various tasks related to the stages of the writing process. According to Jones, weblogs provided students with model entries, examples of feedback, a real audience, and an authentic publishing opportunity. Likewise, Huffaker (2004b) advocates for the usefulness of weblogs for literacy, justifying this claim by arguing that storytelling is a skill that transcends elementary schools as adolescents and adults use it to make sense of the world. He argues that the personal style that characterizes weblogs can provide a fruitful venue for students to publish their stories as well as to develop both their written and digital literacies.

Another area addressed by scholars has been the ways in which weblogs promote self-regulated learning (SRL) and self-directed learning (SDL). Baggetun and Wasson (2006) inquire into the ways that weblogs promote SRL with a group of college level students who voluntarily created their own weblogs. They concluded that weblogs fostered SRL by various means that included: “reflecting publicly on a topic” (p. 469), categorizing entries, and customizing an owned space with structural features and plug-ins. Similarly, Oravec (2003, 2002) claims that weblogs can yield immense dividends in the development of students’ SDL. She argues that weblogs promote the development of critical thinking skills as students reflect about topics and online resources. Moreover, Oravec (2002) reports that the similarities between weblogs and journals encourage students to develop an individual voice¹² as they share personal experiences. She further asserts that weblogs provide a middle space in educational settings and complement traditional face-to-face communication as students can share their ideas and knowledge in an informal environment (2003). She concludes that all of these skills, critical thinking, the development of an individual voice, and self-expression, are necessary for the development of SDL (Oravec, 2003).

In spite of all the benefits reported by the scholars mentioned above, other researchers caution us about the universal appeal or usefulness of weblogs in education; among these, Dawson (2007) and Buffington (2007) are salient. Research on weblogs both in the popular stream and education has evidenced that this type of media discourse can present both benefits and drawbacks for its users. The greatest discrepancy lies in the focus of these studies; the use of weblogs in the popular stream has placed strong emphasis on gender discourses in this medium of communication (Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Ratliff, 2006; Sevick, 2005; Trammell &

¹² The concept of ‘individual voice’ is a contested term for the paradigm that drives this study, which is feminist poststructuralism, but it was important for me to respect the author’s terminology.

Keshelashvili, 2005; Huffaker, 2004a). In contrast, recent studies based on educational weblogs have focused on their benefits for students such as: writing instruction, literacy, SRL, and SDL (Halsey, 2007; Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Jones, 2006; Huffaker, 2004b; Oravec, 2003; Oravec, 2002). It is this large discrepancy of scholarly focus between popular stream and educational weblogs that elicits a need for studies that inquire about the phenomenon of gender discourses in the implementation of this online platform in educational settings.

Another area that deserves further examination regarding the use of weblogs for college level educational settings is the degree to which students demonstrate engagement with the blogging process. Recent academic articles such as Buffington's (2007) narrate the successful experience of a professor while blogging with two graduate students. The weblog was an informal forum to complement face-to-face meetings, students' participation was voluntary and it had no impact on the students' grade. Buffington attributed the success of this experience largely to students' motivation.

In direct contrast to popular stream weblogs, and the case previously mentioned, educational weblogs are generally imposed by a figure of authority, typically a professor. Weblogs are not spaces in which students opt to partake but one in which they are required; even obligated to participate. Consequently, not every course that incorporates a weblog meets the expected outcomes. In the same article cited above, Buffington (2007) presents another instance in which she utilized a weblog with a larger class of graduate students and assigned it as a component of their final grade. She notes that the students did post the required amount of times but the experience of using a weblog in this class was "lackluster," since some students would post without reading other entries, and others would post several times on the same day to meet quotas. Dawson (2007) implemented weblogs in two graduate level English courses, and the

results of this integration were quite similar to those documented by Buffington with her later class. Once again, the course's weblog would remain inactive during the semester until the deadlines for submitting an assignment would draw near, when students would then "log in," post for a grade and not return until the next time they *had* to. Studies like these pave the way for similar projects that examine the way in which educational weblogs promote participatory practices in the student population at the undergraduate level. Since educational weblogs are not created in a vacuum but respond to the exigencies and structures of a formal teaching and learning environment, it seems pertinent to explore how students' gender discourses and engagement with the blogging process reflects or contradicts students' actions in the English language classroom as well.

Gender in Educational Settings

Contrary to the scarcity of studies on gendered discourses in educational weblogs, the phenomenon of gender has been frequently approached by scholars who focus on classroom settings. Studies such as the one carried out by Cervoni (2004) at the elementary level demonstrate that there are certain values ingrained in children that guide them into performing specific gendered behaviors inside the classroom. In her study *Doing Science and Doing Gender*, Cervoni presents the ways in which second graders participated and interacted while working in various science activities. Her study demonstrated that "the boys positioned the girls as their assistants, as incompetent in science and weak and in the need of the boys' help" (p. 63). Although Cervoni's study is based on an elementary level population, it is relevant to this study because it evidences that gender discourses are unambiguously present in classroom settings from an early age.

Moreover, studies in higher education have also examined gendered behavior and discourses at the college level. A study carried out, in a community college, by Lester (2006) found that female students would not benefit entirely from classroom activities and instruction. According to this study, this occurred for two reasons: females were inclined towards synthesis and consensus while males had a tendency to favor debate and competition. Numerous sources, then, validate the influence of gender discourses and representation in students' behavior and willingness to participate in classroom settings (Lester, 2006; Cervoni, 2004). It seems pertinent to examine and juxtapose how such interactions in traditional classroom settings resemble or differ from the gender discourses that occur in students' weblogs in the same course.

Focusing the Inquiry

The latent presence of gendered discourses in the field of weblogs in the popular stream, as well as the lack of studies on gender in educational weblogs represents both a discrepancy and a fruitful area of study. Likewise, the evident manifestations of gender in classroom settings set a precedent for the study of gender in other educational practices as well. For these reasons, the main purpose of my study is to explore what differences, if any, exist in the weblog discourses among students of an undergraduate English course and how this discourse differs from students' face-to-face communication in the language classroom at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez (UPRM). In order to explore this phenomenon my research intends to address the following central questions, some of which are followed by subquestions:

1. What are the gendered roles that students adopt in an undergraduate English language classroom?
 - a. How do female and male students engage in the various activities and topics presented in an undergraduate English course?

- b. What are the differences in the responses of female and male students to these activities and topics?
2. What are the gendered ways in which students in an undergraduate English course participate in an educational weblog?
 - a. What are the differences in the discourses employed by female and male students during the blogging process?
 - b. Which students appear to be actively engaged in the blogging process?
 - c. Which students show a lack of commitment towards the blogging process?
3. What are the differences and similarities between the gendered interactions that take place in the classroom and the ones that occur in students' weblog?

Collecting the Data

To answer these inquiries I opted to conduct a case study in order to closely observe the participants' gendered discourses in the language classroom and weblogs. This choice allowed me to see a detailed account of how a group of undergraduate second language learners participated in an English classroom and an educational weblog. To achieve a systemic and purposeful collection of data, I developed a set of instruments, which will be explained in Chapter III. While I conducted these observations, my role was that of a participant observer. Among the tasks that I performed with the participants were: scaffolding, translation, explanation of grammar rules, and distribution of handouts. In addition to the classroom and weblogs' observations, in order to incorporate multiple sources of data, I also employed ethnographic methods. After I observed the participants for an extended period of time I selected a smaller sample to participate in a series of interviews (the criteria for selecting these participants as well as the contents of the interviews will be explained in Chapter III).

Framing the Analysis of the Data

To analyze the classroom and weblog observations as well as the interviews, this study employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology. This method is appropriate for examining these contexts because it studies how complex communicative events or discourses explicitly or implicitly express values or ideologies in specific contexts. A prominent scholar in the field of CDA (Van Dijk, 1995; 2001a; 2001b) claims that the process of deciphering discourses is complex and necessary because groups and settings are constantly exposed to ideas and values that influence actions and communication amongst individuals. To illustrate, researchers have applied CDA methodology to study online media such as websites (Mateu Zayas, 2007) and classroom settings as well (Duff, 2002).

To narrow the focus of analysis provided by CDA my study employed a feminist poststructuralist perspective to explore the ways in which college students performed gender in their educational weblogs as well as in the general classroom setting. A major contribution of this paradigm to my study is the notion that the individual is never a stable entity but a being who is engaged in a constant process of shaping her subjectivities and being shaped by them. For this reason, gender is not conceived as a biological category but instead as the product of an extended process of socialization; in this manner, my study departs from traditional dichotomies of masculinity/femininity. Another way in which feminist poststructuralism shapes this study is through its conceptualization of language. In this paradigm, language is a site of struggle because it is always produced by an individual who has her own understanding of the world and her own pre-established set of beliefs. Moreover, feminist poststructuralism claims that language and thus discourses are the common factor through which we give meaning to our experiences, make

sense of the world, and shape our identities. Employing this paradigm to my study is appropriate because researchers such as Alvermann (2001) have implemented it to analyze case studies.¹³

In brief, this case study adopts ethnographic approaches in order to address the gaps prevalent in the scholarly literature in relation to weblogs such as: blogging for educational purposes and the effects of gender discourses in educational weblogs. Moreover, this study aims to explore various areas of education in Puerto Rico that also deserve careful examination, among these: the ways in which undergraduate second language learners participate in an English language classroom, the effects of gender discourses in a classroom setting, and the implementation of weblogs at this level.

The following chapter, Chapter II, engages in a discussion of existing literature on the issues of English language, educational technology and gender in the local context of contemporary Puerto Rico. In this manner, I enrich the literature presented in this chapter about these issues in the ‘mainland.’ Chapter III explains the particularities of this study by describing the participants, the site, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter IV presents the major findings of the analysis of the participants’ gendered discourses in the language classroom, while Chapter V focuses on the results of the analysis of the visual and textual components of the participants’ weblogs. Finally, Chapter VI compares the participants’ gendered discourses in both settings, and engages in a discussion of the implications of these findings for current pedagogical practice.

¹³ A thorough explanation of how feminist poststructuralism informed Alvermann’s study is provided in Chapter III.

Chapter II: English, Technology, Higher Education and Gender in Puerto Rico

This chapter provides a historical contextualization for my study, focusing on the issue of educational language policies and practices since the United States took possession of Puerto Rico in 1898. Also, it presents a brief account of the peculiarities of the institution where my study took place and the course in which my participants were enrolled. Within this section, I discuss research conducted at this institution, which addresses both the challenges of English education at the university level as well as the uses of educational technologies in Puerto Rico. Finally, I present an overview of gender-based policies and proposals in educational settings in Puerto Rico to highlight the relevance of this study to on-going discussions in this context.

An Overview of the Relationship between Language and Politics in Puerto Rico

The Advent of Americanization

The political and everyday lives of those who inhabit Puerto Rico are quite particular considering that Puerto Rico is currently a Commonwealth of the United States. This status provides Puerto Ricans or *puertorriqueños* with certain benefits from the ‘mainland,’ such as: American citizenship, which entails free entry into the United States, food waivers, scholarships, and federal funding for areas such as agriculture and education. On the other hand, this status also presents *puertorriqueños* with certain restrictions that differentiate this population from those who live on the ‘mainland.’ To illustrate, *puertorriqueños* have representation in Congress but no vote, and they cannot participate in presidential elections unless they live in the United States. Another gap between *puertorriqueños* who reside in Puerto Rico and ‘mainland people,’¹⁴ is the language of everyday exchanges; while the predominant language in the United States is English, most daily interactions in Puerto Rico are carried out in Spanish.

¹⁴ The concept of ‘mainland people’ includes *puertorriqueños* who live in the ‘mainland.’

*Puerto Rico constituye uno de los pocos países del mundo lingüísticamente homogéneos. Desde la conquista y colonización de nuestro territorio, el español se asentó en estas tierras y desplazó toda otra lengua o dialecto, convirtiéndose en el vernáculo del país y en el idioma dominante de la mayoría de los puertorriqueños.*¹⁵ (Comisión de Educación, 2004, p. 21)

Puerto Rico's status as a colony is not a new state of affairs, since Puerto Rico has remained a colony for over five centuries under two distinct but powerful regimes. Before Puerto Rico was a colony of the United States or a Commonwealth (as some prefer to call it due to the euphemistic nature of the term), Puerto Rico was already a colony of another empire, the Kingdom of Spain. Puerto Rico was 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus during his second voyage to the Americas in 1493 and remained under Spanish rule for a period of four centuries. It was not until 1898, during the Spanish-American war and "under the terms of the 1898 Treaty of Paris, [that] the Spanish Crown yielded its authority in Puerto Rico to the United States...[and] Puerto Ricans...were left to Washington's mercy and whims" (Barreto, 2001, p. 7). Upon the arrival of American troops, the vernacular in Puerto Rico was Spanish but this aspect of Puerto Rican life, along with several others, would soon start to be transformed by the new invading empire.

Sudden changes to Puerto Rican way of life subsequent to the American invasion paved the way for the rise of nationalism in Puerto Rico. Most of these changes were manifested in the handling of local matters, governmental structure, language acts and educational reforms. The

¹⁵ Puerto Rico is one of the few linguistically homogeneous countries in the world. Since the conquest and colonization of our territory, Spanish took root and replaced other languages and dialects, becoming the vernacular of the country and the dominant language of the majority of Puerto Ricans (Comisión de Educación, 2004, p. 21). Note on translations: Throughout this manuscript all quotations that appear in Spanish within the body of the text will remain in their original language to preserve their intended discourse and meaning. My English translation will be included in footnotes to provide clarity.

installation of a new government in 1898 meant a drastic change in the language which had been, for centuries the medium of instruction in schools. Starting in 1898, the Eaton-Clark language policy established that English would replace Spanish as the language to be used by educators in the schools of Puerto Rico. Following this, an intense interplay of language policies would occur for the next 50 years leaving the people of Puerto Rico with a total of seven educational policies that entailed learning a foreign language and learning through a foreign language. Based on Algren de Gutiérrez's (1987) review of these policies, Figure 1 presents a synthesized chronology of their implementation

Commissioner of Education	Medium of Instruction Across Levels
Eaton-Clark (1898-1900)	English was the medium of instruction at all levels.
Brumbaugh (1900-03)	Elementary: Spanish was the medium of instruction and English was a subject. High school: This pattern was inverted.
Faulkner-Dexter (1903-17)	Reverted to Eaton-Clark's except that Spanish was taught as a subject.
Miller-Huyke (1917-34)	1 st to 4 th grade: Spanish as medium of instruction. 5 th grade: Half the courses in Spanish and half in English. 6 th to 12 th : English as medium of instruction.
Padín (1934-37)	Reverted back to Brumbaugh's.
Gallardo (1937-45)	1 st and 2 nd grade: Spanish was the medium of instruction, English was a subject. 3 rd to 8 th grade: Both are the medium of instruction (Time allotted to English would increase periodically). High school: English was the medium of instruction and Spanish was a subject. After 1942: Reverted to Padín's.
Villaronga (1949-today)	English is taught as a subject and Spanish is the medium of instruction across all levels.

Figure 1. Overview of commissioners who issued language policies in Puerto Rico under the American regime.

In addition to quickly shifting and often contradictory language policies, as early as 1900, after only two years of American presence in Puerto Rico, Congress drafted what became Puerto

Rico's new constitution, a document which was never consulted with *puertorriqueños*. This constitution, known as the Foraker Act, established a civil government in Puerto Rico after two years of military government. Moreover, it gave in the words of Barreto (2001) "equal footing" to both the English and Spanish languages (p.17). In this manner, functionaries who came from the mainland were given the benefit of conducting their activities and businesses in their mother tongue.

During this same period, from 1898-1902, a study was conducted in Puerto Rico to inform the ruling empire about the current status of its recently acquired colony. The findings of the Carroll Commission reported the inferiority of Puerto Rican culture, education, and language when compared to those of the United States. As a result, in 1902 the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico passed the Official Languages Act, a territorial law stating that both English and Spanish could be employed in the Puerto Rican territorial government.

In a very short period, English had officially become the medium of instruction in schools and an accepted language for governmental affairs. According to Barreto (2001), the American leadership in Puerto Rico borrowed a model implemented in the mainland to address a wave of European immigration and applied it directly to the case of Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans were to learn the language of the mainland, and in this way learn the social norms of the ruling empire. "Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, English took root wherever the Stars and Stripes flew" (Barreto, p. 2).

In response to the Americanization process a rise of nationalist sentiments permeated in this territory. Conscious of this growing sentiment and concerned by the threat it posed, Congress drafted several governmental measures intended to alleviate this fervor. In 1917, Congress ratified the Jones Act which granted American citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico;

nonetheless, high functionaries of the local government were still appointed by Washington, among these the governor and the Commissioner of Education. It is relevant to note that from 1900 to 1946 Puerto Rico was governed by United States politicians and it was not until 1946 that the first Puerto Rican governor was appointed by Washington. Then, in 1948 for the first time since the United States invasion, Puerto Ricans were able to elect their first governor.

*En 1949, tras la toma de posesión de don Luis Muñoz Marín como primer gobernador electo por el pueblo puertorriqueño, el Comisionado de Educación de Puerto Rico, don Mariano Villaronga, decretó mediante la Circular Núm. 10, del 6 de agosto, que el español sería el vehículo de la enseñanza en las escuelas primarias y secundarias. El inglés se enseñaría como asignatura especial preferente. Esta nueva política pública terminó con el imperio del inglés en el sistema de educación pública del país.*¹⁶

(Comisión de Educación, 2004, p. 12)

In 1952, Congress granted Puerto Rico the Commonwealth status by approving the *Constitución del Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA). This measure granted the people of Puerto Rico various economic incentives and the right to travel freely to and from the mainland. Through these three statutes—the Jones Act, the granting of self-elected governorship and the Commonwealth status—Puerto Ricans received a glimpse of governmental autonomy. In the meantime, these acts accomplished their main objective of containing political turmoil between the ruling empire and its colonial subjects (see Figure 2 for a timeline of these events).

Furthermore, the later advent of the alleged end to the process of Americanization in 1949 was responsible for a significant decline in the debate over language policy. It is worth noting

¹⁶ In 1949, after Luis Muñoz Marín became the first popularly elected Puerto Rican governor, the Commissioner of Education of Puerto Rico, Mariano Villaronga, ruled that Spanish would be the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools. English would be taught as a preferred subject. This new policy put an end to the English regime in the country's public instruction system (Comisión de Educación, 2004, p. 12).

however that as Barreto (2001) points out: “the 1902 law establishing English and Spanish as official languages *remained* [italics added] in the books” (p. 52).

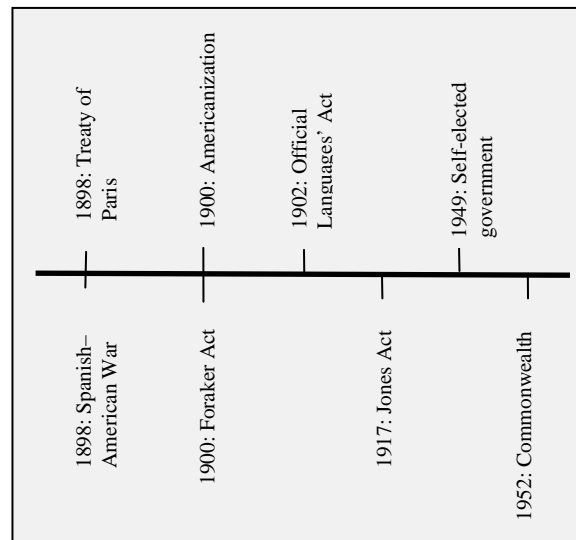


Figure 2. Timeline of major events that contributed to the language issue in Puerto Rico.

The Political Debate over Language

In a recent publication about language in Puerto Rico, the *Comisión de Educación*¹⁷ stated that “*El discurso público sobre el tema de la oficialidad de las lenguas ha estado permeado por una extrema politización que ha empañado los conceptos*”¹⁸ (2004, p. 129). Indeed, as the following overview demonstrates, in recent Puerto Rican history, politics and language education have been tightly and polemically intertwined. As a result of the allegedly democratic measures granted to Puerto Rico in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s the idea of control over governmental structures and educational reforms was spreading through Puerto Rico, yet a large number of *puertorriqueños* did not foresee that Congress would still retain a great deal of sovereignty over local matters. Moreover, they failed to suspect that future self-elected governments would utilize Puerto Rican identity and the language debate as stratagems

¹⁷ Local Commission of Education in Puerto Rico

¹⁸ The extreme politization of public discourse about official language policies has blurred the concepts (*Comisión de Educación*, 2004, p. 129).

to achieve their preferred political stance in relation to the United States. With this goal in mind, alliances and rivalries would emerge between those affiliated with the nationalist movement, particularly those from the highest social strata of Puerto Rico, and the new political leaders.

In the course of five decades, Puerto Rico had suffered drastic changes; it had stopped being a possession of the Kingdom of Spain, it had confronted a new master that spoke a different language, and it had been given limited autonomy over local matters. A group of intellectuals, among them those who had contributed to the movement against Americanization, saw an opportunity to be the architects of *puertorriqueñidad*.¹⁹ This group, mostly upper class families and political leaders, proclaimed that the one trait that differentiated Americans from Puerto Ricans in large measure was a linguistic peculiarity. Barreto (2001) claims that “from intellectual to illiterate, elite to subaltern, virtually everyone is capable of discerning the difference between languages *A* and *B*. Even if outsiders learn the local language, their accents reveal their foreign origin and hence their outsider status” (p. 12). In this manner, Spanish became a defining trait of *puertorriqueñidad*, and English of “the other”.

Elites in Puerto Rico succeeded in establishing this set of beliefs in society. To this day, political debates over Puerto Rico’s status are infused with contentious discussions of English. Illustrations of this are present throughout the literature and date from as early as the first decade of American invasion to the present year. Even when the spokesperson and parties might have different names, the rhetoric has remained quite similar for over a century. Among the most salient figures in the first five decades of the American regime, 1900 to 1950, were three members of the former Liberal Party,²⁰ and the current *Partido Popular Democrático*²¹ (PPD):

¹⁹ *Puertorriqueñidad* refers to traits that signify Puerto Rican identity.

²⁰ “The Union Party faction of the Alliance led by Antonio Barceló reorganized itself as the Liberal Party in 1931 and stressed political independence as a necessary condition for socio-economic development” (Algren de Gutiérrez, 1987, p. 94).

Epifanio Fernández-Vanga, Samuel R. Quiñones and Luis Muñoz Marín. According to Algren de Gutiérrez (1987) it was Fernández-Vanga who “set the tenor for the future development of the movement against the teaching of English through a series of articles which he published in the Island press between 1915 and 1930” (p. 85). Fernández-Vanga referred to the process of Americanization as a loss of Puerto Rican identity and upheld the Spanish language as a symbol of *puertorriqueñidad*. Moreover, Luis Muñoz Marín, who became the first governor of Puerto Rico, and Samuel R. Quiñones, the founder of a renowned newspaper in this territory, stressed the view of Puerto Rico as a victim of the American regime and stated that the use of English in the schools of Puerto Rico was responsible for the destruction of Puerto Rican identity.

Other political leaders and parties would resume the polemic during the decades of 1970 to 2000. The main actors responsible for the continuation of the language play during this period were members of the three major political parties: *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP),²² the *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD), and the *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP).²³ Each of these parties holds an explicit and static stance towards Puerto Rico’s status debate:²⁴ the PIP advocates for independence, the PPD promotes limited autonomy under the current commonwealth and the PNP desires statehood. Barreto (2001) argues that because of the lack of transpartisan teamwork and an obsession with Puerto Rico’s status these three parties engaged in “nested games.” Driven by the ultimate goal of attaining a desired status, every time a political party holds office it utilizes the language debate to send a particular image of Puerto Rican society that mirrors its preferred status goal to Congress, which is ultimately in charge of making a decision. Additionally, in a strategic and timely manner, these three parties dedicate great effort

²¹ Popular Democratic Party

²² Puerto Rican Independence Party

²³ New Progressive Party

²⁴ “the island’s politico-juridical relationship with the central power” (Barreto, 2001, p. 34).

to persuading the people of Puerto Rico of the “evil intentions” of the competing parties. For instance, those who advocate for the use of English are accused of Americanization, while those defending Spanish are labeled separatists. In this manner, decisions of great importance to Puerto Rico such as determining language policies were left to drift with the personal goals of a group of elites and political figures.

Among the most prominent figures of the 1970-2000 period, Barreto (2001) highlights PIP senator Rubén Berríos Martínez, PPD senator Sergio Peña Clos, and former governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Roselló. In 1976, PIP senator Berríos Martínez drafted a bill that established Spanish as Puerto Rico’s sole official language to be used in government operations and as medium of instruction but his party lacked parliamentary strength and the bill did not succeed. In the 1980’s, PPD senator Peña Clos introduced two language bills, one in 1982 and another in 1986. Peña Clos’ 1982 bill proposed the prohibition of the use of English in the public schools in Puerto Rico and also demanded for this measure to be implemented in private schools. Then, Peña Clos’ 1986 bill insisted on declaring Spanish the official language of Puerto Rico. None of these bills flourished because the government in power thought it was more convenient not to address this issue.

Gestures are important, and the PNP feared that even a symbolic language law could be seen in Washington as a show of defiance and emphasize to federal legislators, most of whom knew little about Puerto Rico, the cultural distinctiveness of this Caribbean territory. (Barreto, 2001, p. 55)

The 1990’s was a decade saturated with illustrations of what Barreto (2001) calls nested games between the two parties that held office during this period: the PPD and the PNP. This decade could be looked upon as a hallmark of the political nature of English and English

education in Puerto Rico, since the two parties that held office were more concerned with sending the right message to Congress than with instituting real changes or seriously considering the educational needs of Puerto Rican students. In 1991, Governor Rafael Hernández Colón, member of the PPD, passed bill 417 into law. For the first time since the Language Act of 1902, English had been overturned as an official language²⁵ of the Puerto Rican government. In response to bill 417, Rubén Berríos, member of the PIP, fought to turn this new law into a constitutional amendment, but his effort did not succeed. Being close to the next elections, “the PNP used the 1991 language statute as ‘evidence’ that the PPD was distancing Puerto Rico from the United States” (Barreto, 2001, p. 95). Eventually, the PNP won the 1992 elections and restored English as an official language in 1993.

During the 1990s, Puerto Rico participated in one referendum and two plebiscites. The 1991 referendum, was popularly known as *el referendo del sí y el no*, and formally as the Claim of Democratic Rights Referendum. This referendum intended to know whether Puerto Ricans favored the incorporation of a law of rights into the current constitution and the option “No” triumphed. In this same decade Puerto Ricans voted for their preferred status option on two occasions: in the 1993 plebiscite the commonwealth option won and in the 1998 plebiscite, implemented by the PNP Governor Pedro Roselló, the option *none of the above* received the majority of votes. In 1997, also under Roselló’s administration, the Department of Public Instruction approved the *Proyecto para formar un ciudadano bilingüe* or Project for the Development of a Bilingual Citizen. In sum, in the period of one decade, the people of Puerto

²⁵ The *Comisión de Educación* (2004) defines an official language as “*aquella que un Estado declara jurídicamente tal a los fines de que sirva de vehículo para realizar la gestión de gobierno interno y para la comunicación entre el gobierno y los gobernados*” or that which a State establishes by law so that it becomes the language used by the government in its internal operations and to communicate with the populace (p. 83).

Rico witnessed two different language laws, one referendum, two plebiscites, and one bilingual project.

Whether they were annexationists, autonomists, or separatists, political leaders in Puerto Rico were aware of the connection between the English language and American identity. These same leaders also knew that Puerto Ricans were proud of their culture and their vernacular and recalled the Americanization process undertaken by the federal government in the first half of the twentieth century. (Barreto, 2001, p. 25)

A concise illustration of Barreto's claim is evidenced in the numerous political maneuvers that occurred in relation to language policy during the 1990's. While members of the PIP such as Rubén Berríos defended Spanish as the official language of Puerto Rico, political figures like the former Governor Pedro Roselló, advocated for laws and regulations that safeguarded the permanence of English as an official language.

Implications for Perceptions of Spanish and English

A century of rhetoric and debate over the language issue in Puerto Rico has had significant repercussions on the people who live and are educated here, among them: the creation of a collective link between language and politics, and the development of conflicting perspectives on English language acquisition and usage. Not to mention the implementation of poorly contextualized language policies that fail to address the unique language needs of the children and adolescents who attend our public education system.

On one hand, as a response to the process of Americanization implemented by the United States government and the never ending political debate by the annexationist political parties as well as certain elites in Puerto Rico, English has been elevated to a position of prestige to the extent that it is promoted as a preferred and necessary language. To illustrate, Puerto Rico's

Federal Court is the only court in the federal system where the use of English is mandatory even when the court's personnel is composed almost entirely by native Spanish speakers (Pousada, 2008). Pousada describes how both defendants and witnesses are required to utilize interpreters because Spanish is *not* the language of our court. Moreover, the *Comisión de Educación* (2004) states that during the late 1990's and early 2000's governmental discourse about English was marked by increasingly positive connotations.

*El inglés es el lenguaje del progreso y del futuro, la lengua franca del comercio internacional, la lengua de la ciencia y la tecnología, la lengua de la Internet y las computadoras, la lengua de la convivencia con una de las grandes culturas del hemisferio americano, la lengua de la globalización, la lengua de las profesiones técnicas y especializadas y de las publicaciones sobre temas relacionados, la lengua de apertura al mundo, la lengua de la educación técnica.*²⁶ (p. 18)

In addition to promoting an exaggerated image of the English language, these groups have also succeeded in attributing political connotations to this language. In a study conducted by Crespo Ortiz (1991), questionnaires were distributed to 82 politicians of the three major parties in Puerto Rico. She found a direct link between political affiliation and language preference. Her data reported that PPD and PIP subjects endorsed the maintenance of Spanish as a first language and English as a second language while PNP leaders endorsed bilingualism. In terms of the importance of either language, PPD and PIP leaders said that Spanish was more important than English and PNP leaders gave equal importance to both. Not surprisingly, 90% of the subjects indicated that they voted for the political ideologies represented by their parties and

²⁶ English is the language of progress and the future, the *lingua franca* of international business, the language of science and technology, the language of the Internet and computers, the language of fellowship with one of the great cultures of the American hemisphere, the language of globalization, the language of technical and specialized careers and of their publications, the language for entry into the world, the language of technical instruction. (*Comisión de Educación*, 2004, p. 18)

said they would do the same in upcoming elections. Thus, perspectives on language are indelibly tied to political ideologies that reflect party members' loyalties to a particular political status for Puerto Rico.

*Se dice que: el inglés asegura la permanencia de la relación política con los Estados Unidos; es indispensable para el logro de la estadidad; nos distingue de los países pobres de América; es el lenguaje de la democracia; es la lengua de nuestros conciudadanos americanos; es la lengua indispensable para emigrar, estudiar, trabajar y progresar en el norte; es la primera o la única lengua de muchos puertorriqueños criados y nacidos en los Estados Unidos.*²⁷ (Comisión de Educación, 2004, p. 19)

In contrast, such an intense propaganda towards the English language has had a detrimental effect on Spanish. First, it has shifted the attention of educators and language planners to the teaching of English, and it has focused the distribution of funds to schools and institutions that implement programs for the teaching of English. In the meantime, the teaching of Spanish has not received proper consideration. In this sense, the language of everyday use in Puerto Rico has been presented as an unnecessary obstacle towards mobility and growth; it has become a language of inertia. The *Comisión de Educación* argues that for many

El español es una lengua pobre en vocabulario técnico, una lengua que promueve el aislamiento cultural, una lengua que dificulta el comercio internacional, una lengua que

²⁷ It's often claimed that: English guarantees the endurance of our political relationship with the United States; it's indispensable for Puerto Rico to become a state; it distinguishes us from the poor countries in America; is the language of democracy; is the language of our American fellow citizens; it's indispensable for us to be able to migrate, study, work and progress up North; it's the native and only tongue of many Puerto Ricans born and raised in the United States. (Comisión de Educación, 2004, p. 19).

*representa el pasado y lo tradicional, una lengua que no provee iguales posibilidades de desarrollo.*²⁸ (2004, p. 18)

Moreover, Spanish has been associated with other elitist groups in Puerto Rico. It is perceived as the language of purists, who venerate the kingdom of Spain. It is portrayed as the language of those who are against the United States, of those who seek the independence of our land. Finally, Spanish is the language of those who claim a virginal *puertorriqueñidad* untouched by foreign influences. According to the *Comisión de Educación* (2004) Spanish has become “*la única lengua que defienden los separatistas y los hispanófilos que pretenden eliminar el inglés*”²⁹ (p. 19).

The circulation of such contradictory perceptions in relation to English and Spanish has resulted in a never ending hierarchical display that permeates every fiber of life in Puerto Rico. The fact that Spanish is the predominant language of the working and middle class in Puerto Rico, and that a century of English education has not yet achieved its main goal—that is, the production of a bilingual citizen—has rooted deeply in the conscience of every Puerto Rican. Nickels (2005) concludes that “these different perspectives of English send mixed signals to the individual who wishes to improve his prospects, but who, at the same time, does not want to ‘betray’ his culture” (p. 230). English is not a predominant language in Puerto Rico even when the 1993 law establishes that it is an official language. It is mostly used by small portions of people in Puerto Rico most of whom practice commerce with American companies, work in the tourist sector, and federal institutions such as military bases and the Federal Court of Puerto Rico

²⁸ The Spanish language lacks technical vocabulary, promotes cultural isolation, hampers international commerce, represents the past and the archaic, and does not provide the same chances for development (*Comisión de Educación*, 2004, p. 19).

²⁹ Spanish is the only tongue defended by those separatists and hispanophiles who hope to eliminate English (*Comisión de Educación*, 2004, p. 19).

(Barreto, 2001; Pousada, 2008). The *Comisión de Educación* (2004) argues that English fails to comply with any of the necessary requirements to be an official language in Puerto Rico.

*Es cierto que el inglés se siguió enseñando en Puerto Rico, pero éste ni es una lengua nativa, ni es una lengua de una colectividad claramente diferenciada dentro del territorio isleño, ni es una lingua franca para fines internos, ni es la lengua en la que se realiza la gestión de gobierno, ni es la lengua en que el gobierno se comunica con sus gobernados.*³⁰ (p. 117)

Another factor that has largely influenced the perceptions that Puerto Ricans have towards English and Spanish has been the phenomena of migration of Puerto Ricans to and from the United States. As explained by Duany (2002), this comprises a unique phenomenon because Puerto Ricans do not cross legal boundaries when they enter and leave the United States, given their status as U.S. citizens, but instead transgress cultural borders, such as language, in this process. Duany argues that this phenomenon “has serious implications for the construction of...discourses of citizenship, language policies, and national identities” (p. 210) because this constant process of circular migration requires this group to be literate in both English and Spanish.

Other scholars have also addressed the phenomenon of migration and more specifically the concept of the diaspora.³¹ Flores (2009) has focused on the linguistic and identity related effects that this phenomenon has on constructions of *puertorriqueñidad* in Puerto Rico and the United States. Flores reflects on how the phenomenon of diaspora challenges notions of

³⁰ It is true that English continued to be taught in Puerto Rico but it is not a native tongue, nor is it the tongue of a specific collectivity within the Island’s territory, nor is it a *lingua franca* for internal affairs, nor is it the tongue used in governmental procedures or used by the government to communicate with its constituents (*Comisión de Educación*, 2004, p. 117).

³¹ Flores (2009) defines the diaspora as “transnational communities [characterized by] movement, travel, change on the basis of contact, interaction, and the transfer of context and concept” (p. 15).

puertorriqueñidad, when the first language of some of its constituents is English. He goes further to describe how the experience of diaspora may promote the incorporation of cultural and linguistic traits through kinship between Puerto Ricans in the United States, and relatives and comrades who live in Puerto Rico. Although I will only provide this brief overview on the phenomena of migration and diaspora, this is an important factor that has also influenced the ways in which Puerto Ricans perceive *puertorriqueñidad* and the traits that constitute their ethnicity.

Implications of the Language Debate for Higher Education in Puerto Rico

English and Public Higher Education in Puerto Rico

In addition to creating conflicting perspectives on English and Spanish, such an intense political language debate has affected the way in which Puerto Rican students learn English. Fifty years of United States' imposition of English in the Puerto Rican schools (1900-1949) did not produce its main objective: the acquisition of English by the people of Puerto Rico. Over the next five decades, 1950-2000, when decisions about the teaching of English in Puerto Rico were delegated to the Puerto Rican government, the efforts yielded similar results: the failure to produce bilingual citizens. A study conducted by Aymat (1988), in the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, revealed that "students believed that the politization and indifference of the island's Department of Public Instruction also deters the teaching of English in the public schools of Puerto Rico" (p. 8).

Since 1949, the teaching of English has been an integral part of the educational curriculum from first grade through the second year of undergraduate education in Puerto Rico. Nonetheless, even when such an extensive teaching of a language would seem to provide enough time to master it, past and recent studies at the college level show a different reality. Aymat

(1988) claims that “after twelve years of formal English as a second language instruction in Puerto Rico, most public high school graduates do not have a minimum proficiency in the language” (p. 64). Likewise, in a more recent study, Maldonado (2000) states that “although English is taught at all grade levels along the educational pipeline, some students graduate from high school with a limited knowledge of English” (p. 493).

The most recent data gathered by the United States Bureau of the Census in Puerto Rico asked respondents’ to do a self-ranking of their ability to speak English by completing items such as “do not speak English with ease.” According to the United States Bureau of the Census (2000), 89.4% of respondents between the ages of 5 to 17 reported that they did not speak English with ease. Similarly, between the ages of 18 and over 82.4% of respondents reported not to speak English with ease. Recently, the *Consejo de Educación Superior de Puerto Rico* (2004) published the results of a longitudinal investigation that intended to describe the general characteristics of students who graduated at the secondary level in Puerto Rico. Among a series of other variables the researchers considered students’ scores in the various sections of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB). Results indicated that students’ scores in math and Spanish were higher than those in English. The average score in math fluctuated from 520-501, the scores in Spanish ranged from 504-477, and those for English fluctuated between 479-469. It is evident from these studies and statistical summaries that a century of English education in Puerto Rico has failed to accomplish its main objective, which is the production of bilingual citizens.

In a paper that focuses on the different models for the teaching of English implemented at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), the only public higher education institution in Puerto Rico, Maldonado (2000) indicates that this language limitation appears in students’ college entrance

exams and relegates them to remedial courses before they can move to the corresponding college-level English courses. Maldonado's (2000) and Aymat's (1988) studies are of great relevance to my investigation because they both took place at the UPR, which is the institution where my study was held.

The UPR has 11 campuses around Puerto Rico and is the academic centre to approximately 69,000 Puerto Ricans.³² According to Maldonado (2000) two thirds of the student population in the UPR system comes from public schools. This raises the question of how many students who are admitted to the UPR system enter the various campuses with low English language proficiency. In the UPR system there is no regulation over the language to be used by faculty, nor of the language of the textbooks, which translates then into a dilemma if we consider that most public high school graduates fail to master minimum English skills but are often expected to use English in several courses at the college level.

Studies in the Pre-Basic English Courses at UPRM

As a result of high rates of low English proficiency among high school graduates various campuses of the UPR system have implemented non credit English courses to help students master the minimum skills required by the university. The UPRM, the Mayagüez campus of the University of Puerto Rico is not an exception. A course known as pre-basic English³³ has been created at UPRM to address the English language needs of its student population. Recent studies on pre-basic English courses at UPRM have centered almost entirely on the study of students' mastery of specific language skills, their attitudes towards learning English and their literacy practices.

³² These numbers correspond to the latest data released by the University of Puerto Rico for the year 2001; this information can be found at <http://www.upr.edu/perfil1600.html>.

³³ A detailed description of this course is provided later in Chapter III.

Ospina Cortéz (2002) conducted a study where she tested the extent to which the writing process could be incorporated into the pre-basic English curriculum of a section she was teaching at UPRM. Ospina Cortéz distributed demographic and attitudinal questionnaires that provided great insight into students' backgrounds and attitudes towards English. Her group of 22 participants ranged from first to third year, which is a common situation in this course, and they were all repeaters. In an item that inquired into the reasons for repeating the course, 47% of the participants selected *I think I am bad in English* (Ospina Cortéz, p. 34). She concluded that the writing process could be implemented in the pre-basic English course but that there was no evidence that the students were able to go through the five stages. Ospina Cortez claims that students were able to pre-write but other stages such as planning and drafting were not incorporated into their later written work.

Another study carried out by López Hernández (2007) investigated the attitudes of a group of over 200 students enrolled in various courses in the basic English track at UPRM.³⁴ Through the distribution of a questionnaire and the collection of a journal entry, she gathered extensive demographic information about the participants and their attitudes towards learning English. The vast majority of the participants, 99%, reported that Spanish was their native language and more than 50% claimed that they had learned “a little” English in 12 years of instruction. In regards to the pre-basic English course, 45 out of 238 participants reported that they had repeated the pre-basic English course; some said they had repeated the course up to four times. In terms of attitudes towards learning English, 95% of the participants said that learning English *would not lead to the loss of their Puerto Rican cultural identity* (p. 44) and 97% agreed that Puerto Rican children should be bilingual.

³⁴ An explanation of the English track is provided in Chapter III.

Yet another study, this one with a linguistic focus, was implemented at UPRM and it examined style shift among three “main participants,” one from pre-basic, one from intermediate and one from the advanced English course. In addition, each main participant was required to bring three friends to the study who became members of a network with the main participants. There were three networks and a total of 12 participants. Hermina’s (2006) study inquired on whether students from these three courses had the *phonetic-phonological*³⁵ resources to style shift from formal and informal uses of English and Spanish. The data from Hermina’s study was collected through a questionnaire and socio-linguistic interviews. Her study revealed that although members of the intermediate and advanced English networks had English-speaking friends, most of the members of the pre-basic network did not have an English-speaking friend and those who had one did not communicate with their friend in English. After an extensive and specific analysis of different linguistic variables, Hermina concluded that the pre-basic English network did not possess knowledge of many linguistic variables and lacked the resources to express them.

A recent study conducted by Feliciano Martínez (2008) inquired into the usage of dictionaries among pre-basic English students, be it English monolingual, bilingual, or Spanish monolingual in their English and Spanish courses. A total of three sections of pre-basic English participated in the study which consisted on the completion of a questionnaire on dictionary use. A smaller group of participants was later selected³⁶ to take part in a think aloud protocol to assess their use of a dictionary. The majority of the participants reported to have studied in public schools and to have received formal dictionary instruction at the elementary level. They also agreed that during intermediate and high school levels very little attention was dedicated to

³⁵ Linguistic markers particular to a language (Hermina, 2006, p. 8).

³⁶ “The think-aloud method allows the researcher to better understand the thinking process of students when they are performing a task...with this method every thought is recorded as it is verbalized” (Feliciano Martínez, 2008, p. 27).

dictionary use. In general, 87% of the participants indicated that dictionaries were useful tools and 73% noted that they needed a dictionary in order to understand readings written in English.

In sum, a few common threads have emerged in this review of the participants of the previously discussed studies on the pre-basic population at UPRM (Feliciano Martínez, 2008; Hermina, 2006; López Hernández, 2007; Ospina Cortéz, 2002), most of them are a product of the public school system in Puerto Rico and a considerable amount of them have taken this course on more than one occasion. Also, the findings of these studies indicate that after 12 years of instruction in the English language this population lacks mastery of several skills, among these: the use of the five stages of the writing process, and the recognition of phonetic-phonological structures. Moreover, the participants of these studies recognize their own limited mastery of the English by saying “I am bad in English” and “I need to use a dictionary to be able to understand what I read.” In spite of these strong indicators of low proficiency in the English language, a significant amount of the participants demonstrate a positive attitude towards the English language by making remarks such as “Puerto Rican children should be bilingual” and “the English dictionary is a useful tool.”

Another aspect of English education in Puerto Rico that has received some scholarly attention is the implementation of educational technology and the extent to which it affects the acquisition of the English language and students’ engagement with the class. I will turn to this emphasis on educational technology and language acquisition in the following section.

Educational Technologies: Another Challenge for English Education in Puerto Rico
Educational Technology in Puerto Rican Schools

Research in the area of educational technology in Puerto Rico has focused on various issues, among these: the effects of computer software on students’ writing skills, professors’

perceptions towards the use of educational technology, and professors' mastery of technological skills. Acevedo Cortés (1991) designed a study at an elementary level school in which English was the language of instruction. Her main goal was to observe students' writing in the classroom and language laboratory and assess whether the use of two writing programs³⁷ would aid students' writing skills. Also, she inquired into the attitudes that students had towards writing and using computers. To explore these two areas she distributed pre and post questionnaires, collected pre and post writing samples, and asked students to complete all writing tasks in the classroom. Acevedo Cortés' study reports that students had a positive attitude towards writing with computers, and writing in general, and that the use of computers helped students improve their writing skills.

Another study conducted by Venkatesan (1990) observed two sections of a composition course at UPRM to compare whether using a word processor had an effect on students' writing, specifically in relation to content, organization, vocabulary and language. One of the sections used a word processor³⁸ and the other one served as a control group. Venkatesan concluded that even when the length of the essays increased in both groups, the length of word processed essays increased more than the paper-based ones. Also, she reported that the experimental group scored holistically higher than the control group.

There is commonality in the findings of the previous studies (Acevedo Cortés, 1991; Venkatesan, 1990), starting with the fact that there is a need for more recent studies that address the use of educational technology in the language classroom. Also, both studies conclude that the use of educational technology yielded benefits that ranged from a positive attitude towards

³⁷ Primary Editor and Logo Writer

³⁸ McGraw Hill College Version of Word Perfect

writing to an improvement in writing skills. We now turn to other studies that have focused on professors and their uses of technology for educational purposes in Puerto Rico.

Lambooy and Jared (2003) carried out a quantitative study at a private institution of higher education to inquire into the technological competency of its full time faculty and to determine whether the institution might effectively implement distance education. Through the use of a questionnaire, Lambooy and Jared's study gathered that younger faculty had more mastery of complex skills such as HTML than older faculty. Also, their study indicates that the technical skills that predominated among the faculty at this institution were those considered "lower-level skills," such as email and word processing; while those considered "higher order skills" like HTML and email lists were lacking. Lambooy and Jared concluded that the faculty in this institution was not yet ready to implement distance education.

On the other hand, Saavedra Tosado (2007) designed a study with two goals: to describe the technological competency of the faculty of Agricultural Sciences at UPRM and to inquire about their perceptions on the use of technology in the classroom. Saavedra Tosado distributed a questionnaire to the members of the faculty of Agricultural Sciences who had an academic responsibility of two or more courses. The results of the questionnaire demonstrated that 96.2% of the faculty members had knowledge of the Internet, computers, and email. Moreover, 76.9% of the faculty members agreed that technology should be integrated into the teaching-learning process, while 73.1% claimed that technology provided alternatives to motivate students.

In sum, research on educational technology across various levels of schooling in Puerto Rico has addressed both students and educators. In terms of students, most of this research has dealt with the ways in which educational technology serves as an aid in literacy learning for this population. On the other hand, studies that have focused on educators have assessed their

technological competencies and their perceptions towards the implementation of technology in educational settings. Regardless of their focus, whether on students or educators, these studies have failed to consider an important element of educational technology that permeates current higher education in Puerto Rico, which is the implementation of online platforms in the English language classroom.

The entire system of the University of Puerto Rico is currently guided by an agenda of institutional improvement known as *Diez para la Década: Agenda para la Planificación de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* or Ten for the Decade: Planning Agenda for the University of Puerto Rico, which was implemented in 2005. This agenda aims to continually improve and assess each campus' progress with respect to ten main areas. The goal of *Diez para la Década* is to meet specific objectives within these areas to achieve the global improvement of the UPR system by the year 2015. The area which is of great relevance to my study is the seventh area:

Actualización de Tecnología or Technological Update. Among its objectives are to provide access to Internet and other digital technologies to students and educators, to train the professorate in the use of these technologies, to increase the availability of technological equipment in classrooms and laboratories, and to stimulate the inclusion of course related materials in online platforms. This document evidences that the president of the UPR system as well as its chancellors, and the deans of various campuses have identified the inclusion of technology in these institutions as an area that deserves to be assessed and improved in order to raise standards and to improve the related services provided by the UPR system to its students and faculty. It is relevant to study this proposal because its implementation entails a series of assumptions that include the idea that the incorporation of technology will improve the quality of

education and that technology is being considered an integral part of the preparation of the individual for future careers.

Weblogs in Puerto Rico

An area of educational technology or more specifically online platforms that still lacks scholarly attention in institutions of higher education in Puerto Rico is the implementation of educational weblogs. As mentioned in Chapter I, in contrast to a trend in the United States, the study of weblogs in Puerto Rico has only emerged very recently. For this reason, the literature in this area is scarce. To my knowledge, existing literature on weblogs in Puerto Rico consists of the proceedings of a specific conference on weblogs, a thesis in education with a focus on linguistics, and two studies in journalism and communications.

In February of 2008, a group of scholars and educators interested in the different applications of the Web 2.0 participated in the second conference of *Blogfesor*.³⁹ This conference brought together a number of educators and scholars who had studied various applications of the Web 2.0, but the main focus of the conference was on the implementation of weblogs in the classroom. The conference was celebrated for its third consecutive year in May 2009. Significantly, Mario Núñez, the former Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences at UPRM, and founder of the conference, was also awarded the *Web-Xcelencia* prize in the category of *Best Blog* for his website in 2009.⁴⁰ The details of this award appeared in the article *La UPR se pone alante con el Blogfesor*, which was published in *Diálogo Digital Online*.⁴¹

In addition, Candelaria (2008) conducted a study that focused on the presence of acronyms and icons in weblogs. The main goal of her thesis was to describe this virtual experience, through an ethnography of communication, because of the linguistic effects that the

³⁹To access the conference's weblog see: <http://uprm.info/edublogs2008/>.

⁴⁰To access Mario Núñez's blog visit: <http://www.vidadigital.net/blog>.

⁴¹To read the full article "The UPR moves forward with the Blogfesor" see: <http://dialogodigital.com/node/972>.

use of acronyms and icons could have on future language changes. To achieve this she did case studies of a weather weblog and three other randomly selected weblogs. Among her findings Candelaria points out that acronyms appeared in all four blogs and that icons were used to simulate emotions. She concluded by suggesting that these forms of communication, acronyms and icons, should be included in the curricula of English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms so that students can truly be literate in these new forms of communications that are necessary for successful communication in the virtual world.

Then, in the fields of journalism and communication, Feliciano Ramírez (2008) investigated indicators of Puerto Rican participation in various applications of the Web 2.0 based on statistical analysis. Utilizing data collected from sites dedicated to group weblogs made in Puerto Rico and in the international sphere,⁴² she concluded that weblogs emerged in Puerto Rico as recently as 2005 and that a blogosphere currently exists in Puerto Rico. Feliciano Ramírez argues that the Puerto Rican blogosphere is not optimal at the moment because during the duration of her investigation, June 2007- January 2008, the amount of Puerto Rican weblogs reported remained stable and did not show signs of increase. She concluded that Puerto Rican participation in other sites, like *MySpace*, is much larger than the one present in weblogs. Finally, Feliciano Ramírez observed that very little research has addressed Puerto Ricans' use of the Internet, and that the few studies in this area do not address the interactions of Puerto Ricans in these spaces or their use of Internet based applications.

Yet another thesis in this area, by Gutiérrez Pacheco (2007), describes the emergence of weblogs in Puerto Rico, focusing on the ways in which these have been used in traditional media of communication such as local newspapers. She claims that due to the implementation of computer mediated communication (CMC), and specifically weblogs, a new era of journalism

⁴² Feliciano Ramírez focused specifically on: Wikeo.com, PuertoBlogs, Technorati.com and Blogalaxia.

has emerged, that of interactive journalism. As an example of the emergence of this phenomenon in Puerto Rico, Gutiérrez Pacheco indicates that the first journalist to publish a weblog for a traditional newspaper in this context was the director of *El Nuevo Día*, Luis Alberto Ferré Rangel, in 2005. After observing this weblog for a period of four months, Gutiérrez Pacheco arrived at the conclusion that interactive journalism had started in Puerto Rico. She claimed that the roles of journalists and readers could easily be inverted in weblogs as both are able to read and publish. Also, she added that readers could now contribute to a news report by complementing it with their own knowledge and experiences.

As evidenced in this section, the study of weblogs in Puerto Rico is still in a very premature stage. There is a scarcity of studies that address weblogs and education, Candelaria's (2008) thesis being the only one to my knowledge. The study of weblogs in Puerto Rico has been conducted mostly by researchers interested in journalism and communication. There is a lack of studies that investigate the creation of weblogs by individuals with no affiliations to the press or general communication. Moreover, none of these investigations have considered the aspects of gender and participation in educational settings. In this sense, my study represents a much needed contribution in the areas of: students' participation in educational weblogs, the effects of gender in individual weblogs, and the various ways in which Puerto Rican adolescents engage with this medium.

Gender and Education in Puerto Rico

The phenomenon of gender in the specific context of Puerto Rico is quite a sensitive issue. To illustrate, on July of 2008, the former Secretary of Education Rafael Aragunde Torres released a *Carta Circular*⁴³ popularly known as *Género como política pública* or Gender as

⁴³ An official document distributed by the Department of Public Instruction in Puerto Rico. This document, which is similar to a memo is used to disseminate regulations and standards established by the Secretary of Education.

public matter, formally called *Carta Circular Número 3-2008-2009*. Among its objectives, this document intended to: include women and other underrepresented groups in the curricular content of the schools, identify sexist content in textbooks and other materials in order to eliminate them, and to implement the use of inclusive language in educational materials, teaching practice and administrative documents, among others. The dissemination of this *Carta Circular* caused the mobilization of civic groups who organized and protested in front of the Department of Public Instruction in Puerto Rico. Moreover, it generated a wave of press coverage that included news such as: *Gran oposición a filosofía, género como política pública*,⁴⁴ and an extensive campaign of opposition, which claimed that these measures would create chaos and have adverse effects in children, which included a loss of identity and confusion. In 2009, the recently elected Secretary of Education Carlos Chardón vetoed this *Carta Circular*. Following his decision *El Nuevo Día*, a local newspaper in Puerto Rico, published the article *Resucita el currículo de género*⁴⁵ where the *Procuradora de la Mujer*⁴⁶ Johanne Vélez further explained some of the measures presented in this *Carta Circular* and reiterated its relevance to education and to the fair treatment of underrepresented groups. The revolt caused by this proposal illustrates the complexity and sensitivity of the phenomenon of gender and education in Puerto Rico. This scarcity in the literature as well as the controversial nature of this subject calls for studies that address the phenomenon of gender in the context of contemporary education in Puerto Rico. Studies like the one reported in this thesis, which intend to portray how gender is enacted in a college level English classroom, evidence that gender is a factor that influences students' actions in the teaching-learning process and thus deserves thorough exploration.

⁴⁴ To view this news article visit: <http://www.noticiasonline.com/D.asp?id=14221> or http://www.alertacristiano.org/ac/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49:gran-oposicion-a-filosofia-perspectiva-de-genero-como-politica-publica&catid=34:locales&Itemid=2

⁴⁵ The gender curriculum re-emerges.

⁴⁶ The spokesperson for the women matters' office in Puerto Rico.

To conclude, this chapter intended to delineate research that represents areas of relevance to my study, such as: English education, educational technology, higher education, and gender in the context of the contemporary Puerto Rican educational system. As mentioned earlier, contrary to a trend at the national level, presented in Chapter I, there is a need for recent studies on educational technology in the Puerto Rican context; furthermore, there is a scarcity of studies that explore the use of weblogs as educational tools in Puerto Rico. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter there is also a need for studying undergraduate student populations who are placed into ‘remedial courses.’ Finally, another area that deserves examination in the context of Puerto Rico is that of gender and its intersections with education and technology.

In the following chapter, I present the particularities of my study such as the participants and the site, the type of study that was carried out to meet my research objectives, and the methods that were selected for the collection and analysis of the data.

Chapter III: Framing the Study

In this chapter I elucidate the type of study that was carried out to accomplish my research objectives; moreover, I present and justify the selection of determined methodologies. I provide a description of the participants and the site, as well as my participation. Also, I detail the approaches or techniques used for the collection and analysis of the data pertinent to this study. Finally, I discuss the feminist poststructuralist perspective that frames this research.

Case Study

To conduct this investigation, I carried out a case study using ethnographic methods. According to Delamont “in the field the researchers’ aim is to understand how the cultures they are studying ‘work,’ that is, to grasp what the world looks like to the people who live in the fishing village, [or] the boarding school” (2004, p. 218). For my investigation, the field of study was the language classroom and the cultural practice⁴⁷ that received greater emphasis was students’ weblogs. By observing and analyzing both I explored the gendered ways in which students participated in these contexts.

Definition of a Case

A case study, as defined by Stake (2000), “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is going to be studied” (p. 435). As a form of research, case study is characterized by a focus on ‘individual cases.’ In other words, the contribution of case studies to qualitative research is not a list of methods to be used but a narrowing on the focus of what is going to be studied. Dyson and Genishi note that researchers identify a unit and this becomes “a case of something, of some phenomenon” (2005, p. 3). As reported by Dyson and Genishi, “cases are constructed, not found, as researchers make decisions about how to angle their vision on places

⁴⁷ “events that happen recurrently and are charged with values of what is ‘normal’ or correct....The concept of practice brings with it other relevant contexts that include the historic, economic and cultural influences that meet in a specific place” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 7).

overflowing with potential stories of human experience” (p. 2). In the process of conducting this study, for instance, I had already identified the field, the classroom, and one of its cultural practices, educational weblogs, and had also acknowledged the central phenomenon to be explored, which was gender discourses. Nevertheless, the participants who would comprise the in-depth case studies were chosen afterwards.

Case Selection

The reason why cases are not selected randomly is because social settings are impregnated with human experience and as such provide immense insights into varied phenomena. Additionally, a case has to fulfill certain criteria before being identified as such. Stake (2000) draws on some qualities that should be present in a case, among these: boundedness and behavioral patterns. In other words, for something or someone to be a case it must be systematic, patterned, coherent and representative of the phenomenon *writ large*. Case selection is then a major undertaking because choosing the in-depth cases will influence the way the phenomenon is understood. According to Stake, a last criterion to be considered while doing case selection is variety, because this will provide ample opportunities for learning about the phenomenon.

Case Depiction

Judicious case selection is not the only determining factor in the efficacy of case study research; at large the decisions made by the researcher are also of great import. The manner in which we document events, the data collection techniques that we use, and the extent to which we reflect and report what occurs in the field is crucial for the depiction of a case study. To document events researchers use what Stake (2000) calls *thick description*⁴⁸ or what Dyson and

⁴⁸ A design that is developed around issues, contexts and interpretations; it is rich enough to allow readers to draw their own conclusions (Stake, 2000, p. 439).

Genishi (2005) name *casing the joint*, as an initial data collection technique, and as a possible source for writing their reports. To case the joint Dyson and Genishi argue that researchers “slowly but deliberately amass information about the configuration of time and space, of people, and of activity in their physical sites” (p. 19). They highlight the importance of noting how time is distributed in a lesson, and the order in which activities are carried out; they recall the relevance of jotting down students’ seating arrangements, grouping, and space, and finally observing the distribution of classroom materials, from technological equipment to books and tables. According to Dyson and Genishi, these steps help the researcher to make educated decisions about data collection and participants’ selection.

Enriching a Case

In addition to casing the joint and using thick description, Scholz and Tietje (2002) note that case studies should incorporate various sources of data such as observations, interviews, and documents from the participants. This need for various methods in case study research stems from what Dyson and Genishi (2005) describe as an interest in the experience the participants have in a specific setting. Stake (2000) claims that whichever detail of the participants’ experience the researcher fails to grasp can be obtained if she compiles other sources of data. By having varied sources of data the researcher is able to obtain richer data, draw connections, make inferences, and identify patterns or recurrent events within the case. Accordingly, they produce grounded conclusions about the topic under investigation and arrive at a deeper understanding of the manner in which various phenomena are present in a case.

In sum, Stake (2000) asserts that an important element of qualitative case study is the need to reflect, and revise the implications of what happens with the participants and the site. The tasks of collecting data, analyzing cases and events, and documenting findings are important

in this regard but not simple for researchers. Stake argues that “the conceptions of most ...case studies need accurate description and subjective, yet disciplined, interpretation; a respect and curiosity for culturally different perceptions of phenomena; and emphatic representation of local settings—all blending” (p. 444). Moreover, the necessity of spending time in the field observing a case is particularly motivated by a desire of the qualitative researcher, as Dyson and Genishi (2005) note:

Whether they are studying children learning to read, or to write, or to talk in a first language or second, researchers assume that learners and their teachers make sense of talk and text within physical settings and through social activities that are informed by the world beyond the visible one. Everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings, and understanding them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies. (p. 9)

To illustrate the pertinence of case studies to the exploration of weblogs, it shall be noted that previous studies have used this methodology to examine this medium. For instance, Jones (2006) used case studies to inquire how weblogs can be used as a tool for peer review among college students. Similarly, Olander (2007) utilized them to observe writing instruction and weblogs at the high school level. Moreover, Candelaria (2008) conducted a case study to inquire into the ways in which ESL students made use of acronyms and icons in weblogs.

The Participants

The selection of participants for my study was based on purposeful sampling. As stated by Creswell, “in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (2005, p. 204). In order to examine students’ discourses in an educational weblog and a classroom setting, I identified a professor who taught

a course that integrated both (see Appendix A). This professor would complement classroom activities by having students create their own weblog in a pre-basic level English course at UPRM during the Spring semester of 2008. The participants were a group of 18 students who were enrolled in pre-basic English, numerically identified as INGL 0066.

The Site

At UPRM all students are required to take 12 credit-hours of English as a requisite for graduation in any major. To meet this requirement, the English Department at UPRM offers three sequences of 12 credit-hours each; these are: basic, intermediate, and advanced. Students are placed in these sequences based on the results obtained in the ESLAT (English as a Second Language Achievement Test). Students who are admitted to UPRM and do not attain the minimum requirement for entering the basic sequence, which is 470 points, are placed in the course INGL 0066 or pre-basic English. The purpose of this course, as described in the Master Syllabus from the English Department at UPRM is

To prepare students who score 469 or lower on the ESLAT...given by the CEEB (i.e., College Entrance Exam Board) to enter and succeed in INGL 3101 (Basic English), the first course in the English Department's Basic sequence of courses. The course structure is 3 hours of lecture and 1 hour of lab per week during one semester. (INGL 0066 is a non-credited course. Students receive no graduation credit, but successful completion of the course gives them three credits toward the 24 they must pass in their first year).

The Roles of the Researcher

The details of my research site and my participants called for a reflection on the roles I could perform to achieve an understanding of the ways in which they enacted gender in the classroom and their weblogs. Baszanger and Dodier (2006) note that the researcher is present in

a multiplicity of roles that include collecting data and participating in the daily activities of the culture under study. Thus, in my role as a participant observer, I performed two roles simultaneously: collecting data and interacting with the participants. As Delamont (2004) reports, “participant does not mean doing what those being observed do, but interacting with them while they do it” (p. 218). By adopting these roles, I was able to closely approach their experiences in the English classroom and their weblogs. I did not conduct a traditional ethnography, which entails spending an extended period of time in a foreign setting; I was studying a context that was both local and familiar to me.

The first couple of days, I sat in the classroom with notebook and pen at hand writing descriptions of my participants, becoming acquainted with their faces, learning their names, and delineating their preferred seating arrangements. I somehow perceived that during this stage we were in the same boat, they were starting a course and learning about their professor, their peers and the stranger constantly observing and writing. As agreed upon in advance with the professor who taught the course, I soon commenced to engage with the class in simple tasks; sometimes I would be in charge of reading a text aloud, while at times I would distribute handouts. Occasionally, the professor would ask me to help a student perform a task.

A precedent was set as I performed simple tasks in the classroom and the participants slowly started asking me for help by calling my name or gesturing me to approach them. In this way, I started to acquire a set of relatively stable subject positions in the eyes of my participants. I like to describe my role in the observed English classroom as that of friendly resource, but my involvement and identification with the university meant that what I came to signify for my participants in the English class was an orientation to all things related to English language, education, and ultimately teaching. I had morphed from a stranger with notebook and pen to

resource/teacher and they had changed from my participants to my students. From this point on, I sat in various areas of the classroom assisting those students who needed my help in various activities such as reading, writing, and exams.

My assisting students in these three areas allowed me to take an active part in their language learning process and to acquire a more familiar subject position than that of the outsider or the traditional ethnographer. To illustrate, on one occasion, a female student, Bez, asked me if I was going to give them class some day. Also, another female student, Jennybeth, asked me if I would be willing to be her English tutor, a request I kindly declined. My familiarity with the class was also perceived by the professor who taught the course and who asked on one occasion if I could give the class in her place because she had to be absent and the students already knew me. In sum, students' constant requests for my assistance and the professor's acknowledgement of my acquaintance with the students led me to conclude that I was seen as a resource/teacher in my research site.

Data Collection

Classroom Observations

The first stage of data collection for my study began in February 2008 with class observations that extended to the second week of April 2008 and consisted of two 75 minute visits per week to the classroom to document students' interactions and behavior in this context. As defined by Creswell (2005), observations provide "the opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting, to study actual behavior" (p. 211). While conducting these observations, as explained in the preceding section, my role was that of a participant observer. Glesne notes that through participant observation "you learn firsthand how the actions of research participants correspond to their words; see patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected, as well as the

expected; and develop a quality of trust” (2006, p. 49). Becoming familiar and involved with the activities that took place in the classroom, in contrast to taking notes in isolation, allowed students to become familiar with my presence in the classroom. Through these observations, I was able to explore ways in which students communicated verbally, and determine which students remained silent or conversely, dominated classroom discussion (see Appendix B).

Glesne argues that as a participant observer one has to “consciously observe the research setting; its participants; and the events, acts and gestures that occur within them” (2006, p. 54). In addition to the verbal dimension of students’ interactions, I also considered students’ nonverbal communication.⁴⁹ Woods claims that, “the nonverbal dimension of communication is extensive and important” [mainly because] “nonverbal communication supplements verbal communication, regulates interaction, and conveys the bulk of the relationship level of meaning in interaction” (2004, p. 129). It is also relevant to observe this other dimension of communication since, “like language, nonverbal communication is learned through interaction with others. Also like language, nonverbal communication is related to gender” (2004, p. 129). To illustrate, a scholar in the area of masculinities, Swain (2005), argues that as social institutions, schools and thus classrooms are settings where there is strong gender play. He claims that rules of masculinity prescribe males’ behavior in schools as well. Swain explains that resistance, uses of the body and space, and even group formation are key elements of *doing boy* (p. 215). On the other hand, Woods asserts that women are sensitive to nonverbal communication, demonstrate more attention, “constrict themselves physically,” and control their body gestures more than males (p. 144). In this study, some aspects of nonverbal communication

⁴⁹ Woods defines nonverbal communication as “all elements of communication other than words themselves” (2004, p. 129).

that were observed in the classroom were: gestures, body movement, seating arrangements, and the ways in which students formed groups for collaborative tasks (see Appendix C).

Weblog Observations

A primary component studied in order to explore students' gendered behavior was students' educational weblogs. Similar to the classroom observations, the analysis of the weblog entries was carried out weekly, from the last week of February through the second week of April 2008. As an educational resource and multimedia genre, weblogs deserve careful examination because they can provide rich information about their creators, the students/bloggers.

A unique characteristic of the use of educational weblogs in this study was that students did not 'sign up' to the professor's weblog to post; instead, they created their own weblogs to post their journals. For this reason, I observed a total of 16 weblogs.⁵⁰ Most existing literature on the use of educational weblogs has centered on how students post within the professor's weblog, limiting then the possibility of students creating their own 'online diaries' or personal websites. It was interesting to observe what other information the textual and graphical aspect of students' weblogs contributed to the existing knowledge of how individuals enact gender in this medium (see Appendix D). This is an aspect that has been a tendency in the popular stream but has not received proper scholarly examination in educational weblogs. It is also relevant to study whether the experience of having a personal blog instead of posting in the professor's weblog changes or reifies students' existing perceptions towards blogging for educational purposes (e.g., improving communication, being a burden). Also, by giving students the opportunity to create their own weblogs, new possibilities are presented for the examination of students' engagement with this practice and their gendered communicational practices in this medium. In the same way

⁵⁰ Although I had 18 participants, two of them did not create a blogging account. A detailed explanation of the participants' weblogs is provided in Chapter V.

that I gathered data about verbal and nonverbal gendered communication in the classroom, I took notice of the textual and visual elements of the students' weblog participation.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To provide a third perspective and further enrich the sources of data, I carried out semi-structured interviews with a sub sample of seven students enrolled in the course. The interviews took place after the second week of April 2008 and extended to the second week of May 2008. Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994) note that interviews are a useful technique when one seeks to understand how people feel in relation to a specific event. Since this study aimed to understand how students responded to the activities and discussions that occurred in the classroom and to the postings in students' weblogs, semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven students from the course (see Appendix E). In the case of this study, the participants were provided with a forum to discuss and reflect on their experiences while attending the language classroom and participating in the creation of their own weblogs. These interviews enabled me to further my understanding of the students' experiences in both classroom and weblog discourses. As Fontana and Frey suggest, "interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two people leading to negotiated, contextually based results" (2000, p. 646). The interviews thus allowed me to enrich my own classroom observations by comparing them to the participants' own perceptions.

The criterion for selecting the participants for the interviews was maximal variation. Creswell defines maximal variation as a sampling strategy "in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait. This procedure requires that you identify the characteristic and then find sites and individuals that display different dimensions of that characteristic" (2005, p. 204). The characteristic that I examined through these semi-

structured interviews was students' engagement or participation in the weblog and classroom, respectively. The first set of students were four females, one of whom was a student who actively participated in the weblog and classroom activities; one who did not partake or partook minimally in these two contexts, one who only participated in classroom activities, and one who only participated in the weblog. The second set of students were three males who were chosen following the same criteria established for female students, except for the last criterion, a male student who only participated in the weblog, because none of the male participants met this requirement. This variation allowed me to explore the experiences of students who were eager, indifferent or reluctant about participating in the English classroom and their respective weblogs.

Data Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis as Data Analysis

For the purposes of analyzing the data this study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology to explore gender discourses underlying students' interactions in the classroom and students' weblogs. This method is appropriate to examining gender discourses in these contexts because as explained by Van Dijk (2001a), "critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p. 352).

It is pertinent to clarify that for the purposes of this study and departing from the postulates established by the paradigm that drives this investigation, feminist poststructuralism,⁵¹ power is not seen through a traditional structuralist perspective. In other words, power is not seen as something that can be a possession of an individual or a group. According to Gardiner (2005) it is not visualized in a dichotomous fashion as individuals being either empowered or powerless.

⁵¹ A complete explanation of this paradigm will be provided in the next section.

Instead, it is conceived as something that cannot be centralized or contained, a quality that is always in constant play across various actors. This is so because, for feminist poststructuralists, there is an array of factors such as politics, society, discourse and individual actors that affect the way power is manifested in any given setting. For instance, as I observed my participants in the English language classroom of power was manifested by several individuals in a plurality of classroom activities. On some days, a participant would find affinity with a certain topic and would share her views. On other occasions she remained quiet. Furthermore, in some collaborative activities a participant would lead a group while in others she would follow the directives of another group leader.

Discourse and ideologies: A CDA perspective. In order to understand the relevance and contributions of this methodological framework to this study some basic theoretical concepts have to be discussed, among them: discourse, ideology, and social cognition. As a data analysis tool, CDA “aims to ‘demistify’ discourse by deciphering ideologies” (Wodak, 2004, p. 199). Before one can commence a discussion on how CDA conceptualizes ideologies, it is pertinent to note that discourse is defined by experts in the field of CDA as a series of complex communicative events (Van Dijk, 2001a). Numerous scholars in the field of CDA argue that discourses such as social practices are embedded with beliefs, ideas and attitudes (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 2001b). This is so because cultures and groups acquire ideologies through constant and extended exposure to processes of socialization (Van Dijk, 1995). Ideologies are defined by Van Dijk as:

A specific kind of ideas. In somewhat more technical jargon (in social psychology and political science), we would call them belief systems or social representations of some kind....This means that they are not personal beliefs, but beliefs shared by groups, as is

also the case for grammars, socioculturally shared knowledge, group attitudes or norms and values. (2001b, p. 12)

Thus, ideas, norms and values are constantly fed to individuals from the moment they are born by different social institutions such as the family, church, and schools. The complexity and strength of ideologies lie in their influence to promote social cognition. Van Dijk asserts that social cognition is a “system of mental representations and processes of group members” (1995, p. 18). In other words, ideas and norms that individuals are exposed to by different discourses during their lives promote social identification, categories, and divisions. Ideologies achieve this by implicitly or explicitly illustrating to individuals which are the “basic social characteristics of a group, such as their identity, tasks, goals, norms, values, position and resources” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 18).

The notion of group division in particular can often translate into a detrimental situation because individuals led by ideologies and social cognition may exert power/control over other groups. Van Dijk indicates that social cognition “allow[s] members of a group to organize (admission to) their group, coordinate their social actions and goals, to protect their (privileged) resources, or, conversely, to gain access to such resources in the case of dissident or oppositional groups” (1995, p. 19). It is relevant to note, however, that the extent to which individuals or groups relate to each other or control one another will be ultimately determined and influenced by the peculiarities of the setting and also by the individuals present in it.

CDA and the study of online settings. Consequently, as a mode of analysis, critical discourse analysis appears to be the most adequate way of approaching students’ weblogs in this study. Research projects like the one carried out by Mateu Zayas (2007) set a precedent for the appropriateness of CDA methodology to the study of representations of certain populations

online. In her work, she utilized CDA to study, among other things, the representations of students in online forums by examining text and visuals such as banners and graphics present in a group of websites. She demonstrated that there were strong contradictions between the visual representation of students and those provided by the various texts included in the websites. For this reason, it seems pertinent to incorporate CDA into my study to critically examine the ways in which students create gendered representations of themselves in this social practice by means of both texts and visuals.

Moreover, studies like the one carried out by Ratliff (2006) assert that to examine an online medium such as weblogs it is essential to critically study the visual design created by a blogger as an extension of individual identity. Giving emphasis to the visual and graphic design of students' weblogs in my study is not only a response to an established trend in the study of websites and weblogs but also provides an opportunity to further understand students' gendered representation in this medium. It is also relevant to observe this dimension of students' weblogs so that there is a basis for comparison to students' verbal and nonverbal communication in the classroom.

CDA and educational settings. Moreover, to provide a parallel and equivalent examination of students' gendered discourses in the classroom, CDA methodology was also applied to classroom observations and later transcriptions of classroom activities. Recent studies have noted the usefulness of CDA in analyzing classroom discourse. For instance, Duff (2002) applied CDA to study the ways in which high school level students constructed identity and knowledge in the classroom. Her study found that seating arrangements and other classroom practices such as discussion topics, and interaction/participation patterns (e.g., turn taking)

constituted identity and difference in the class. Thus, to achieve an in-depth understanding of classroom discourse both verbal and nonverbal communication were monitored.

However, even when CDA has been applied to the analysis of classroom discourse there is a scarcity of studies that use CDA to study gender. “One vast field of critical research on discourse and language that thus far has not been carried out within a CDA perspective is that of gender” (Van Dijk, 2001a, p. 358). In response to this void, my research utilizes CDA to study gender discourses in the context of an English language classroom and one of its social practices, students’ weblogs.

Feminist Poststructuralist Framework

To provide a definite focus to the analysis of the data my study employs a feminist poststructuralist perspective that centers on the ways in which college students perform gender in educational weblogs and in classroom contexts. In order to understand the relevance and contributions of this paradigm to the purposes of this study some basic theoretical concepts will be addressed, among them: language, discourse, the individual or subject, and gender.

Meaning and language in feminist poststructuralism. As noted by Weedon (1997), for those taking up a feminist poststructuralist stance, meaning is never fixed; in other words, there are no inherent and absolute ‘signs,’⁵² or *truths*. This is mainly so for two reasons: first, for poststructuralists, language is not transparent; and second poststructuralists see the individual as a subject who is ‘always in process.’ Understanding a feminist poststructuralist perspective on language is essential to exploring its relevance for studying power relations⁵³ and gendered

⁵² According to Terry Eagleton, “a sign can always be reproduced in a different context which changes its meaning. It is difficult to know what a sign ‘originally’ means, we simply encounter it in many different situations; its context is always different it is never *absolutely* the same, never quite identical with itself” (1996, p. 112).

⁵³ According to Weedon, “power is a relation. It inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control, compliance and lack of control between discourses and the subjects constituted by discourses, who are their agents. Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects” (1997, p. 110).

differentiation. Language in this framework is a site of struggle because it is always produced by an individual who has her own knowledge of the world, and most importantly is driven by determined interests. Moreover, language is the means by which her identity is shaped, the way she gives meaning to her experiences, and the way in which she makes sense of the world. In other words, language is an essential medium for the construction of the individual's identity or sense of self. According to Weedon (1997)

The plurality of language and the impossibility of fixing meaning once and for all are basic principles of poststructuralism. This does not mean that meaning disappears altogether but that any interpretation is at best temporary, specific to the discourse within which it is produced and open to challenge. (p. 82)

The conception of the individual in feminist poststructuralism. These views of language and meaning characterize feminist poststructuralist constructions of the individual in which the individual is conceptualized as a subject in process. Such views stand on evident opposition to dominant humanist depictions of the subject as a “conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject” (Weedon, 1997, p. 21). Weedon notes that poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict. In other words, the individual's subjectivity⁵⁴ is neither fixed nor stable; it is contradictory and constantly transformed and shaped by discourse. Weedon defines discourse as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them” (p. 105). One aspect of the individual's subjectivity that is strongly influenced by discourses and therefore is crucial to feminist poststructuralism is gendered identity.

Gender in feminist poststructuralism. It is through discourses and thus language, both verbal and nonverbal, that human beings make meaning of the world around them. Woods notes

⁵⁴ Subjectivity refers to the positions individuals take and the values inherent in them (Weedon, 1997).

that “language is not neutral. It reflects cultural values and is a powerful influence on our perceptions” (2005, p. 112). It is through the exposure to and the analysis of discourses that human beings define and express gender. As social beings, humans are exposed to constant social expectations of what femininity and masculinity are and should be. In this study, I employ the terms femininity and masculinity because my focus is on behavioral manifestations that denote the feminine and the masculine; not the sexual or biological signs that refer to female and male. The models or signs that we currently link to gender are another inheritance of structuralist thought, a system based on binary divides.⁵⁵ These dichotomies have the underlying effect of producing signs or stereotypes of what constitutes feminine and masculine socially accepted behavior. However, paradigms such as the one employed in my study seek to break apart from these overly simplistic definitions of gender.

The most important accomplishment of 20th-century feminist theory is the concept of gender as a social construction; that is, the idea that masculinity and femininity are loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain kinds of bodies—not the natural, necessary, or ideal characteristics of people with similar genitals. (Gardiner, 2005, p. 35)

The notion of patriarchy in feminist poststructuralism. Another area of life that has also been largely influenced by structuralist thought is the valuation of human beings according to their gender. To this day, several societies, including vast sectors of Puerto Rico, are raised and live according to the principles of patriarchy. A patriarchal society is one that posits masculine traits on the left side of the binary divide; in other words, such societies uphold the masculine gender as the norm. Masculine forms of behavior become the center while anything that deviates

⁵⁵ A binary is a system of thought that places two ideas, concepts or signs in a polarized dimension. It projects these as static and allows for no variety or hybridity between one concept and the other. Signs that are posited on the left side of the divide are considered the norm (e.g., day/night, men/women).

from these is considered not only different but inferior. This analysis can be considered the expression of a metaphysical⁵⁶ perspective. This static allocation of signs dictates that individuals in such societies live according to these rules and monitor the compliance and permanence of the status quo. Consequently, the nature of femininity and masculinity, as gendered signs, becomes a key site of struggle for the individual who is, from a feminist poststructuralist perspective, always in process. In my study, I explore how students from a college level English class adopt or transgress socially constructed prescriptions of femininity and masculinity through their discourses in the classroom and their weblogs.

Social institutions and education in feminist poststructuralism. Varied forms of subjectivity and gendered identity according to Weedon (1997) are always present in social institutions and practices though perhaps not explicitly. She adds that these institutions, whether it is the school or the church, precede us and for this reason we tend to perceive the values they promote as natural. Eagleton describes this naturalization of values as a weapon of ideology.

Signs which pass themselves off as natural, which offer themselves as the only conceivable way of viewing the world, are by that token authoritarian and ideological. It is one of the functions of ideology to ‘naturalize’ social reality, to make it seem as innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself. (1996, p. 117)

Therefore, our notion of what constitutes masculine or feminine behavior and attitudes in various settings are informed by the social institutions to which we attend. Our taking up of masculinity and femininity as naturalized categories is a product of our socialization and is produced by different discourses from the moment we are born. Moreover, Weedon (1997) claims that the institutions responsible for the upbringing and socialization of children function

⁵⁶ Eagleton in an analysis of Jacques Derrida’s work states that “‘metaphysical’ [is] any such thought system which depends on an unassailable foundation, a first principle or unimpeachable ground upon which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed” (1996, p. 114).

following these naturalized discourses of gender. In this line of thought, Lester (2006) adds that even when one would idealistically conceive of educational institutions as places guided by egalitarian practices, this is not always the case because at times “individualistic and competitive masculine roles as opposed to feminine collective, cooperative, and collegial, are promoted and idealized” (p. 10). We can thus conclude that social institutions such as colleges are not gender neutral and are governed by societal and patriarchal constructs of what is the norm.

It seems pertinent to explore Weedon’s claim that “discourse constitutes ways of being a subject, modes of subjectivity, which imply specific organization of the emotional as well as the mental and psychic capacities of the individual” (1997, p. 94). When an individual enters a social institution or decides to participate in any discourse, she has to be willing to follow the behavioral guidelines that govern this setting or face being considered different or labeled as ‘abnormal.’ In sum, from a feminist poststructuralist perspective, it is vital to understand that all representations in both text and image are gendered and they either follow or contradict society’s models of what is considered feminine and masculine. The strength of this paradigm thus lies in that “it open[s] up discourses and practices to questioning, that run[s] against the grain of common sense and of dominant (and dominating) discourses and practices” (Davies, 2000, p. 169).

Alvermann (2001) examined nine case studies that had already been analyzed by others researchers through other paradigms and reanalyzed them employing a feminist poststructuralist perspective. She emphasized that applying this perspective allowed her to question gendered issues that took place in the classrooms where these cases were originally studied; issues that would have otherwise gone unnoticed and perceived as part of the ‘status quo.’ For this reason, for the purposes of this study, I am interested in utilizing a feminist poststructuralist framework

to examine gender discourses in the specific context of an English language classroom and students' weblogs in a college setting in Puerto Rico.

Common Ground: Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Poststructuralism

As a methodology, CDA, as mentioned earlier, studies the way in which social abuses such as dominance and inequality are enacted through language. It claims that in order to identify and expose these issues one has to decipher the ideologies embedded in social institutions through a detailed scrutiny of their discourses. CDA postulates that the relevance of studying discourse lies in the various subtle and direct ways in which it can promote social categories and divisions by prescribing specific social traits. In other words, CDA provides for the study of power present in the discourse of social institutions. Nonetheless, even after summarizing the primary objectives of CDA it is clear that there is a need for narrowing the study of social power to a more definite category. It is here where feminist poststructuralism stands to make a major contribution to the CDA methodology.

Analogous to CDA, feminist poststructuralism visualizes language and thus discourse as a site of conflict where power/control is exercised on the basis of gender. Likewise, it proposes that it is because of the ideologically-oriented nature of discourse that individuals are in a constant process of shaping their identities. As individuals are exposed to different subject positions they continue to mold their behavior and their identity. Thus, feminist poststructuralism shares common ground with CDA, and likewise emphasizes the importance of studying discourse and the values inherent and promoted by it. Feminist poststructuralism then provides the perspective or the lens, while CDA brings forth the necessary tools for the thorough examination of the specific phenomenon of students' gendered discourses in the language classroom and educational weblogs.

The Process of Analysis

Informed by the theoretical and methodological tenets of feminist poststructuralism and critical discourse analysis, I commenced the process of analyzing the data collected over the course of my study. In order to perform this analysis, my fieldnotes on students' gendered interactions in the language classroom as well as their individual weblogs were transferred to a digital format by using word processing software. Also, the recordings of my interviews with them were transcribed. These three main sources of data, now in a digital format, along with a screenshot or graphic image of each student's weblog were then incorporated into a cohesive digital unit using Atlas.ti.⁵⁷ This data analysis tool was selected because it provides for the analysis of both text and images, which allowed me to analyze both mediums with one application. Through a constant process of reflection, using the research questions and observation protocols, I proceeded to identify various events in the classroom, weblogs and interviews as representative of specific categories or phenomena. For instance, some activities were labeled as representative of classroom participation, while others were marked as indicative of engagement with the blogging process.⁵⁸ During this process of analysis and interpretation, I routinely wrote memos to include possibilities for further investigation, recurring threads, and possible new angles I might take in analyzing the remaining data.

In brief, this case study aimed to explore from a feminist poststructuralist perspective the ways in which a group of pre-basic English students from UPRM performed gendered discourses in the English language classroom and their respective weblogs. To reach this analysis, I adopted critical discourse analysis to explore the actions and discourses of the participants in the classroom, as well as the textual and visual components of their weblogs. Moreover to provide

⁵⁷ More information about this qualitative research tool can be accessed at: <http://www.atlasti.com/>.

⁵⁸ A detailed description of the categories of analysis and the criteria used to place various events under each are provided in the Chapters IV and V.

various sources of data, I analyzed the interviews conducted with the in-depth cases using this methodology. This analysis was aided by a qualitative research software, Atlas.ti.

My data analysis is presented in the following two chapters. Chapter IV focuses on the process of analyzing the classroom observations and the major findings of students' gendered discourses in this setting. Chapter V addresses the analysis of the weblogs' observations and the results of how the students' enacted gender in their individual weblogs.

Chapter IV: Gendered Participation in the Classroom

Redefining Classroom Participation

The collection of six months of classroom observations provided me with an extensive record of students' actions in the language classroom. As an educator myself, I had my own preconceptions of what classroom participation should be; for me engaging in class discussions, reading out loud, and raising a hand to provide an answer to the professor's question were ways of participating in class—at least that is how I had done it my whole life as a student. Nonetheless, the analysis of the data showed that other less traditional actions such as students' use of humor reflected that students were engaged in the learning process. I had to distance myself from my background as an educator and graduate student and take the persona of the reflective researcher in order to understand these fully. This chapter addresses the first research question: What are the gendered roles that students adopt in an undergraduate English classroom? For the purposes of Chapters IV through VI, I include events that occurred in the classroom observations; the performers of these events are presented employing pseudonyms.⁵⁹

At first, I registered the phenomenon of classroom participation with records of conventional and expected student actions, such as: taking notes,⁶⁰ paying attention,⁶¹ engaging in oral participation,⁶² consenting to share,⁶³ and requesting help.⁶⁴ Surprisingly enough, while I analyzed the classroom observations and specifically the apparent phenomenon of “lack of

⁵⁹ All participants' names referred to in the following chapters are self-selected pseudonyms. Although most participants selected only a first name, one participant selected both a first name and last name: Marita Estrada.

⁶⁰ Instances in which students have their notebooks out and write class related information from the professor or their peers (professor's explanations, instructions, examples, peers' answers to an exercise).

⁶¹ Moments in which students hold a posture that reflects engagement with the lesson (look to the front of the classroom, nod, appear puzzled and maintain eye contact).

⁶² Times when students would volunteer to engage verbally in varied tasks performed in class, such as: answering questions and contributing to the discussion of a topic.

⁶³ Occasions when a student agrees to participate in a task after being prompted by the professor (coming to the computer, sharing an answer, showcasing her work).

⁶⁴ Instances when a student raises her hand to solicit professor's assistance or implicitly benefits from the help that the professor gives to a neighboring peer.

classroom participation,” which will be explained later in this chapter, I identified certain actions that had been originally categorized as distractions, yet these were becoming strong indicators of its exact opposite: classroom participation.

Technological Distractions vs. Technology Use

An example of actions that were initially categorized as distractions and thus as lack of classroom participation were moments when students used technological devices; this phenomenon was later divided into instances of technology use that represented a distraction and others that aided in the learning process. For example, there were days when students would bring their laptops to class and use them solely for classroom participation. Following is an excerpt from my observation notes that documents an event of students making use of a technological device as aid in the learning process in the classroom.

While the professor discussed the skill of writing a summary, she asked students to work in small groups to summarize the chapter “The Shabbat” from the class’ text: *Persepolis*. A group of three female students who sat in the tables at the right side of the classroom, composed of Bez, Yara and Nicky, took out a laptop and utilized a word processor to collaboratively type what they thought were the most relevant events in the chapter. After this step, they proceeded to write the summary on a piece of paper and submit it.

For this group of students, Bez, Yara and Nicky, access to a personal computer and a word processor improved their experience of writing a collaborative summary. Whether it was the possibility of using a spell checker or just the chance to manipulate the order of the events they thought were the most important ones, typing their summary in the laptop first before submitting it by hand seemed a feasible option for this group.

Side Conversations as Classroom Participation

In addition to redefining classroom participation by integrating less conventional actions like the use of technology in the classroom, there were series of discourses that were later integrated into classroom participation as well; one such discourse was side conversations. At first, I interpreted students' talk as a distraction but then I observed that a large number of these conversations were actually triggered by the tasks that students had to perform in class, the topics being discussed or the skills that the professor was explaining that day. The following is an example of a side conversation related to the task at hand.

The professor announced the first set of oral presentations, which caused a long period of commotion in the classroom. Then, she proceeded to indicate that the presentations would be in groups and that each member of the group had to participate and speak in English. As I sat at the table at the back of the classroom, I observed a group of four females sitting to my right, Chiquita, Bratz, Jennybeth, and Yesi, as they talked about the task to be performed and started to laugh nervously. One of the females, Jennybeth, said to her peers: "*yo nos present.*"⁶⁵

After hearing the professor's announcement, this group of females immediately commenced the task of assigning roles to the members of their group while others jumped to claim theirs. To illustrate, Jennybeth quickly proceeded to declare her role; as a student who is frequently quiet in class, the task of introducing the members of the group, and mentioning the title of the presentation seemed like a convenient way of achieving the requirement of speaking in English during the presentation.

⁶⁵ "I will introduce our group."

Another typical event that motivated students to engage in side conversations was the discussion of certain topics. For instance, an illustration of a side conversation that took place in the classroom related to a topic under discussion was captured in the fieldnotes below.

Today, students reached the end of the novel and the professor assigned the class one last novel-related task. The professor explained that the task would consist of a posting in their individual blogs. This posting would be a brief explanation of the contents of the novel, the audience level would be informal, and she said “imagine that a friend is asking you what the book is about.” In this precise moment, two male students seated in the back of the classroom alongside each other, Chu and Daniel, held a brief but quite interesting dialogue: Chu says “*La vida de Marjane*,”⁶⁶ to which Daniel adds “*Mas nada*.”⁶⁷

The informal tone of this conversation could have easily been misinterpreted as mere classroom talk. However, this pair of males, Chu and Daniel, had reached consensus about the contents of the book; for them the novel was simply a biographical account of Marjane’s life.

Students’ Humor as Discourse of Classroom Participation

Another type of discourse that was incorporated into the phenomenon of classroom participation was students’ humor. This discourse, students’ use of humor,⁶⁸ was reclassified due to its educational contributions. Following is an excerpt of how students used humor to engage in classroom participation.

A group of students had done a brief oral presentation on the history of Iran; in this presentation they had explained how the Sha’s regime had drastically changed the way of life of Iranian people. When they were finished, a conversation started and students’ focus shifted to a more familiar story, that of United States’ history. Using a loud volume

⁶⁶ “Marjane’s life.”

⁶⁷ “Nothing else.”

⁶⁸ Occasions in which an individual in the classroom makes use of smart comments, laughter and an ironic tone.

and a very sarcastic tone Yara, a female seated close to the front of the classroom, said “*Estados Unidos no hace eso.*”⁶⁹ Daniel, a male seating all the way in the back of the classroom responded: “*Son unos puercos.*”⁷⁰

Though this verbal exchange occurred as students talked to each other across the classroom, which might have seemed disruptive of the traditionally organized and structured classroom discussion, these students had appropriated the topic of a regime’s violent invasion of other lands into a more familiar context and had turned it into a colloquial and political chat.

Reconceptualizing Lack of Classroom Participation

As a point of contrast to classroom participation, I also observed the opposite phenomenon: lack of classroom participation. This phenomenon morphed from its early stages, as mentioned in the previous section, as events that were considered at the onset of my fieldwork as illustrative of lack of classroom participation were eventually recoded as modes of classroom participation (e.g., technology use, side conversations, humor). Thus, my re-conceptualization of lack of classroom participation included incidents of students’ refusal to share and in-class distractions.

Refusal to Share in Class

A series of events which I address as refusal to share refers to moments when a student declined to participate in a task when prompted by the professor, did not reply, said ‘no’ or nodded in refusal. The following quotation is an example of such a moment.

The professor was discussing the class’ assignment which consisted of writing a blog entry about their experience learning English. In order to do this, she proceeded to ask students’ permission before attempting to read an entry from any of the students’ blogs.

⁶⁹ “The United States does not do that.”

⁷⁰ “They’re pigs.”

A female student consented and so the professor read the entry. In the meantime, a male student seated to the right side of the classroom, Juan, chatted with Chucho, his male peer, about his own experience with an English teacher who was absent quite often. The professor noticed and asked the male student who started the conversation to share his thoughts with the class to which he replied in a strong tone “¡Na, nada!”⁷¹

Since I was sitting close to Juan and Chucho, I knew that the conversation they were having was a perfect example of the type of experiences that could be included for this weblog assignment. However, it seems that for these males, this was a private conversation and not an experience that they were willing and/or able to share in the public forum of the classroom.

Classroom Distractions

Another example of students’ lack of classroom participation was in-class distractions; these are events caused by students that in some way disrupted or interrupted the class. Some examples of distractions were: sleeping in class, technological distractions (e.g., the use of cell phones, ear pieces and laptops, talk, tardiness, and leaving and entering the classroom. The following excerpt from my observation notes is illustrative.

As I sat among the students, Enrique was next to my right arm. As usual he had his small navy blue backpack on top of the table right in front of him. Right after the lesson started he put his arms crossed on top of the backpack as if he were hugging it. Then, he proceeded to lower his head and a few seconds later he closed his eyes. During the full lesson Enrique calmly slept using his arms and backpack as comfort. He did not seem to mind my presence immediately next to his left.

While the majority of the students used the tables to place their materials and to take notes comfortably, Enrique had his upper body, head and arms lying on the table. Other types of

⁷¹ “Nothing!”

distractions were mediated by technology and encompassed the use of various devices such as cell phones and laptops during class. Consider the following quotation as an example of a moment of technological distraction from a male student.

Today's class focused on a review of the past tense, for which reason most of the time was spent on grammar discussion. Several students paid attention and took notes of what was being covered. On the other hand, Chu, a male who always sits in the back of the classroom, used an earpiece and was constantly interacting with his laptop.

During the whole class, which encompassed grammatical formulas and was done to review an area in which students had demonstrated difficulty, Chu listened to some sort of digital media while his sight was locked on the laptop's screen. Another type of distraction was the incidence of talk that was not related to the topics being covered in class nor to the assigned tasks. The only events and actions that remained as demonstrative of lack of classroom participation after the analysis of the data were those that interfered with the professor's instruction or the students' learning process.

Based on my eventual re-conceptualization of classroom participation, in the following section I discuss various non-traditional incidents and actions which became fertile ground for my analysis of students' gendered participation in the English class.

Gendered Classroom Participation

The analysis of the classroom observations revealed that some types of discourses and actions were particular of specific classroom populations. However, other discourses and actions indicated that gender played no importance in students' actions in the classroom. Both traditional and non-traditional actions and discourses demonstrated students' interest in the learning process. The greatest discrepancy was the ways in which classroom populations demonstrated

affinity with specific modes of classroom participation. These gendered discourses deserve careful examination as they may challenge established definitions of classroom participation.

Female Participants and Conventional Classroom Participation

The discourses employed by female and male participants to engage in classroom participation were markedly different. Females engaged in more traditional modes of classroom participation, I like to refer to these as conventional modes of classroom participation.

Conventional classroom participation included sanctioned actions such as asking for help and engaging in oral participation. The following excerpt from the classroom observations shows students engaging in conventional classroom participation that includes oral participation and raising their hands.

The professor asked students to think on what they planned to do for their summer vacation. Then, she signaled students with her hand and they all shared their plan for this upcoming vacation. Marita Estrada said she was going to Orlando. Matete shared with the class that she would go to the Dominican Republic. The professor then asked: “How many of you will take class in summer?” and a great majority of the class raised their hands.

This event represents a typical illustration of what is perceived to be traditional classroom participation: the professor asks a question and assigns turns for students to contribute in an organized manner to the topic under discussion. Throughout the duration of this class, the female participants were responsible for the production of a larger number of incidences of traditional oral participation when compared to the male participants. This phenomenon contradicts the findings of other studies, which indicate that male students traditionally dominate ‘speaking time’ and classroom participation (Nielsen, 2000; Schulze, 2000). For example, the female

participants in Nielsen's (2000) study were portrayed as cautious, enactors of passive roles and as less assertive than men when they were in mixed gender classrooms. Similarly, the female participants in Schulze's (2000) study were described as quiet and in constant avoidance of opportunities for participating in the classroom. In this sense, the phenomenon of females' participation in my study denotes moments in which these participants transgressed from gendered notions of what is expected of females in classroom settings.

Females and their requests for help. Another discourse that showed difference by gender was students' request for help. Regardless of whether students asked the professor or asked me for help, females were the ones to do most of these requests. The analysis of the data revealed that there were 26 instances of participants requesting help from the professor; 15 of these requests were made by the female participants. Similarly, the analysis of the data showed that there were 15 instances in which the participants asked me for help. Female participants were responsible for 11 of these requests. This finding is congruent with those from Nielsen's (2000) study in which the female participants claimed that female students were more vocal about their doubts. What follows is an example of a student asking help from the professor.

The professor was moving in the front of the classroom lecturing on how to form the future tense with the aid of a *PowerPoint* presentation. Marita Estrada interrupted and asked about the grammar formula displayed on the screen, she was wondering whether she could add -ing to the verb.

This student, Marita Estrada, had a doubt with the material being presented in this lecture; she did not hesitate to openly ask for the professor's help for clarification. On other occasions, female students would address me when they had doubts or needed help; consider the following excerpt.

In the previous class, students had been given an assignment; they had to work on a list of verbs that the professor had put on her website. Today, the professor was going over the assignment, she was writing some of these verbs on the board. During this activity, Lela touched my left arm and asked me if I knew the meaning of the word 'guilty.' I provided her with two possible definitions: feeling bad about something you think you did wrong, or being held responsible for a crime. She nodded, said thanks, wrote it down in her list and continued to pay attention to the discussion.

At some point during this lecture, Lela wanted to know the meaning of a word, which had not been covered by the professor but was part of the extensive list assigned to them. For this reason, instead of 'interrupting' the professor's explanation and perhaps because I was more accessible at this given moment, sitting right next to her, Lela asked me for the meaning of this word.

Females' consent to share. Another area of classroom participation that was also particular of female students was their consent to share. Female students accounted for the production of the largest majority of these instances while males were responsible for a minor amount. The analysis of the classroom observations records 11 events where the participants explicitly consented to share their work; 8 of these events were done by the female participants.

Following is an example of a female student consenting to share her work with the class.

The professor wanted to show students an example of a blog posting that followed the requirements of a well constructed posting. She looked at a female student who sat in the back of the classroom, Bratz, and asked whether her blog posting could be projected and read. Bratz said no immediately while giggling; then lowered her head, and said it was fine.

On this particular lesson, the professor devised that it would be more effective to showcase a student's weblog that met the requirements that she expected of the class rather than to create a model post to explain these guidelines. The professor had identified a possible weblog but she thought it was pertinent to ask permission from its owner. It can be seen through this excerpt that even when Bratz felt self-conscious about having her blog be seen by the whole class, she agreed to the professor's request.

This study's female participants' appropriation of traditional modes of classroom participation directly contradicts claims made by other scholars (Lester, 2006; Nielsen, 2000). In her study, Lester (2006) argued that female participants did not receive full benefits from classroom instruction because these were male oriented; however, the findings of this study in regards to how female participants dominated traditional classroom participation challenge this argument. Furthermore, the ways in which the female participants in this study enacted classroom participation contradict the findings of Nielsen's (2000) study. While the female participants in the later study were mostly shy, quiet and avoided participation, their counterparts in research site were vocal, active and willing to participate in the classroom. To provide a parallel discussion on how the male participants engaged in classroom participation, I now present the discourses through which this population demonstrated their participation in the classroom.

Male Participants and Unconventional Modes of Classroom Participation

Similar to the female participants, the male participants also demonstrated preference towards specific though distinct discourses. They would engage in classroom participation mostly through what I like to call unconventional modes of classroom participation. This mode of classroom participation refers to traditionally unsanctioned discourses such as humor and side

conversations. Next is my rendition of an instance of unconventional classroom participation performed by a pair of male participants.

In a discussion of the skills to be assessed in the final exam the professor wanted to integrate students' preferred activities. While female students suggested activities to the professor, a group of males got caught up in a loud and humorous conversation of the strategies they would use to pass the exam. Martillo said "*embotellar*" while Alberto and Daniel approved saying "*lo memorizas.*"⁷²

At first sight, this exchange could have appeared to the observer as unruly student talk. However, a close look at the contents of this brief conversation and the context in which it occurred indicated that these male students, Martillo, Alberto and Daniel, were engaged in the topic of the day. They were talking about the final exam but for them how to pass the exam was more important than how it could be structured.

Males and their use of humor. The main example of males' unconventional classroom participation was the use of humor while participating in whole class activities. The majority of times that male participants used humor in class, this was not intended to disrupt the class, it was rather to demonstrate their attention to what was happening and to express their points of view. Female participants also made use of humor but drastically less so in comparison to males; male participants are responsible for 13 out of 18 humor events initiated by the students. Males would find written and oral opportunities to utilize humor in response to a task or a topic under discussion. Male participants' appropriation of humor as a preferred discourse correlates with Swain's (2005) argument on how schools and classrooms provide males with various options and opportunities for *doing boy*. Swain argues that amongst these ways of doing boy, some options are considered open and others more restricted depending on how available and accepted

⁷² The terms *embotellar* and *lo memorizas* are synonyms and mean: "You memorize it."

they seem to the actors in a determined setting. In the specific context of the classroom where I conducted my research humor was characteristic of the professor's teaching, being her the producer of 24 out of 42 events of humor in the classroom. In this manner, the discourse of humor was catalogued as an open discourse in this context, and was appropriated by the male participants. Following is an example of males' written use of humor.

The professor wanted to model the simplicity of creating a weblog in *WordPress*. For this reason, she asked for a volunteer to come to the classroom's main computer to create an account. Since no one volunteered she asked Chucho, a male who was seated at the right side of the classroom, to do it. He came to the computer and started the task while students were all looking at what he was doing in the screen projection. When the moment came to select the blog's name he wrote Chucho's Weblog.⁷³ The whole class laughed in response to his creativity. The professor thanked Chucho for his participation and he went back to his seat.

In this excerpt, Chucho found a remarkable opportunity to develop a humorous text in a medium which allowed all his peers to see it at once and laugh together. However, through this discourse he was demonstrating to the class how simple it could be to open a blogging account in this platform. Furthermore, the male participants devised verbal ways of sharing their humor with the whole class; what follows is an observation that exemplifies males' verbal use of humor.

As part of the class requirements students needed to complete a specified number of laboratory hours in an online language learning software named *Tell Me More*.⁷⁴ The professor told students that those who exceeded the minimum amount of laboratory hours

⁷³ Chucho is the Puerto Rican equivalent to a masculine hillbilly name in the United States.

⁷⁴ For more information about this online language laboratory please visit: <http://www.tellmemore.com/>.

would receive a small bonus. A male student, Juan, made a loud humorous remark in Spanish on the possibilities of using this bonus on the final exam grade. The whole class laughed in response as the professor grinned and replied negatively saying “that was a good try but no.”

Juan could have directed this question to the professor on a one-on-one basis; nonetheless, he decided to do this loudly and in the presence of the whole class. He was seeking a chance to get more benefits from this task while being recognized by the class in his effort. Swain (2005) argues that an “urgent dimension of school life for boys is the need to gain popularity and, in particular, status (p. 218). Both Chucho’s humorous blog episode and Juan’s effort to get a bonus were public demonstrations on their ability to be funny and their capacity to direct the attention of the whole class towards themselves. According to Swain, status is gradually acquired as an outcome of an individual’s daily maneuvers. Juan’s incident also reiterates claims made by Nielsen’s (2000) participants, who claimed that it was not that boys talked more in the classroom but that they “shouted out.”

Males and side conversations. In addition to employing humor, male participants found other unorthodox ways to demonstrate their engagement in the learning process. Another example of male unconventional classroom participation was side conversations. Male participants initiated 10 out of the 16 side conversations recorded that demonstrated engagement with the lesson. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes presents the occurrence of a side conversation by a pair of male participants.

The professor was discussing a list of verbs that was given to students. She was explaining the meaning of the various abbreviations next to the verbs (e.g., n= noun) and providing the meaning of the verbs in Spanish. The professor went over the verbs ‘to

fight' and 'to hit' while modeling a punch; Alberto nodded to the professor's example. In the meantime, Daniel, who was sitting next to Alberto, said to him in Spanish that 'to hit' had other connotations such as those used in baseball.

Daniel and Alberto were engaging in a brief and informal conversation, which was in no sense disrupting the class, but that was instead incorporating their background knowledge to the content that the professor was explaining in this lesson.

Non-Gendered Classroom Participation

Other areas of classroom participation that were also considered but that did not yield particular relevance to any population in the classroom were non verbal actions such as paying attention and taking notes. In regards to paying attention, more than half of the episodes recorded were equally performed by both female and male participants in the classroom. Following is an example of an activity that caused all students regardless of gender to pay attention.

Students were covering a unit on translation and the professor decided to have students translate the lyrics in a song. She provided them with a copy of the lyrics of a song by Vico C, a Puerto Rican old school rapper, who uses a mix of Spanglish. Students were asked to listen to the song because they would be assigned a specific verse of the song to translate. Specifically, they would have to translate the words that appeared in English into Spanish. On this day, students' attention was focused on listening to the song's lyric.

Similarly, on other occasions the whole class was engaged in taking notes on the professor's lecture. Next, is an excerpt from my fieldnotes of an activity that prompted a wave of students to take notes.

After a brief summary of the class' evaluation strategies the professor continued to provide an explanation of the course's portfolio. During this account the professor

explained that the portfolio was not going to be a collection of class work but a place in which students could demonstrate that they had addressed all the course objectives by carefully selecting a piece of evidence from their own work. Meanwhile, most students copied the questions that were projected on the board, and the explanations on how to assemble the portfolio.

Again, these non verbal actions, paying attention and taking notes were not practiced by any gendered population in specific; both female and male participants equally engaged in these activities. This finding suggests that although female and male participants demonstrated preference for specific modes of classroom participation, there were actions that were equally shared by the whole class.

Gendered Lack of Classroom Participation

The majority of the participants were deeply involved in the learning process; this was evidenced by the multiplicity of traditional and unorthodox discourses they took up and actions they performed in order to demonstrate their engagement with the lesson. However, there were participants who demonstrated a lack of engagement or unwillingness to participate in classroom processes more often than other peers. The phenomenon of lack of classroom participation, as explained earlier in this section, was composed of two major actions: the first one occurred as participants responded negatively to the professor's request for sharing, and the second dealt with various types of in-class distractions.

Male Participants and Refusal to Share

At the same time that students were eager to participate in class, there were instances when the participants declined to share with the class. This action, though sometimes performed by the entire class, was overwhelmingly exhibited by the male participants. This finding is

consistent with Swain's (2005) claim that "some boys actively resist school learning and expectations" (p. 216). One day that particularly exemplifies this phenomenon was the day in which students had their first formal oral presentations.

The day had come for the class to do their first formal oral presentation. Since students would soon start reading the graphic novel *Persepolis*, the professor decided that the presentations should be used to create a background context on the history of Iran, its culture, and the Sha's regime, among other relevant topics. The class seemed to be a bit tense today; some students were seated stiffly and with their arms crossed: Martillo, Yesi, Yara and Bez. Some of the groups were missing a member but it was interesting to note how each group dealt with this circumstance. The first group to present was composed of Yara, Lela, Bez, Nicky and Chucho, the latter whom was the only male member of this group and was absent. This group of females told the professor that they would present anyway and they covered his part of the presentation. On the other hand, there was another group composed mostly of males: Alberto, Daniel, Chu, and Enrique. They refrained from doing their presentation because Matete, who was the only female in the group, was absent. The next time the class met the professor gave Chucho, the male student who was absent from the first group, the opportunity to pair with another male, Juan, who was absent as well but did not belong to any group,⁷⁵ to do the presentation on the next class. Even after these two males were given a second chance they never did the presentation.

This particular task, the group oral presentations, represented an opportune moment for the study of gender and its influence on students' willingness to share their work and complete a task. While the largely female group was missing a member, this did not represent any

⁷⁵ Juan missed class often and had been absent the day in which the groups for the oral presentations were formed.

impediment for them to share the work they had prepared and complete the task that was required of them. In my subsequent formal interview with Lela, a member of this largely female group, I asked her if she would have liked to present at some other moment, to which she responded

Ay nooo, por lo menos yo, a mí me gusta a hacer las cosas el día que son, a mí no me gusta que me cambien nada y salimos de eso rápido... como quiera nosotras podíamos cubrir la parte y Chucho me envió la información pero pues no fue. [¿Ustedes sabían que él no venía?]. No, si nos tomó de sorpresa porque él había dicho que iba.⁷⁶

On the contrary, the largely male group who was missing a female peer refrained from presenting; when I interviewed Matete, the female member who was absent that day she claimed

Sí, yo la tenía, yo la tenía en mi USB. [¿Por qué tenías tú la presentación?]. No porque el día anterior nos reunimos, entonces Daniel lo tenía en la computadora y yo estaba estudiando de otra clase yo le dije pues, dénmelo, yo como que lo pongo bonito en PowerPoint y me lo llevé.⁷⁷

The greatest difference between these two groups relates to the level of commitment and responsibility that each group had towards the task. The largely female group confronted the limitations presented to them on that day; they covered Chucho's part and presented despite his absence. On the other hand, the largely male group relied on Matete to make the presentation more appealing and did not count with a backup plan. This phenomenon is similar to what Nielsen (2000) reports in terms of the degree to which female and male students work in

⁷⁶ "Oh nooo, at least me, I like to do things on their assigned date, I do not like changes and we got rid of that fast..anyways we could cover his part and Chucho had sent me the information but he did not show up [Did you know that he was not coming?]. No, it took us by surprise because he said he would be there."

⁷⁷ "Yes, I had it in my USB. [Why did you have the presentation?]. We had met the day before and Daniel had it in his computer, since I was studying for another class, I told him to give it to me so that I could make it prettier in PowerPoint."

educational settings. In her study, Nielsen's participants claimed that females usually worked harder than the males in the classroom, a finding that is supported by the data collected in my research.

Male Participants and Distractions

Similar to refusal to share, even when the whole class performed distractions in the classroom, male participants were responsible for the largest number of these incidences. The analysis of the classroom observations records 45 events of in-class distractions; 30 of which were performed by male students. This finding supports Nielsen's (2000) claim that males are more disruptive than females in the classroom. In Nielsen's study the male participants were louder than the females and did not adhere to classroom rules.

In my study, the analysis of the data showed that male students were familiar with the production of particular types of distractions that included specifically the use of space, manifested by periods of sleep in class. Moreover, the other two types of distractions were caused by their use of technological devices and their production of classroom talk. Male participants were responsible for 10 out of 12 instances of sleep on class; 9 out of 14 events of technological distractions, and 5 out of 9 episodes of classroom talk.⁷⁸ In each one of these three types of distractions male participants were responsible for more than half the total amount of incidences, the rest being performed by female participants in insignificant quantities. The following is an observation note that illustrates an instance when a pair of males was engaged in both a technological distraction and frequent talk.

While students were supposed to be working in a collaborative writing task a group of males in the back displayed an interesting view. Alberto was the only one reading the

⁷⁸ From the remaining four episodes of classroom talk three are performed by the whole class and one is solely produced by female participants.

novel in order to complete the task; meanwhile, two of his peers, Daniel and Chu, did not stop talking with each other, and the fourth peer, Enrique, was sleeping. Minutes kept passing by and the situation remained the same. Then, after several minutes, Enrique lifted his head up and joined Chu while he procrastinated with his laptop.

This event presents how a male student struggles solo to complete a collaborative task when his male peers refuse to do their part. In a subsequent interview with Alberto he explained to me what happened that day.

Yo estaba copiando y como que a la misma vez escuchando [refiriéndose a sus compañeros] y pensando; opino o no opino, y na déjame seguir el trabajo. Estaba indeciso porque Chu me llama y me dice: ‘mira, Alberto que Daniel nos va a invitar pa’ tal sitio’ y yo como que ‘Daniel el trabajo’ y él como que se echó a reír pero lo siguió: ‘pero si te estoy invitando pa’ un la’o ¿cómo tú estás pensando en el trabajo?’ Y después, al rato salió: ‘Sí, sí el trabajo hay que hacerlo.’⁷⁹

This incidence shows a lack of interest, by some participants, in the educational process occurring in the classroom and a tendency to engage in other activities that disrupt the collaborative learning environment. Also, it demonstrates how peers can sometimes try to persuade each other to engage in other, perhaps more entertaining, tasks. In reference to the influential power of peer groups Swain (2005) reports that:

The boy’s peer group is one of the most important features of school as a social setting, for peer-group cultures are also agents in the making of masculinities; they have a

⁷⁹ “I was copying and listening at the same time (referring to his peers’ conversation) and thinking should I join them or not? let me continue working. I hesitated because Chu calls me and says ‘Alberto, Daniel is inviting us to go somewhere’ and I’m like ‘Daniel the task’ and he started laughing and continued ‘but I’m inviting you to go somewhere, why are you thinking about the task? Then, later Daniel said ‘Ok, ok the task needs to be done.’”

fundamental influence on the construction of masculine identities, and there are constant pressures on individuals to perform and behave to the expected group norms. (p. 217)

As evidenced in Alberto's response, he was struggling to stay on task, he was working while simultaneously listening to his peers' conversation and he was also aware that he was the only one following the professor's instructions. Moreover, he confessed that he was hesitant: "*¿opino o no opino?*"⁸⁰ There were multiple pressures exerted by his peers, from Daniel discussing what they would do after school, from Chu attempting to engage him on his laptop and from Enrique sleeping by his side. This last behavior is the next example of common male distraction; consider the following exchange recorded in my observation notes.

The professor was explaining the evaluation strategies that comprised students' final grade. The majority of the class, both females and males were taking notes. Nonetheless, Enrique was starting to fall sleep, while the class had barely started. He struggled to stay awake, and so he moved his seat to the wall in back of him and lied his head on it.

Enrique's constant sleeping episodes in class had become representative of his identity in the classroom. In fact, when I interviewed the in-depth cases one of the female participants, Lela, answered to the item on 'a peer who rarely participates' in the following manner: "*uno que está ubicado frente a donde yo me siento...que siempre está dormido*".⁸¹ Similarly, Martillo, one of the male participants said "*es que no me sé el nombre de él, el que se sienta al ladito mío, un muchacho*,"⁸² as I described his peers physical appearance he agreed that that he was referring to Enrique. Four out of the seven in-depth cases made similar remarks in reference to Enrique. Clearly the participants and I had arrived at a common conclusion; it was our understanding that sleeping in class was a distraction to the teaching-learning process. The notion of a peer who did

⁸⁰"should I join them or not?"

⁸¹ "The guy who sits facing towards me across the classroom...the one that's always sleeping."

⁸² "I don't know his name, the guy that sits right next to me."

not participate in the language learning process denotes an established and shared ideology. The interviewees were able to coincide in the naming of a peer; they had utilized a common set of characteristics that a peer needed to demonstrate in order to be considered as someone who rarely participated in the classroom and Enrique exhibited these traits.

Whole Class Distractions

In the same way that there were various events that indicated classroom participation, the phenomenon of lack of classroom participation was also comprised of a multiplicity of actions. Among the distractions performed by the participants there were others such as arriving to class late, and leaving and entering the classroom. These distractions, however, were equally performed by all members of the class. This finding indicates another area in which my participants shared commonality while they also transgressed from dichotomous notions of how female and male participants behave in educational settings.

In brief, while observing the phenomenon of lack of classroom participation a few threads were evident. Females engaged in half the amount of distractions of male participants and did not demonstrate affinity towards the production of any particular type of distraction. On the other hand, males were responsible for twice the amount of distractions, and these were mostly body movements. Finally, it is relevant to note that in the same manner that most participants, regardless of gender and their preferences, partook in classroom participation, lack of classroom participation was also performed by the majority of the class, even when male students engaged in this practice more often than others.

Participants' Experiences in the Language Classroom

Participants' Definition of Classroom Participation

Due to the depth and complexity of threads that started to materialize in my data analysis in relation to the phenomena of classroom participation, I inquired about these in the interviews conducted with the in-depth cases. Since I was looking into the phenomenon of classroom participation as an indicator of students' engagement with the lesson and gendered behavior, I asked the participants to explain what they understood classroom participation to be. The participants' responses can be summarized into two types of actions: verbal and non verbal. Within the first category the participants said that for them to participate was to answer professor's questions and to engage verbally. Then, in terms of non verbal actions, the participants reported that studying and paying attention were key. They reported that the main action to perform in order to participate in class was to answer the questions posed by the professor. This conception of classroom participation was a notion, perhaps derived from dominant ideologies in educational settings, shared by both female and male interviewees.

Peers who participate in class. Following my inquiry into classroom participation, I encouraged the participants to signal a student whom they considered as someone who participated often in classroom activities; it is important to clarify that a couple of participants named more than one student. Six participants mentioned Marita Estrada, three suggested Lela and one participant remarked "*mayormente las nenas.*"⁸³ My participants' perceptions of classroom participation reiterate those reported by Nielsen's (2000) participants who also claimed that the female students in their class worked harder than the males.

Peers who do not participate in class. As a point of contrast, I asked the participants if they could think of a student that participated minimally or rarely in the class. In response to this

⁸³ "For the most part girls."

item, four participants mentioned Enrique, and added claims such as “*nunca lo he oído hablar.*”⁸⁴

The answers provided by the in-depth cases in reference to ‘peers who participate often’ and ‘peers who participate rarely’ demonstrate gendered notions of classroom participation. From the participants’ point of view, the discourses enacted by Lela and Marita Estrada were exemplary of what it meant to participate in the classroom. On other hand, the participants agreed that the actions manifested by Enrique were an accurate illustration of lack of engagement with the teaching-learning process in the classroom. This implies that both classroom participation and lack of classroom participation were comprised of events that did not occur in isolation but that were observed and perceived by all members of the class. The participants had their own pre-established guidelines of the characteristics a peer had to impersonate to be considered as someone who participated or not in the teaching-learning process. Also, the participants and I agreed that an individual could engage in verbal and non verbal actions to demonstrate engagement with the lesson.

In sum, the analysis of the classroom observations demonstrated that the phenomenon of classroom participation was composed of complex manifestations that surpassed the traditional binaries of classroom participation/lack of classroom participation. Even when the greatest majority of the class participated in the classroom it was their inclination towards a specific mode that marked a difference amongst the participants. Most female participants performed conventional classroom participation while the majority of the male participants engaged in unconventional classroom participation. What made this difference most evident was students’ preferred discourses since female participants opted for requesting help, and engaging in oral

⁸⁴ “I’ve never heard him speak.”

participation while males utilized humor and side conversations. Another area that demonstrated gender discourses in the classroom were the actions, both verbal and non verbal, that students' produced in order to demonstrate their unwillingness to participate in the teaching-learning process. This phenomenon was markedly characterized by male participants. Finally, throughout the interviews there is an underlying perception of what constitutes classroom participation. The participants' definition of this phenomenon as well as their examples of who falls into the categories of someone who participates and someone who does not reiterate the data collected from my classroom observations.

In the following chapter, Chapter V, I present the findings of the observations done to the participants' weblogs. Chapter V extends the discussion of the participants' gendered discourses in the classroom by presenting how these were enacted in an online setting.

Chapter V: Gendered Participation in Students' Weblogs

The other medium that was analyzed as a possible source of participants' gendered discourses were their weblogs. For this reason, both the visual and textual components of each participant's weblog were studied. In terms of the visual component of the weblogs, the analysis of the data showed that female bloggers were eager to customize the appearance of their weblogs while male bloggers preserved them in their original layout. The analysis of the textual aspect of the weblogs revealed that there were patterns in the participants' selection of titles for their weblogs. Also, it evidenced that male bloggers wrote significantly fewer postings than female bloggers. Thus, this chapter presents a detailed description of the findings of the observations done to the visual and textual components of the participants' weblogs in order to address the second research question: What are the gendered ways in which students in an undergraduate English course participate in an educational weblog?

Weblogs in the English Language Classroom

The weblogs created for the English language classroom had a series of specifications that differentiated them from the traditional filter weblog.⁸⁵ These weblogs were designed for the sole purpose of writing personal entries in response to a graphic novel, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, which students were reading in the course. The professor did not specify any guidelines nor pose any requirements for the visual aspect of the weblogs, although it is relevant to note that she did demonstrate how to change the weblog's layout in case anyone wanted to do so. The only requirements set by the professor were that each student created a blog, and published a posting for each one of the five prompts she provided them with. By the end of the semester, a total of 16 out of 18 participants created the weblog, of which nine were females and

⁸⁵ "The filter blog contains links to content the author finds from surfing the Web. Filters contain little original content and are known for pointing to news items." (Tramell and Keshelashvili, 2005, p. 971)

seven were males.⁸⁶ There were no additional exigencies of reading nor of posting into peers' weblogs and there was no specification about entry's length. Participation in the weblog forum was intrinsically defined as participants' completion of the required amount of postings because this was the only requirement set by the professor. However, for the purposes of this study, participants' engagement with the blogging process was examined by looking at whether the participants submitted the required amount of postings, and how they integrated other visual components. In other words, I was interested in observing the extent to which the participants appropriated this medium. Examples of this were extracurricular entries such as poems, the inclusion of smileys and plug-ins, and participants' incorporation of various aesthetic add-ons such as themes and color schemes (a definition of these visual components will be provided later in this chapter).

WordPress as Weblog Platform

The professor selected *WordPress* as the weblog platform of preference for the creation of the course's weblog and students' weblogs as well. According to its creators *WordPress* is "a state-of-the-art publishing platform with a focus on aesthetics, web standards, and usability" (<http://wordpress.org/>). The course's weblog had two main purposes: first, to serve as practice for students to publish their first posting, the only one that was not related to the novel and was a reflection of their experience learning English; and second, to function as a network for each student's individual weblog, since these were linked through its blogroll.⁸⁷ The course's weblog was created by the professor during a class period to model the simplicity of its creation and how to publish a posting. At the moment of their creation, all *WordPress*' weblogs possess the same

⁸⁶ The two participants who did not create a weblog for the class were females. Although they never met this requirement they remained in the class.

⁸⁷ A blogroll is "a list of links to other blogs generally found in a blog's sidebar" (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006, p. 17).

visual and textual characteristics, and features (see Figure 3). In regards to the textual characteristics are the weblog's title and an initial welcome posting called "Hello world!" or "¡Hola Mundo!," which depends on the weblogs' default language settings. The visual characteristics of the weblog include the font type, color and size, the banner area where the weblog's title is displayed, and the sidebar which typically includes a search bar, pages section, archives, categories and blogroll.



Figure 3. Sample *WordPress'* weblog in its original theme.

WordPress' Customization Options

WordPress' focus on the visual and functional qualities of its platform has allowed for the development of a large array of customization options for the blogger to choose from; these are largely categorized in two areas: aesthetics and functionality. The main purpose of the aesthetic component is to improve the appearance and display of information by modifying fonts, colors and images. While the functionality component aims to enhance the experience of the blogger's readership by adding among other things plug-ins (a definition of this term will be given later in this section).

WordPress' themes. One available option for the blogger to change the initial layout provided by *WordPress* is to implement themes, which can be accessed and previewed at <http://wordpress.org/extend/themes/>. *WordPress* defines themes in the following manner:

Fundamentally, the WordPress Theme system is a way to “skin” your weblog. Yet, it is more than just a “skin.” Skinning your site implies that only the design is changed.

WordPress Themes can provide much more control over the look *and presentation* [sic] of the material on your website. A *WordPress* Theme is a collection of files that work together to produce a graphical interface with an underlying unifying design for a weblog (http://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Themes, What is a theme? section, ¶ 1).

Themes provide tech-savvy bloggers with a fast option to enhance the way information is presented in their weblogs. Most importantly, this allows beginner bloggers to drastically change their weblogs' layout without great effort. Regardless of the knowledge possessed by a blogger, themes allow the blogger to develop an atmosphere and mood for the information being presented. They also serve as ways of presenting the blogger's taste, preferences and even identity to the online community (Ratliff, 2006). Figure 4 serves as an illustration of how themes can significantly modify the layout of a weblog without altering its content.

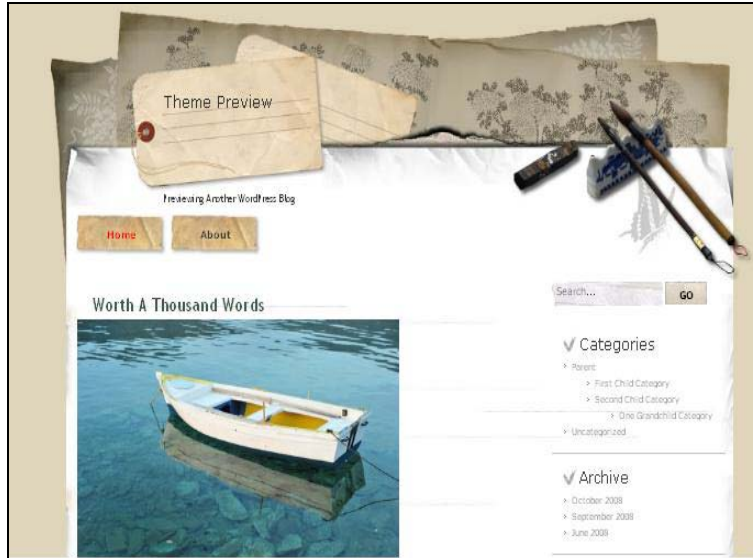


Figure 4. Sample WordPress theme Japan-style by Good Web Design.

WordPress' color schemes. In addition to allowing its users to select from a wide array of themes, this blogging platform also enables bloggers to switch the color scheme of their weblog. Different from a theme, which changes the location of various objects, may add images, and alter fonts; a color scheme slightly modifies the banner's background color and the title's font color as well. Figure 5 illustrates how a color scheme provides a simple but effective way for bloggers to alter the overall presentation of their persona online.

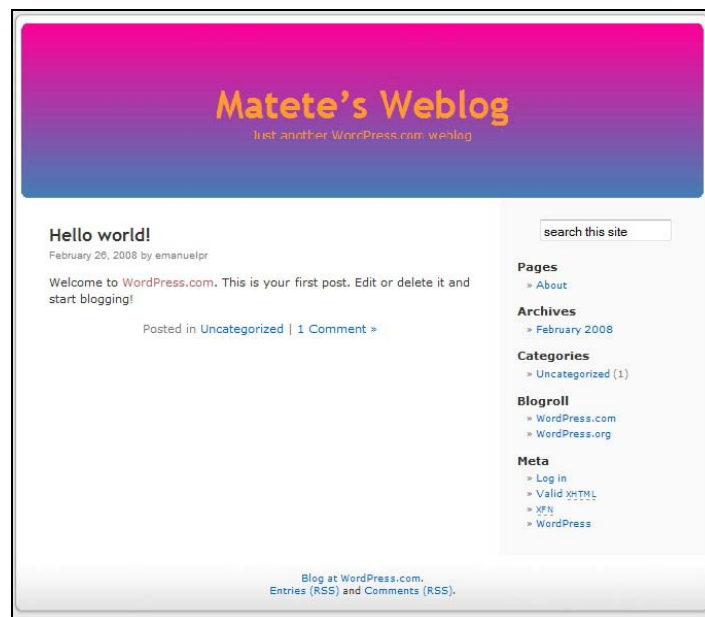


Figure 5. The effects of a color scheme.

WordPress plug-ins. Plug-ins are optional gadgets or add-ons that can be incorporated by a blogger to enhance the structural and functional qualities of a weblog. Plug-ins serve various purposes, among them to make the readership's experience more pleasant by allowing them to do other things in addition to reading and publishing, such as listening to music, and looking at slideshows. Also, they serve to make the weblog more valuable for its owner by enabling him or her to add plug-ins that report on the blogger's readership and tabulate the postings that have received the greatest number of comments.⁸⁸

Visual Component of the Participants' Weblogs

This myriad of customization options provided by *WordPress* deserves careful examination as possible indicator of the bloggers' visual taste and aesthetic preferences, and ultimately as a source of gendered representation online. To perform the analysis of the participants' weblogs I implemented a weblog observation protocol (see Appendix D); for the purposes of this section, I focus on the first part of this protocol which includes questions regarding the visual aspect of the weblogs. Among the items that were considered in this analysis were the images, graphics, plug-ins, themes and color schemes. One significant area of the visual analysis of the weblogs that demonstrated difference per gender was the amount of bloggers that implemented themes and color schemes, being female bloggers the population that most often engaged in this activity.

Female Bloggers' Choice of Visual Components

Yara's and Nicky's weblogs. Both female bloggers preserved *WordPress'* original theme and did not add any images, color schemes or graphics to their weblogs.

Matete's weblog. Matete preserved *WordPress'* original theme; however, she performed a slight variation to the color scheme of the weblog's banner. The banner did not consist of the

⁸⁸ For a list of plug-ins and their description visit: <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/>.

typical light blue banner; instead it had pink and bright blue tones. Also, the banner's font remained the same type but its color was orange and not the original white (see Figure 5). Except for this color variation there were no other visual changes to Matete's weblog.

Yesi's weblog. Yesi changed her weblog's appearance by implementing a customized theme. Her theme was called *Banana Smoothie* and it is rich of color, textures and images. The weblog's background is beige with very thin brown lines forming consecutive small squares. On top of this background there is a yellow layer where the postings are displayed. On the top right corner of this layer there is a large cup of banana smoothie with half a ripe banana next to the left of the cup. Under these images is the side bar which displays sections as the blogroll, and archives on three dimensional squares that simulate yellow sticky notes. The last yellow sticky note portrays a handwritten recipe for a banana smoothie in blue ink. This sticky note has two watermarks of a cup's rings on it. It is relevant to note that unlike the majority of the participants' weblogs, Yesi's weblog has no banner and the weblog's title is placed in a very small font on top of the background and outside of the beige top layer. The *Banana Smoothie* theme also affects the way the fonts are displayed. The postings appear in soft and translucent purple text boxes located on top of the beige layer. The font for the entries' titles is in bold and is bright orange. The entries' text has a smaller font and a brighter tone of purple.

Lela's weblog. Lela drastically changed the appearance of her weblog by integrating one of *WordPress'* customized themes called *Rounded*. The background of Lela's weblog is solid chocolate brown. The weblog's sidebar is located on the right and displays its different components (e.g., the blogroll) as boxes of various solid colors that have rounded edges and are placed as another layer on top of the background. The weblog has no separate banner section and the weblog's title is located on the top left corner of the weblog over several colorful hanging

flowers. The entries are located on individual solid large beige boxes that occupy the left side and center of the weblog. This theme also affects the color and characteristics of the weblog's fonts. The title is displayed in uppercase letters in a large size beige font. The entries' titles are lime, and the text itself is black, all of these vary in size, the entries' title being the largest font.

Chiquita's weblog. Chiquita altered the visual appeal of her weblog by adding the theme *Ambiru* from the list of *WordPress'* customized themes. The largest amount of space in the weblog is occupied by a solid dark gray background. On top of this background there is a solid white layer that contains three main sections: a banner at the top, the entries in the middle and the side bar ironically at the bottom. The banner is green with translucent descending white shades. The entries' title is green too, the dates are gray and the text is black. The font size is distributed from largest to smallest in the same order mentioned above. It is relevant to note that the entries have three different fonts, as if Chiquita had first written the entries in a word processor and then pasted them on the weblog.

Beba's weblog. Beba modified her weblog by applying the theme *Girl*. The background of this weblog is light green with several dark green flowers. On the upper part of the weblog is the weblog's title followed by two thick black lines. On the top right corner there is a large image of a teenage female. She has long black hair, and white skin. Her facial features are not distinguishable; she wears a long sleeve green shirt that lets her shoulders and the strap of a black bra show. Parts of her lower belly are also visible; she is wearing long black pants and closed black shoes. To the left of this figure and directly under the thick black lines is where the entries are located. Each entry is placed in an individual box composed of three sections. The entry's title is located in a dark green row. Under it is a dark gray row where the text is displayed. Finally, under these two there is a last green row where the date is placed. The font

color for these three sections is different and is made of one of the tones on the other row (e.g., dark green, dark gray, green). In addition to selecting a custom theme, Beba added smileys⁸⁹ to her weblog. She inserted various smileys in one of her entries that included lips, kisses, happy faces and hearts.

Bratz's and Bez's weblogs. Bratz's and Bez's weblogs underwent a process of transformation in the hands of their owners as they both selected the theme *Sweet Blossoms*. The background of this theme starts at the top of the weblog with a red shade and becomes a bright pink shade as it goes down. On top of this background there are two solid light pink columns. In the top part of these columns there are two large sunflowers, a yellow one to the left and a pink one to the right; these sunflowers radiate dozens of small hearts and butterflies. The left column is the area designated for the entries, while the right column is the side bar; the components of the side bar use small bright pink hearts as bullets.

The visual analyses of the weblogs created by the female bloggers denote several characteristics about their creators. For the female bloggers the aesthetic quality of their weblogs was of large importance. This is evidenced by the large amount of weblogs that were customized by the bloggers to a form that suited their taste. My analysis was confirmed by the female bloggers themselves as I asked them to reflect on the visual aspect of their weblogs during the interviews. To illustrate, Chiquita claimed that she had implemented a theme “*porque es como que más llamativo, más, no sé, se ve mejor.*”⁹⁰ When I asked Debby the reasons for choosing the theme *Rounded* she said: “*bueno, yo escogí eso porque tiene flores y a mí me encantan las*

⁸⁹ These are interactive emoticons provided by the *Smiley Central* http://smiley.smileycentral.com/download/index.jhtml?partner=ZSzeb068_ZN. Most companies that offer free applications place an advertisement box on personal webpages after they are incorporated. For this reason, Beba's weblog had a box from the *Smiley Central*.

⁹⁰ “Because it is more appealing, more, I don't know, it looks better.”

flores.”⁹¹ Another female blogger, Matete, explained to me why she had modified the color scheme of her weblog. I reproduce below our exchange about this:

M: *La profesora dijo que uno podía cambiarle las páginas, los dibujitos, cambiarle la imagen, ponerlo bonito.*⁹²

ZA: *Noté que habías cambiado el ‘banner,’ ¿alguna razón por la cual escogiste estos colores?*⁹³

M: *Pues, el chinita porque me gusta, es mi color favorito, el rosa y azul, pues, se veía lindo.*”⁹⁴

The selection of words such as *llamativo*,⁹⁵ *bonito*⁹⁶ and *lindo*⁹⁷ demonstrates that for these female bloggers the aesthetic aspect of their weblogs was an important component. In sum, six out of the nine females who created a weblog applied a theme to their weblogs; one changed the color scheme but preserved the original layout and only two preserved *WordPress*’ original layout. It is quite interesting that two female bloggers Bez and Bratz incorporated the same custom theme, *Sweet Blossoms*, and that Lela’s weblog’s theme was named *Girl*. For this reason, I accessed the listing of *WordPress*’s themes and searched for keywords such as boy, man, male, girl, woman, and female and kept a records of any results from these searches.⁹⁸ I analyzed the names of the various themes and the description provided by their creators. The search for the keyword ‘girl’ resulted in five themes, which were organized in the following order with their descriptions:

⁹¹ “Well, I chose it because it has flowers and I love flowers.”

⁹² M: The professor said that I could change the page, the graphics, change its image, and make it pretty.

⁹³ ZA: I noticed that you had modified the banner, why did you choose these colors?

⁹⁴ M. Well, I like orange it’s my favorite color, pink and blue, well, it looked cute.

⁹⁵ *Llamativo* is the Spanish term for appealing.

⁹⁶ *Bonito* is the Spanish term for pretty or attractive.

⁹⁷ *Lindo* is synonym of *bonito* in Spanish, but could also be translated as *cute* or *sweet* in English, depending on the context.

⁹⁸ These searches were completed on April 16, 2009.

1. SimpCalar. A very simple and colorful theme, suit for girls. [*sic*]
2. Pink Tulip. A pink girly Tulip flower theme for WordPress.
3. Planetemo. WordPress-Theme für Emo Boys and Emo Girls. (Largely black)
4. Girl. Wordpress Girl Theme by Wordpress Themes.
5. Chinese Love. A nice purple theme, with pink headings, especially for girls in love ;)

WordPress' allocation of these themes within the keyword 'girl' denotes marked gendered notions. The consideration of certain elements such as flowers, and colors like pink and purple as "girlie," "suit for girls" [*sic*] and "especially for girls" suggests that these are meant to appeal to females, on the basis of dominant and prevailing gender constructs. The theme Planetemo is not the exception as it claims that the theme is suited for emotional and sensitive boys and girls.

It is clear that the female bloggers in my study were playing right into the social constructions of gender by implementing 'feminine' color schemes and themes. To illustrate, Bratz and Bez's theme, *Sweet Blossoms*, was pink as well as Matete's choice of a color scheme, which also included pink. Moreover, female bloggers such as Bratz, Bez, Lela and Beba selected *WordPress*' themes that included flowers. In the following section, I provide a parallel to the analysis of the visual components of the female bloggers by exploring the weblogs created by the male participants.

Males Bloggers' Choice of Visual Components

Martillo, Daniel, Alberto, and Juan's weblogs. These four male bloggers preserved *WordPress*' original theme and did not add any images, color schemes nor graphics to their weblogs. However, Alberto included a *Sonific*⁹⁹ music player in his weblog's side bar.

⁹⁹ Sonific is a plug-in that allows online users to add songs to their personal websites and weblogs, for more information visit: <http://www.downloadsquad.com/tag/sonific/>.

Chu's weblog. Chu preserved *WordPress'* original theme; nonetheless, he performed a slight variation to the color scheme of the weblog's banner. The banner did not consist of *WordPress'* original colors; instead it had black and red tones. Also, the banner's font remained the same type but its color was black. Apart from this slight variation of the color scheme, there were no other graphic changes in Chu's weblog.

Enrique's weblog. Enrique changed the appearance of his weblog by integrating one of *WordPress'* customized themes called *Freshy*. At the top of the weblog there is a black banner with the title in white font. Under this there is an image of several colorful numeric tabs dispersed on top of one another. Following this image are the home and about boxes, which appear in green and black shades. This theme is composed by a light gray background and a solid white front layer. The entries are located to the left side of this layer and the side bar to the right.

Chucho's weblog. Chucho's weblog underwent modifications through the integration of the custom theme *Solipsus*. The background of his weblog has various shades of gray accompanied by a series of textures. On the top part of the weblog is where the title is displayed in thick black uppercase letters. Behind the title there are various small black images, among these: a rainy cloud, a sun, a sad smiley, and two iconic flowers. Under the weblog's title there are two columns: a black one to the left that contains the side bar and a light gray column for the entries.

A thread becomes clear after this brief analysis of males' weblogs. For the purposes of this class, these bloggers did not place major importance to the aesthetic characteristics of their weblogs. Most of the male bloggers preserved *WordPress'* original theme; four out of seven bloggers did not modify their weblogs, and one did a slight variation by altering the banner's color scheme. Only two male bloggers implemented a customized theme to replace *WordPress'*

original theme. A quick glance at these initial descriptions of the participants' weblogs, both female and male, delineates a contrast in the degree of relevance that both populations assigned to the visual aspect of their weblogs. On one hand, most female bloggers weblogs were drastically modified to fit a certain aesthetic standard; on the other hand, the majority of male weblogs remained in their original visual layout. This finding contradicts those reported by scholars who address weblogs in the popular stream (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005). Studies such as the later have found that male bloggers pay more attention to the visual aspect of their weblogs as an essential component of self presentation to their readership.

Figure 6 provides an illustration of how the aesthetic preferences of these two groups differed and coincided. Most importantly the incorporation of smileys and plug-ins did not represent a significant finding; which also reiterates the participants' purpose for creating the weblog and their technological skills as well. In an interview with the only blogger who incorporated a plug-in, Alberto, I inquired about the music player he had added and the song it included. Alberto stated that he did not know with certainty how this plug-in had appeared and that he had not listened to the song. In addition to Alberto, various participants stated that they would have liked to change their weblogs' appearance; among their desired changes they mentioned adding a picture. Others claimed that "*en realidad como no estaba muy diestro en lo del blog pues lo dejé hasta ahí porque no no sabía mucho pero en un futuro me gustaría como que mejorar.*"¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ "The truth is that because I did not know much about blogs I left it this way but I would like to improve in the future."

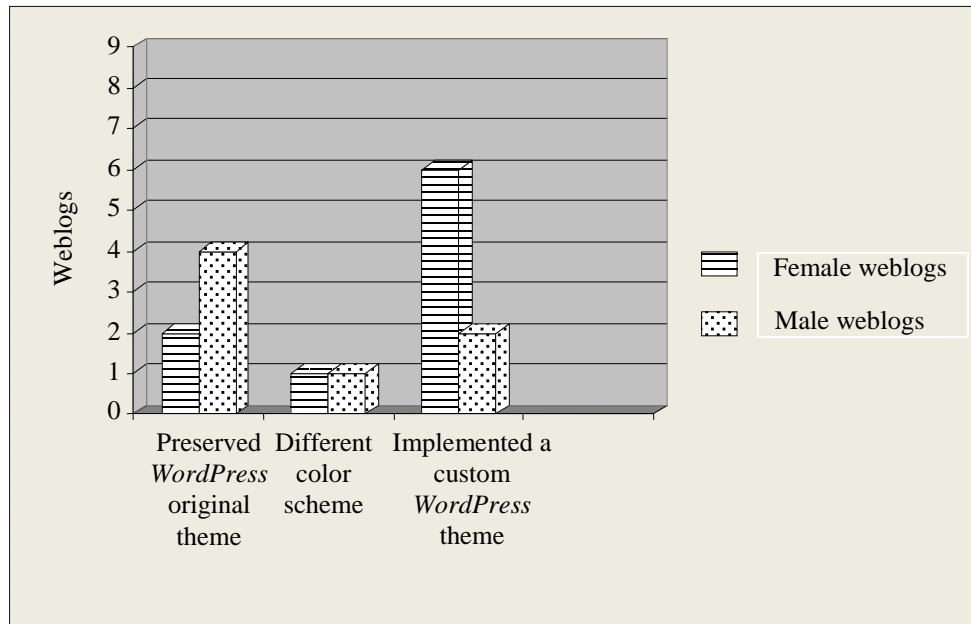


Figure 6. Analysis of weblogs' visual aspect.

Textual Component of Participants' Weblogs

The second aspect of the participants' weblogs that underwent a process of analysis was their textual component. As a basis for this analysis, I utilized the second part of the weblog observation protocol (see Appendix D). Among the textual components considered in this analysis were the weblogs' titles, and the postings written by the bloggers. The analysis of the textual aspect of the weblogs showed that most bloggers, both female and male, conformed to formulaic weblog titles. Also, it revealed that male bloggers wrote significantly fewer postings than female bloggers, and that the majority of the bloggers did not meet the required number of posting established by the professor. Furthermore, the textual analysis of the weblogs provides evidence that both female and male bloggers would 'log-in' to post several entries on the same day.

Weblogs' Titles

The moment in which a weblog is created using *WordPress* the blogger is provided with the option to customize the weblog's title or to preserve the one generated by this platform. The

weblog's title that *WordPress* assigns is a formulaic one; it is formed by the blogger's name followed by an apostrophe 's' and the word 'weblog'. To illustrate, if a blogger opens an account in *WordPress* and selects John as his name, *WordPress* will automatically generate the following title for the weblog: John's Weblog (e.g., bloggers name + 's +Weblog= *WordPress*' original weblog title).

This is precisely the criteria that I utilized to determine which bloggers had preserved *WordPress*' original weblog title and those who had modified it. The analysis of the data showed that five bloggers had modified their weblog's title. Interestingly enough, four out of these bloggers were females; only one male blogger modified the weblog's title. On the other hand, 11 bloggers maintained *WordPress*' original weblog title, from which six were males and five were females.

Information disclosure in weblogs' titles. An important element of gender representation online derives from the information that a blogger reveals about herself. The inclusion of personal information such as names, nicknames, and places of origin can complement or help the reader to understand the blogger's tendency to speak about certain topics, take a specific stance towards an issue and even make use of specific visual accents. For this reason, I also analyzed the weblogs' titles for patterns of disclosure of information. From the analysis of the 16 weblog titles, two common patterns emerged: titles that disclosed the bloggers' nickname and titles that incorporated the bloggers' first name. Table 1 demonstrates which bloggers conformed to each pattern.

Table 1

Patterns of Disclosure of Information in Weblogs' Titles

Pattern #1: Nickname			Pattern #2: First name		
Blogger	Gender	Pattern modification	Blogger	Gender	Pattern modification
Bez	F		Juan	M	
Lela	F		Enrique	M	
Chiquita	F		Nicky	F	Last name
Matete	F		Alberto	M	Last name
Yara	F	Last name	Beba	F	Last name
Bratz	F	Qualifying adjective	Chu	M	Location

Note. One male blogger, Chucho who is not included in any of the above patterns, managed to merge both patterns by using the formula (name + nickname) in his weblog's title.

F= female; M= male.

Table 1 demonstrates that the majority of the bloggers disclosed personal information in their weblogs' titles, whether it was their nickname or first name. However, most female bloggers disclosed their nicknames, while the majority of the male bloggers displayed their first name. Only three bloggers, Daniel, Yesi, and Martillo did not fall into either of these two patterns of disclosure of information because they created a customized title that did not reveal any information that could lead to their identification. Contrary to the findings reported by scholars who have explored popular stream weblogs (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005; Huffaker, 2004a), the female and male bloggers in my study did not disclose a considerable

amount of personal information. In these studies, the bloggers explicitly shared personal information such as emails, personal web pages and age. This indicates that for my participants the weblogs were mainly a course related activity and not a forum they appropriated for personal purposes.

Weblogs' Postings

Another component that was considered within the textual analysis was the postings written by the bloggers in their respective weblogs. In this case, the purpose was not to study gender representation online but to determine the level to which these bloggers were engaged with this online portion of the course. Unlike Trammell & Keshelashvili (2005), I did not consider the textual components, more specifically the bloggers' entries as the main source for gendered discourses online. There are various reasons for this, including the length of the entries, and their grammatical intelligibility. The average length of the entries was 86 words, which did not provide extensive text to be analyzed. To illustrate, consider the following weblog entry written by Chiquita in response to the first prompt, which asked for a description of the novel's main character Marjane. "She has ten years old. She is from Iran. She has short hair and big eyes. Marjane is very religious. The book favorite the Marjane is "*Dialectic Materialism.*" Most entries addressed the prompts given by the professor and hardly included additional insight from the bloggers. This is contrary to studies like Huffaker's (2004a) where the length of the participants' weblog postings typically exceeded 2000 words.

The bloggers' proficiency in the target language not only affected negatively the length of their entries but also affected their capability to faithfully express ideas and construct meaningful sentences. The effects of their language proficiency were manifested through several

misspellings, direct translations, and incorrect use of pronouns. Following is an example of such an entry; this entry was written by Daniel in response to the same prompt.

She is was a girl who sees sad that tells us a part of hi life. She shows us for the solutions that he is living in his country they will go she is a very confused situation since in the school also they speak to him on the revolution. In his family there are happening for a few thing since his this mather in favor of the revolution to his mother they took a picture and it went out in the firs page of the newspaper. After this event his lives changed and she to begin to see the life of another perpestive. But she kept on being a sad girl. the event of his mother changed to them the lives since it brought problems to his family. She is a onfused girl.

In this entry, Daniel described the main character of the novel, an Iranian girl named Marjane. It is evident from this entry that he refers to Marjane using the pronouns he and she interchangeably. With few exceptions the entries written by the bloggers were saturated with misspellings and grammatical errors that made of their analysis a complex task. This point was made evident to me in an interview with one of the participants. As I analyzed the weblog entries, I noticed that one of the bloggers, Alberto, would constantly use the term boy when referring to Marjane. For this reason, I inquired about what he was trying to say; his explanation clarified that for him “boy” meant children or kids not a male child.

No [risa] pues en realidad escribí por encimita pero...pues usando en el ejemplo de la novela y eso era girl pero pues [¿Querías hablar de los niños en general?] Aja, sí eso

*sería como que de un punto de vista exterior...no solo con Marjane sino con cuantos estarían también sufriendo lo mismo.*¹⁰¹

In Alberto's first language, Spanish, the terms girl and boy are very similar, the difference is merely one vowel; a girl is referred to as *niña* and a boy is referred to as *niño*. Moreover, when someone refers to a group of kids composed of different genders, usually they use the term *niños*, which is the equivalent to children or kids and is almost identical to the male term for a child with the addition of a final -s. This could explain why Alberto thought the word boy could be used as plural and inclusive of both female and male children. Alberto's struggle while trying to express his ideas in English was a common phenomenon in the weblog entries written by the majority of the bloggers.

Bloggers who did not write postings. There were seven bloggers who created a weblog but did not write any postings. Out of these seven bloggers five were males: Chucho, Chu, Juan, Enrique, and Martillo. The remaining two bloggers who did not write any postings in their weblogs were two females: Bratz and Nicky. These findings contradict those reported by Huffaker (2004a). In his study, Huffaker explained that the rate of blog abandonment was not affected by gender, whereas in my study it was largely the male bloggers who created their weblogs and never went back to publish any entries.

Bloggers who wrote postings. While some bloggers never posted in their weblogs others were committed to the forum and did publish postings. In this section, I refer to bloggers who regardless of the amount of postings and whether these were published on time, wrote postings in their weblogs. Out of the 16 bloggers who created a weblog, nine wrote postings in them. It is relevant to note that seven of these bloggers were females.

¹⁰¹ "No [laughter] truth is that I wrote it fast...but using the example provided in the novel it was girl [Where you trying to refer to children in general?] Yup, like an objective point of view...not just Marjane but how many were suffering the same way."

Bloggers who met required postings. Even when nine bloggers wrote postings not all of them met the required amount of postings. Early in the semester the professor provided each student with a handout that specified the amount of postings they were required to complete for the class, the dates on which each posting was due, and the prompt for each posting. Students were required to write and publish five postings in their weblogs by the assigned dates. For the purpose of this section, more emphasis is given to the bloggers' amount of postings rather than to the dates on which these were published. Utilizing this criterion, only six bloggers met the postings' quota established by the professor, which were five postings. Among these bloggers four were females: Lela, Bez, Chiquita and Yesi, and two were males: Alberto and Daniel.

Bloggers who wrote extra postings. For obvious reasons the majority of the bloggers utilized the weblog only to write course related postings. However, there were two bloggers who wrote an extracurricular entry as their first posting to their weblogs, these were two females: Yesi and Beba; these entries belonged to a specific genre, poetry. Following are the postings written by these bloggers.

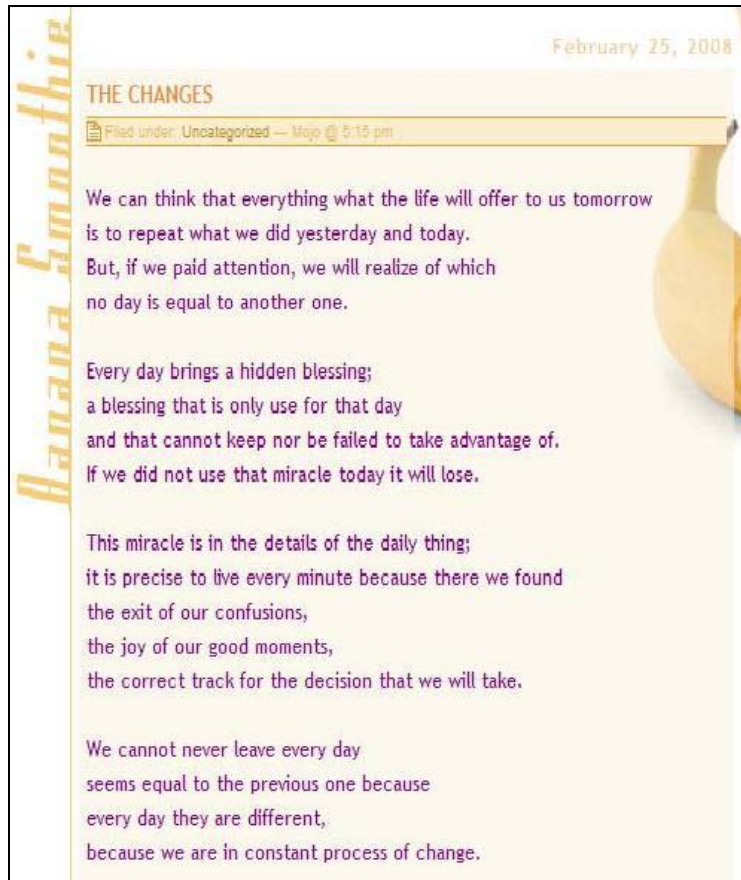


Figure 7. Yesi's extra post.



Figure 8. Beba's extra post.

Although these two poetic entries were not part of the requirements set by the professor who taught the course, they are relevant for the exploration of gender and its manifestations on the weblogs' textual component. Yesi's post in particular serves as an indicator of her own subjectivities as an individual. In the first stanza of this poem Yesi explains that every day and every minute is different in terms of what it offers to the individual. Then, she makes reference to daily "confusions," "good moments" and decision making. In this sense, Yesi is reflecting on how every day provides new opportunities for reinventing herself and dealing with joy and

frustrations. Yesi concludes her poem by claiming that “we are in constant process of change.” What is most interesting about Yesi’s poem “THE CHANGES” is that she is aligning herself with feminist poststructuralist tenets about the individual and its subjectivities. She is arguing that every day provides a different set of chances to live life. She is making evident that she believes in the reshaping of her identity and the complexity of her own subjectivities.

Then, Beba’s short poetic verse, although borrowed from a Latin American author, is a great example of the ways in which this female blogger represents herself through text. Although Beba wrote her required entries in English, she chose to write this extra entry in Spanish. This entry is a statement that the language through which she gives meaning to her experiences is Spanish. Beba’s entry is also an indicator of her passionate and emotive personality. The smileys that accompany this verse, a set of lips and a heart, complement its content.

Timing of bloggers’ postings. Yet another area of the bloggers’ postings that yielded interesting results was the time at which bloggers published them. The professor requested students to publish five postings by different assigned dates, which entailed that students had to go to their weblogs a minimum of five times. Nonetheless, only one blogger, Lela, met this requirement; the remaining eight bloggers who published postings followed a schedule of their own. Some bloggers published a minimum of two postings a day while others posted a maximum of four postings on the same day. During the interviews I asked Matete why she had published all her postings on the same date and she responded “*pues como que cogí el tiempo para hacerlo, como que aproveché.*”¹⁰² Table 2 provides a detailed account of the times in which each blogger logged in to publish its postings.

¹⁰² “Well, I took time to do it, I took advantage of it.”

Table 2

Timing of Bloggers Postings

Lela	Bez	Daniel	Beba	Yara	Chiquita	Matete	Yesi	Alberto
3/3	3/4	3/4	3/4	3/19	3/18	3/26	3/31	3/13
3/10	3/21	3/13	3/25	3/19	4/20	3/26	3/31	4/7
3/23	3/23	3/25	3/25	3/23	4/20	3/26	4/28	4/7
3/31	4/14	4/8		4/1	4/20		4/30	4/7
4/6	4/14	4/8	4/14				4/30	4/7

Note. The number under the bloggers' names indicate the date in which each posting was published. The dates follow the format of day and month. Spaces in blank signify an entry that was not completed.

The timing in which the bloggers in my study published their entries correlates with the experiences reported by Buffington (2007) and Dawson (2007) in their respective graduate courses. Similar to Buffington's class, the participants in my study posted several times a day to meet quotas. To illustrate, Matete published all of her entries on the same day, while Alberto published a record of four entries in one day. In this sense, the findings of my study arrive at a parallel to Dawson's experience as well; my participants would log in, post and not return until they were obliged to do so.

Number of postings by gender. As mentioned earlier, in the section "Weblogs in the English language classroom," 16 participants created a weblog for the course. Departing from the minimum number of postings required by the professor, which were five; the total number of postings including all weblogs should have been 80. However, by the end of the semester the total number of entries added up to 49 postings. Females' weblogs comprised 38 of those postings while males' weblogs contained 11 postings.

In brief, it is evident that female bloggers demonstrated major participation in the weblog component of the class. Overall they wrote more postings than the male bloggers, were the only ones to publish extracurricular postings, and had more weblogs that included the required amounts of postings. Likewise, in terms of the participants' engagement with the blogging process, which entailed its personalization, female bloggers showed more commitment towards this practice. While most male bloggers preserved their weblogs in their original layout, most female bloggers incorporated colors schemes, and themes.

Chapter VI: A Micro/Macro Portrait of Participants' Discourses across Contexts

In this chapter, I summarize the major findings of the analysis of the participants' discourses in the English language classroom and their weblogs. Also, I provide both a micro and macro level comparison of how the participants' discourses transcended and digressed across settings. These analyses are followed by their implications for educators, a consideration of the limitations of my study and a series of suggested threads for future research.

Participation in the Classroom

Based on the definitions of classroom participation provided in Chapter IV, which include both conventional and unconventional modes of classroom participation, we can conclude that both females and males participated in the context of the classroom. However, female participants were more inclined to sanctioned and traditional modes of classroom participation such as requesting help and consenting to share while males found affinity with non-traditional modes like using humor and engaging in side conversations. This variation of modes across populations shows that female participants more readily adopt the accepted behavioral guidelines of this environment while male participants found strategies for participating on their own terms.

Although most participants devised ways in which they could participate in the learning process that occurred in the classroom, there were instances of lack of participation as well. In regards to the female participants they did refrain from participating in certain occasions but this was not in a significant amount. However, the majority of the male participants were characterized by their constant unwillingness to share with the class and by the production of specific types of distractions, such as: the use of technological devices, the production of disruptive talk and the enactment of body movements like sleeping in class. Overall, male

participants dominated the sphere of lack of classroom participation. This is parallel with claims made by scholars such as Nielsen (2000), who argue that males are more disruptive and females work harder than their male peers in the classroom.

The analysis of the classroom observations demonstrated that gender discourses had a significant influence on the actions that were considered appropriate for female and male participants in the context of the English language classroom. These gendered formulas were not written in stone nor explicitly named by any of the participants; nonetheless, they were latent in every classroom observation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, female participants were characterized by their affinity with conventional classroom participation; they played the roles of the organized, well behaved and learned student. On the other hand, male participants impersonated the irreverent yet smart and interested student. It is relevant to clarify that even when these two modes of classroom participation were the norm for specific groups they were not the rule; there were always instances in which participants moved away from them. More importantly, there were non verbal actions that were equally performed by female and male participants in the classroom like paying attention and taking notes.

Participation in the Blogging Forum

In regards to the blogging process, there is a large discrepancy between the ways in which female bloggers and male bloggers engaged in this forum. On one hand, female bloggers published a significant amount of postings; several of them met the required amount of postings, wrote extracurricular postings and customized their weblogs with *WordPress*' themes. On the other hand, male bloggers' participation in the blogging forum consisted of simply creating an account; only two male participants published postings. Utilizing the professor's criteria, if more postings meant higher scores, then female participants were evidently dominating weblog

participation. Furthermore, this illustrates that the blogging process was an activity that achieved the engagement of the female participants but failed to reach the majority of the male participants.

In terms of lack of participation in the blogging forum, female bloggers did not engage in this practice to a significant degree. Nonetheless, male bloggers demonstrated a lack of commitment towards this forum by publishing significantly fewer postings and by preserving their weblogs in their original layout. Most female bloggers shared their personal thoughts regarding the novel; which their favorite chapter was, what they considered to be the most important events; and even their opinions about it. The majority of females' weblogs displayed a series of postings and commonly looked similar to Figure 9.

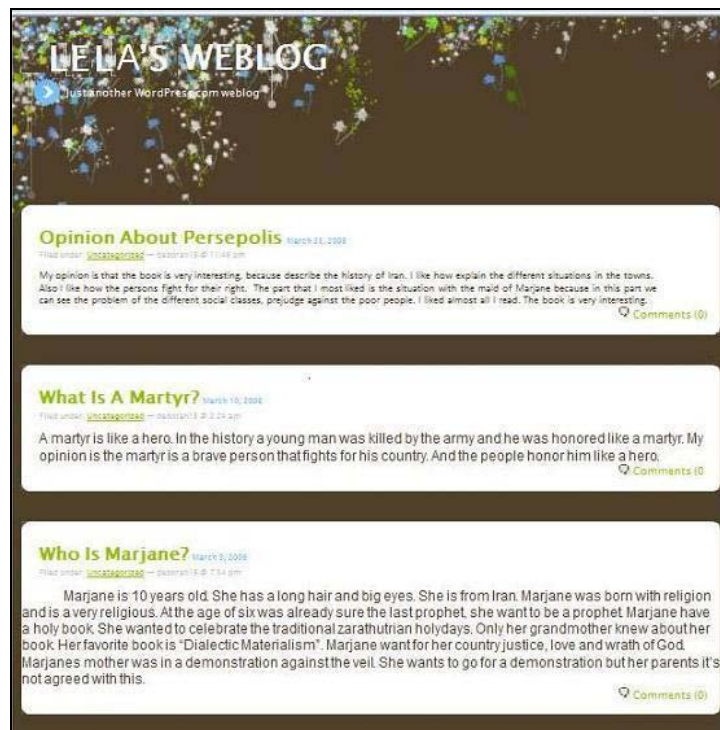


Figure 9. Screenshot of Lela's weblog.

On the other hand, male participants largely refrained from publishing their thoughts on these issues. Their lack of communication through this medium was marked by empty white

spaces and the phrases “Hello world!” and “start blogging!” Figure 10 is an example of such a weblog.

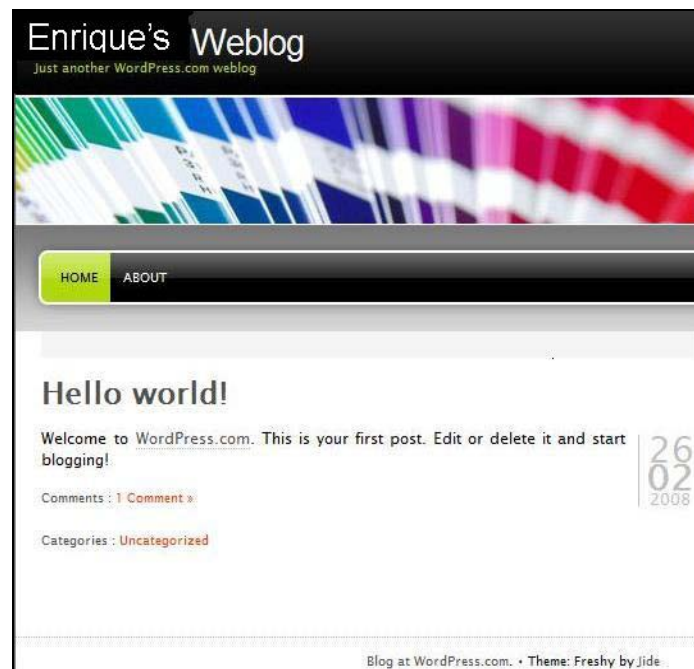


Figure 10. Screenshot of Enrique's weblog.

As I reflect on the references the male participants' made to the text that was used as basis to write the entries in the weblog, I understand that the content of the book had an adverse effect on their engagement with the blogging forum. I reminiscence on Chu's and Daniel's humorous remark on how the novel could be summarized simply as 'Marjane's life, nothing else.' In this sense, it is not surprising that they never wrote an entry in response to their reading of the novel in their weblogs. Similarly, as I asked Enrique, in a formal interview, why he had not published any entries in his weblog he claimed that he never bought the novel. The male bloggers' lack of engagement with the blogging forum supports Swain's (2005) claim that typically males refrain from engaging in practices and activities that could be considered feminine. The majority of the male bloggers did not demonstrate interest in reading nor in writing about the various events that occurred in the life of an Iranian girl.

The only male participants who did write entries in their weblogs provided their opinion about the novel in their third journal entry. In this entry, Daniel said “my opinion about of the book tat to teach the that the person live day to day. Is that to teacho live to we the that we are no in that situation. It pleases me by to teach the gives us until. Until now to liked th book.” Likewise, Alberto asserted that “is very difficult lives in one place and more yes is one boy.The family and Marjaen fiht every day two. The problem and this situation. Marjaen is abig person and human. First, i like this people because i think , this problem in my live.” Both Daniel and Alberto appropriated the delicate situations faced by the novel’s main character, Marjane, and expressed that it made them reflect on how difficult their lives could be. Daniel and Alberto were transgressing from notions of masculinity by participating in a journal like weblog to which Ratliff (2006) refers to as a feminine genre. Furthermore, they were expressing their opinions on a novel about the life of an Iranian girl, and hinting at moments of identification with her.

Another differentiation between female and male bloggers was the preference for specific written genres. Female bloggers were the only ones to incorporate another genre in addition to the personal journal entry. Two different female bloggers included poetry in their weblogs; Yesi and Beba. As point of contrast to such an extensive array of differences both female and male bloggers coincided in not following the professor’s blogging schedule and almost all of them published various postings on the same date with the exception of Lela.

A Micro Level Comparison of Participants’ Discourses across Contexts

It is relevant to perform two types of comparisons between the participants’ discourses in the English language classroom and their weblogs; one that addresses the discourses of individual participants and one that considers the entire class. Such an analysis recognizes and represents the variety of ways in which the participants/bloggers engaged in both contexts.

The observation of discourses of two participants across settings, Lela and Enrique, illustrates how in some instances participants' discourses transcended both contexts. First, Lela was committed to participating in the classroom; she consented to share her weblog with the class, completed her collaborative oral presentation even when a member of her group was absent, and was recognized by the interviewees as someone who participated often in classroom activities. Likewise, in the weblog forum, Lela published the five required postings, and she was the only participant to publish all of them on different dates; in an overall sense she demonstrated responsibility, punctuality and willingness to share her ideas and opinions in both settings.

The second exemplary participant was Enrique. Enrique attended the classroom and as mentioned in Chapter IV was regularly found sleeping in class. Moreover, the interviewees signaled him as someone who rarely or never participated in the classroom, and they also acknowledged noticing his in-class sleeping episodes. Similarly, in the weblog forum, Enrique was present since he created a weblog; nonetheless, he never wrote a posting. In general, Enrique's unwillingness to share his work, and his lack of engagement were evidenced both in the language learning process that occurred in the classroom and the blogging forum.

On the other hand, the analysis of the gender discourses of other individual cases demonstrated that in other occasions participants' engagement with the language learning process digressed across settings. For instance, in the English language classroom, Marita Estrada would ask for help, raise her hand, and even demonstrate being upset by her peers' unwillingness to participate. On one occasion, the professor asked for volunteers to come to the classroom's computer to type a vocabulary word that they did not understand and wanted to be discussed in class. Marita Estrada stood up, typed a word and remarked in a loud tone of voice

“¿*Quien más va a escribir algo?*”¹⁰³ Furthermore, she was the one participant referred to the most by the interviewees as someone who participated in the language learning process in the classroom. Nonetheless, Marita Estrada’s exemplary participation in the classroom was contradictory to her blatant absence in the blogging forum; she was one of the two participants who never created a weblog for the class.

Another participant whose discourse and participation differed across the classroom and the weblog was Beba. She was usually quiet and shy in the classroom. She was not mentioned by any of the interviewees as someone who agreed or refrained from participation in the English language classroom; Beba was the well behaved and reserved student. However, her engagement with the blogging forum demonstrated a different subject position for this English language learner. In terms of the visual component of her weblog, Beba implemented a customized theme, and added smileys. In reference to the textual component of her weblog, she wrote an extra posting and published four out of the five required entries. Moreover, she demonstrated consternation for having missed one posting in a conversation with Martillo, which took place in the language classroom. Beba’s active engagement with the blogging forum as contrast to her ‘shyness’ in the classroom confirms Oravec’s (2003) claim that weblogs can serve as a middle space in educational settings by providing students with a less formal setting to freely express their ideas. The weblog provided Beba with a space where she could share her opinions about the novel and demonstrate her English language abilities.

A micro level comparison of the participants’ discourses across contexts demonstrates that for certain participants the context did not affect their engagement or lack of engagement with the language learning process. However, it also evidences that for other participants the context determined their level of engagement or lack of engagement with the language learning

¹⁰³ “Who else is going to write something?”

process. These participants, as claimed by feminist poststructuralist scholars such as Weedon (1997) were in the process of creating their identities, in Beba's case, for example, she was the 'passive' second language classroom learner yet in the online forum she was an active and avid blogger.

A Macro Level Comparison of Participants' Discourses across Contexts

A broader analysis of the entire class illustrates one underlying discrepancy between female and male participants' discourses in the English language classroom and the weblogs. On one hand, female participants demonstrated a cross-contextual engagement with the language learning process. On the other hand, males participated in the language learning process in the classroom, yet were largely absent in the blogging forum.

As a point of contrast, such an analysis also demonstrates that there were similarities between the participants' discourses in both settings. This similarity resides in the latent presence of the participants' first language in both contexts. As evidenced in Chapter IV, the greatest majority of the quotes I used to illustrate participants' verbal activities in the classroom show their use of Spanish for collaborative tasks, and to pose questions to the professor and to myself. Similarly, in their weblogs the participants would use punctuation marks typical of Spanish such as question marks (e.g., ¿?), and would write postings in Spanish (see Figures 7 and 8). Moreover, the brevity of their verbal participation in the classroom, the fact that there were never debates or classroom discussion is reflected in the weblogs as well through the brevity of the weblog entries. Evidently the participants' proficiency in the target language and the influence of their first language was latent in both settings and affected their participation. Departing from the tenets of feminist poststructuralism, if language is the channel through which people make sense of the world, then Spanish was an essential element for the students to communicate effectively

in the classroom and their weblogs (Weedon, 1997). Even though the use of English was a requirement in both contexts, the participants materialized their identities by employing their first language whenever possible. In the classroom, the language of collaborative activities between the students was Spanish, although they would use English to submit their written work and to answer the professor's questions on some occasions. Similarly, in the weblogs, the bloggers would write their entries in English but would set their weblogs' default language to Spanish. Moreover, they would write extra postings in their first language. Due to the gendered focus of my study, I am limited to providing but an overview of this language phenomenon yet it seems relevant to include it as a faithful description of my participants' identities in the language classroom and the weblog forum and as evidence of how their discourses were materialized in both contexts.

In brief, it is necessary to account for the complexity of the individual participant's discourses across contexts to acknowledge the rich and morphing characteristics of gender discourses. As noted by Weedon (1997), this complexity in the individual participant's discourses reiterates feminist poststructuralist notions of "a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (p. 32). However, it is also important to recognize that overall there were gendered tendencies manifested in the participants' discourses in the English language classroom and the weblogs that reiterate the influences that the social construction of gender has on the ways in which the members of a classroom participate of educational settings.

Pedagogical Implications

The completion of this study provided me with various insights about classroom participation, the implementation of educational weblogs, and the role of the educator in

students' ultimate discourses in these contexts. For this reason, I reflect on the impact that the findings of this study could have for the teaching of English as a second language, and the integration of online platforms such as weblogs in educational settings.

An area of education that was challenged in my study was educators' perceptions of classroom participation. The findings of my study suggest that our own definition of classroom participation with its traditional manifestations is not the only valid one. The students I interviewed argued that participation could entail studying for the class, completing the assignments, and paying attention. Most of these actions we cannot see materialized in our classrooms but for these students were valid ways of demonstrating that they cared about the class. What intrigued me about students' main definition of classroom participation was their understanding that the main way to participate was to answer the professor's questions. This shared ideology made me reflect on how much control we exert in the classroom, and most importantly over our students' accepted behavior in the classroom. We need to be aware that not all students comply with the traditional behavioral guidelines present in most classroom settings, and that student 'passivity' and sometimes unorthodox discourses does not equal lack of engagement with the language learning process.

As educators we strive to keep up with the technological innovations of our time and their promise of meaningful and engaging lessons. However, a series of factors must be considered so that these tools can become enablers of language learning and not obstacles in our central pursuit. One important factor is the extent to which students are included in the decision making process about the inclusion of these tools, their purpose and their weight towards students' grade. Failure to include students in these processes entail that we control what the weblog is used for, whether it is a filter blog, a forum for further discussion, or a personal

journal. Also, it means that we control when they write and what they write about. In this sense, the result is a repetition of traditional guidelines for submitting printed papers, and completing writing tasks with a slight shift of medium. It seems pertinent to consider claims made by scholars who suggest that students' engagement in blogging for a class is largely related to their freedom to interact with this medium (Buffington, 2007; Baggetun and Wasson, 2006).

Another factor that is of great importance is students' access to the necessary resources to comply with the tasks we assign to them in this medium as well as their mastery of it. Although we like to think that we are being creative by implementing online platforms such as weblogs we cannot assume that all our students have access to a computer at home. Furthermore, the possession of a computer at home does not necessarily mean that they will have access to the Internet. Supposing they do have the minimum resources needed to comply with their online tasks, there is still another issue: how familiar are students with this medium? In our intent to keep up with emerging technologies we cannot assume our students have mastered the complexity of tasks required to publish in a weblog such as: creating a weblog, navigating in this platform, typing the posting, and publishing it. A fruitful approach would be to implement a needs assessment to inquire about students' knowledge of weblogs to maximize their potential in the classroom.

One last factor that we need to consider when we integrate technological platforms such as weblogs in our classrooms is students' proficiency in the target language. Doing this will help us design appropriate tasks and fair evaluation criteria for our students. Students who have English as their second language and have low proficiency in this language might not feel comfortable with writing in a public medium. Furthermore, as evidenced in my study, students'

language proficiency might affect the length of their postings, the grammatical correctness of their entries, and even the inclusion of words in their first language or markers of it.

Limitations of the Study

As I reflect on the general picture of this study, I can identify a series of factors that may have limited the exploration of participants' gendered discourses. First, the participants' English language proficiency might have limited the ways in which they participated in the classroom. I wonder if they would have performed differently in a classroom where their first language was the medium of instruction. Second, my participants were required to participate in an online laboratory a specific amount of hours per semester. I speculate how the participants completed these hours and whether they followed the 'log-in' routine that they used for the weblogs (that of doing as much as possible in one day). Finally, I reflect on how my own theoretical framework, feminist poststructuralism, may have limited the ways in which I interpreted and described my participants' identities. Although this paradigm enabled me to explore the participants' gender discourses, it had negative implications as well. It inhibited me from carrying out a more-in-depth analysis of the participants' linguistic identities.

Suggestions for Further Research

As I conclude the lengthy yet adventurous journey of completing my first study I consider the various significant areas that could be addressed by researchers to enrich current knowledge of education, gender and technology in the context of contemporary Puerto Rico. For this reason, I provide a series of possible research topics that surfaced within my study but that I was not able to address due to my focus and proposed timeline. First, future studies could consider the extent to which the educator's preferred discourse influences what is considered sanctioned or unsanctioned behavior in the classroom. In the specific case of this classroom, one

of males' preferred discourse, the use of humor, was not 'punished' because this discourse was largely promoted by the professor. The analysis of my data showed that the professor was the main performer of incidences of humor in the classroom, followed by the male participants. Second, it would be interesting to explore the ways in which the educators' discourses and selection of activities benefits or inhibits the participation of specific gendered classroom populations. As evidenced in my study, male participants benefited from the professor's preferred discourse, while female bloggers were largely the ones engaged in the journal type weblog. Third, it would be fruitful to explore how the participants' native language is manifested in the English language classroom in daily exchanges. A productive inquiry would be to address the ways in which students make use of their first language whether this is used to interact with peers and/or educators and which are the tasks that promote the use of a specific language (English, Spanish or even Spanglish). Fourth, researchers could study the presence of the participants' native language in the use of online platforms. In my study some students made Spanish the default language of their weblogs, wrote postings in Spanish, published postings in a mix of Spanish and English, and even used punctuation marks of Spanish while writing in English. Such a study would contribute to a current illustration of how Puerto Ricans craft their identities in online settings.

I believe this study sheds light on the gendered ways in which Puerto Ricans' make use of Web 2.0 applications, and more specifically weblogs. This is an area of study that has not previously received adequate scholarly attention in the context of Puerto Rico. Recent studies in the area of weblogs, which have emerged from the fields of journalism and communication, have focused on the extent to which Puerto Ricans participate in the Web 2.0 (Feliciano Ramírez, 2008), and the effects weblogs have had in journalism (Gutiérrez Pacheco, 2007). Other studies

on weblogs in this context have focused on language; consider for example, Candelaria's (2008) study which focused on students' use of linguistics markers such as icons, and Carroll's (2008) that addressed the ways in which Puerto Ricans used Spanish and English in *Myspace*. In this sense, my study makes a significant contribution to the exploration of gender and weblogs. It demonstrates that both female and male bloggers conformed to socially prescribed notions of gender. On one hand, the male bloggers avoided a rhetorical practice that was considered feminine because of its journal-like format. On the other hand, the female participants engaged in this practice with both text and visuals. The females played right in to socially constructed notions of gender by opting for what are considered feminine accents like the color pink, flowers, and hearts, among others.

Another contribution of the gender focus of this study is its extended exploration of the ways in which gender is present and manifested in the Puerto Rican educational context. By exploring gender discourses at the college level my study adds to a large gap in the research on gender and education in Puerto Rico. It demonstrates that although the educational system in Puerto Rico is against the inclusion of gender content in the curricula, this is a phenomenon that is manifested in educational settings on a daily basis and affects the ways in which students experience the teaching-learning process. My study calls for reflection on the part of educators in regards to the selection of textbooks, and activities, and for a careful re-consideration of how our authoritarian choices may be beneficial or detrimental to both our female and male students. My study suggests that we reflect on the discourses that we make available in our classroom and how our preferred discourses may inhibit or propitiate student engagement and participation.

Furthermore, these findings call for researchers and educators to re-consider the ways in which our students' subjectivities in the classroom may challenge established constructs of what is

feminine and masculine. For instance, in my study, the female participants were positioned as the “writers” in the weblogs, while the male participants were portrayed as the “chatterers.” In this way, my findings defy hegemonic notions of feminine and masculine discursive practices.

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Wadsworth.

Appendix A

Classroom Observation Request Letter

January 17th, 2008

Dr. _____
English Department

Dear _____,

A key element of my work as a graduate student and former teacher assistant has been to encourage students to realize their academic and social potential. For my thesis, therefore, I have chosen to research the gendered dynamics in a classroom as students interact with each other as peers. Ultimately, I hope my research will contribute to the enhancement of the students' educational experience here at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez through the information gained from my study and through my work as a research assistant.

To conduct my research, I will be observing an undergraduate level English course that includes as part of its curriculum the use of a weblog. So, I am writing to request your permission to observe one section in a course that you are teaching this semester (INGL 0066). I would like to schedule these observations for sometime during the month of February of 2008. All information gathered will be held confidential and completely anonymous for reporting purposes by assigning each participant and class session a pseudonym. Participants' comments and observations will not be discussed with other study participants.

Your contribution to my study would be greatly appreciated; however you are under no obligation to participate.

Thank you for your consideration,

Zaira R. Arvelo Alicea
Research Assistant
English Department
University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez

Appendix B

Observation Protocol for Verbal Communication

- Are classroom participation and communication patterns of men and women similar?
- Who talks more frequently?
- Do particular students talk for longer or shorter periods?
- Do certain students exert more control over the topic of conversation?
- Are particular students interrupted more frequently or forcefully than others?
- Are there periods of silence or waiting that encourage or discourage students from participation?
- Are some patterns of speech more highly valued than others (assertive, impersonal or abstract styles, competitive interchange)?
- Which students, if any, communicate with less confidence as demonstrated by hesitation or “false starts,” a questioning intonation?

Observe

- Who do they talk to?
- When do they respond to teacher’s prompts?
- When do they fail to comply with teacher’s prompt?
- When do they initiate contact with the class?

Appendix C

Observation Protocol for Non-Verbal Communication

Consider the following as an important dimension of language that can also indicate students' gendered participation in a classroom setting:

- Kinesics- face (e.g. gestures, smiles, yawns, eye contact, averted eyes)
- Body movements (e.g. posture)
- Proxemics- (e.g. use of space, and territoriality)
- Seating arrangement of the class: (e.g. who sits next to whom, students' arrangement for group work)

Appendix D

Observation Protocol for Students' Weblogs

Visual Analysis

- Are there any images included in the weblog? (e.g. picture, video, smiley)
- Where are these located?
- What is the name of the weblog's layout or background?
- Are there any color schemes or themes?

Textual Analysis

- What is the title of the weblog?
- Is there a motto, slogan, quote in the weblog?
- What are the themes that foster students' posts?
- Where is the text located?
- What type of font is used? (e.g. color, size)

Content Organization

- What is closer to the top of the weblog?
- What is given more emphasis? (e.g. bigger size, front layer)

Appendix E

Protocolo de Entrevistas

La siguiente lista de preguntas será utilizada como punto de partida para realizar las entrevistas con los participantes del estudio. Este documento puede ser sometido a cambios a medida que surgen descubrimientos o eventos de importancia durante la investigación.

Preguntas Introductorias

- Nombre, concentración, año de estudio.
- ¿Es esta la primera vez que cursas Inglés pre-básico?

Experiencias de los Estudiantes en el Salón de Clase

- Reflexiona por un momento en las interacciones en el salón. ¿Quién participa más a menudo? ¿Quién participa raramente? ¿Qué actividades o tipos de lecciones prefieres? ¿Cuáles son más beneficiosas para tu aprendizaje en la clase? ¿Cuáles te perjudican más? ¿Por qué?
- Reflexiona en actividades grupales. ¿Con quién normalmente trabajas? ¿Por qué? ¿Qué opinas del trabajo en grupo te agrada o no? ¿Por qué?

Experiencias de los Estudiantes en el 'Blog'

- ¿Habías utilizado un 'blog' antes? ¿Si es así, con que fines? (e.g. entretenimiento, educativos)
- ¿Te fue fácil o difícil crear tu 'blog'? Explica.
- ¿Te agrada escribir tus 'journals' en el 'blog' o preferirías entregarlos impresos a la profesora?
- Háblame un poco del aspecto visual de tu 'blog'. (e.g. fotos, colores, videos)