

## Teaching English in a Mexican intercultural university: analyzing teacher discourses and practices from ELF perspectives

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show how English teachers have integrated the concept of interculturality and how they have affected the teaching of English in an intercultural university in southeastern Mexico. Based on the contributions of the ELF approach, biographical interviews with five English teachers were analyzed to explore their discourses on the educational model and its relationship with the sociocultural context of the Yucatan Peninsula. Interviews were analyzed through discourse analysis and three categories were obtained by which teachers make sense of their current professional practice: (1) the creation of intercultural relationships, (2) the interculturalization of ELT, and (3) discursive tensions towards an intercultural approach. Different positions and definitions about interculturality and its implications in the English classroom were found. Through an ELF approach, emphasis is placed on taking advantage of the diversity present in the classroom to develop intercultural awareness. It also explores the need to pay attention to communicative needs rather than continuing with traditional communication patterns and developing critical thinking in their students.

**Key words:** English as a Lingua Franca, Intercultural Education, English language, Teacher discourses, higher education.

## La enseñanza del inglés en una universidad intercultural mexicana: discursos y prácticas docentes desde los enfoques ELF

### Resumen

El propósito del artículo es mostrar como los docentes de Inglés han integrado el concepto de interculturalidad y como lo han adaptado a la enseñanza del inglés en una universidad intercultural del sureste mexicano. A partir de las aportaciones del enfoque ELF, se analizaron entrevistas biográficas a cinco docentes de inglés para conocer sus discursos sobre el modelo educativo y su relación con el contexto sociocultural de la Península de Yucatán. Las entrevistas fueron analizadas por medio de un análisis del discurso y se obtuvieron tres categorías por las cuales los docentes hacen sentido de su práctica profesional actual: (1) la creación de relaciones interculturales, (2) la interculturalización de la enseñanza del inglés y (3) las tensiones discursivas sobre el enfoque intercultural. Se encontraron diferentes posiciones y definiciones sobre la interculturalidad y sus implicaciones en el salón de clases de inglés. A través del enfoque ELF se pone el énfasis en el aprovechamiento de la diversidad presente en el aula para desarrollar una consciencia intercultural. También se explora la necesidad de prestar atención a las necesidades comunicativas en vez de continuar con patrones de comunicación tradicionales y desarrollar el pensamiento crítico en sus estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** Inglés como Lengua Franca, Educación Intercultural, Lengua Inglesa, Discursos Docentes, Educación Universitaria.

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## Introduction

Intercultural universities in Mexico have been professionalizing indigenous and rural youth for more than a decade within a culturally and linguistically relevant educational model. These institutions represent a promising innovation in higher education, but more importantly, the initiative brings higher education closer to social groups historically excluded from it (Mateos and Dietz, 2016). At the very least, the creation of these universities since 2003 has made possible to highlight the historical debt Mexican State has with its indigenous population in terms of consolidating higher education. Although there is a variety of intercultural universities with different characteristics and educational models, the official education system, through the *Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (CGEIB for its acronym in Spanish)*, the department in charge of the intercultural and bilingual education in Mexico, defines interculturality as a “transversal axis in teaching and learning that recognizes, values, and fosters plural identities, knowledge, and local practices without prejudice” (CGEIB, 2014: 5). Based on its epistemological, linguistic, and ethical framework, the educational framework sought to develop collaborative and horizontal relationships that favor a harmonious coexistence of different cultures.

With the creation of the CGEIB in 2001, the federal government aims to redefine educational policies towards indigenous people as part of a new chapter in the relationship between the State-nation and these populations. This initiative has been the target of criticism from indigenous communities and researchers because of its ambitious goals, the operationalization of partial and biased notions of culture, or just because it disguises the continuity of a welfarist policy with international discourses on human rights as affirmative action (Hernández-Loeza, 2016). Despite the different stances about this initiative, its implementation has brought a series of reflections on the impact of higher education and its relevance to global and regional challenges indigenous people face. In this sense, intercultural universities became a unique space where tradition, rural-Indigenous communities, and expectations of students and their families meet higher education as a feasible pathway.

The idea of these universities standing between the boundaries of scientific and disciplinary traditions, regulations, standardization, and neoliberal knowledge dynamics, places them in a space of permanent conflict and tension (Galán and Navarro, 2016). One particular element that appears to be left out of the most frequent and widespread discussions of this educational system has to do with the presence of the English language in the curriculum (Ramírez, 2017). Intercultural universities have indeed integrated into various ways English language learning as part of a professionalization path for their students. In doing so, they should define and implement an intercultural teaching perspective that articulates students' needs and realities into their educational model. Then, the aim is not only to develop linguistic competencies in the students so they can perform in environments where English

is required (for professional, academic or personal needs) but to cope with linguistic ideologies related with the poor valorization and use of indigenous languages by mainstream Mexican culture and government agencies, racism, and marginalization of indigenous peoples. This “ecology of pressures” (Velázquez, Terborg y Trujillo, 2021) has forced indigenous communities to abandon their mother tongues and to embrace monolingualism (in Spanish) as a norm. In some cases, even aspire to learn English which has greater status and possible economic retribution.

In Mexico, English is a language that is not usually spoken as a second nor even as an official language at intra-communal level. However, it has now become more present than ever before in current internationalization policies of higher education, global domains of culture and communicative platforms such as social media. This is the case of an intercultural university located in the South-east of Mexico, near one of the most famous tourist destinations worldwide: The Riviera Maya. This region stands out because of its sociolinguistic conditions where a third of the population speaks a variation of Mayan language, having Spanish as a dominant national language. English has a significant presence due to tourism and its border with Belize, a country that speaks a variation of English and multiple local languages. This article explores the case of *Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo* (UIMQROO, for its acronym in Spanish), which has been particularly successful in providing differentiated provision for rural and indigenous communities (Rosado-May, 2017). UIMQROO works with a pedagogic model that recognizes the socio-cultural context of the Yucatan Peninsula, so Mayan language and culture are fundamental to the university identity.

Due to the status of the English language in the region, it is necessary to take a plural approach that allows the understanding of local realities, but at the same time global dynamics, values, practices, attitudes, and representations of people and languages related to the research. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspectives may help in that regard because it centers the attention on the speakers and the communicative needs of the interaction (linguistic and non-linguistic), and not in normative patterns of speech, expected interactions and participants. These elements articulate each other in a specific context, often characterized by tension, inequality, and negotiation, and produce a unique configuration of linguistic exchanges and communication practices (Jenkins, 2015; Cogo, 2018).

This case study comes from a PhD thesis on educational research that confronted the political and official discourses of interculturality and the implementation of intercultural practices in English language teaching (ELT). This research was carried out with a biographic-narrative methodology where life-stories are at the center of the analysis. The particular interest of this article is to examine how ELF-informed research can contribute to analyze in a more comprehensive fashion, multilingual English classrooms in higher education. Due to the characteristics of the research

context, it seemed necessary to incorporate this perspective to understanding the way English has influenced social dynamics and communicative practices in the Yucatan Peninsula.

As an exploratory study, it aims to show how important is to address these contexts with critical and conscious assessment for building upon local knowledge. One significant aspect of this case is to broaden the scope of sociocultural contexts on ELT and to expand the body of ELF-informed research made in Latin America. As this area will be explored further below, there has been a growing interest in this area in countries such as Colombia, Brazil and Mexico (Macías, 2010; Gimenez, El Kadri and Simoes, 2017; Ronzón, 2019). Although, most contributions come from regions different from Latin America, ELF-informed understandings of English may not necessarily illustrate speakers' appropriation of the language, communication attributes, and communicative resources and strategies in this continent. The purpose of this article is to show how teachers have integrated the concept of interculturality and how it has affected their teaching working at an intercultural university, and particularly in a EFL classroom.

### **Intercultural universities and English language policy in Mexico**

Indigenous people and other marginalized communities in Latin America have been the target of multiple initiatives and policies created by governments to manage (at the very least) the continuity of such cultural and linguistic diversity in their territories. An example of these control efforts would be the official indigenous education systems with an assimilationist perspective (Mato, 2018) in history. Those education systems have imposed hegemonic cultures on indigenous peoples that led to an expansion of monolingualism in Spanish and the adoption of nationalist values, world views, and practices.

In Mexico, the latest phase in indigenous education system integrates an intercultural perspective that complies with the provisions and suggestions of international recommendations, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN General Assembly, 2007) regarding indigenous languages, cultures, and cosmovision. Article 14° of the declaration reaffirms that "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning" (UN General Assembly, 2007: 13). Increasing access to higher education has been part of the recommendations from international organizations to Latin American States since the beginning of the twenty-first century as part of the globalization of the educational agenda.

It seems that these recommendations are based on the continuous growth of human capital prepared in specific competencies and qualifications acquired only throughout college. That is why higher education policy in Mexico has pushed initiatives to close the national gap between enrolment ratio and available seats in public universities (Mendoza-

Rojas, 2015). With this situation, it is possible to understand how current neoliberal policies redefine internationalization and commercialization of higher education as a mean to distance it from the notion of public good (Carrasco, 2021).

Although this has been an important improvement, there are still inequities in terms of educational coverage across states, social groups, ethnic and cultural background, skin color, or geographical contexts. The scenario of indigenous people enrolling at a university is an example of the education gap. There are 15.7 million people that identify themselves as indigenous. That number represents 14.86% of the total Mexican population (INEGI, 2016). It is important to highlight that less than a half speak an indigenous language (6.9 million) and most of that population lives in rural regions. It is estimated that only 1% of the total student population comes from indigenous regions. It is in this unequal field that intercultural universities were established.

### **Origins of intercultural education in Mexico**

Interculturality has had its own particular trajectory in each country due to the concern of nationstates for "*la presencia de minorías étnicas y/o culturales o del establecimiento de comunidades migrantes en sus territorios*" [the presence of ethnic and/or cultural minorities or the establishment of migrant communities in their territories] (Dietz and Mateos, 2011: 22). In Mexico, but also throughout Latin America, "el problema del indio" [the problem of the native] (Ibid: 61) has been the cornerstone in the construction of intercultural education. Through the following review, it becomes clearer that the development of this concept situated within the boundaries of ethnicity and linguistic diversity.

The creation of an intercultural higher education system constitutes a response to the demands of indigenous groups in Mexico that gained recognition and visibility in the mass media since the emergence of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* [Zapatista Army of National Liberation] during the 90s. Schmelkes (2013) finds three particular demands regarding education at that time: access to linguistic and culturally relevant education; recognition of indigenous cultures at a national level, and autonomy to design, implement and evaluate their own educational systems. These demands were not properly solved by Mexican government and were left out of the conversations and negotiations. It was not until the end of a 70 years-long regime of the *Partido de la Revolución Institucional* that the conservative party integrated some of these indigenous communities' demands in its government plan but ignored those related to autonomy and self-determination (Olivera and Dietz, 2017). At the beginning of the 21st century, some changes were made in the Constitution related to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country to protect indigenous rights. In practice, political structure and economic development still perpetuate inequalities, particularly to indigenous communities.

CGEIB in 2001 introduced a federal program to create universities in rural and indigenous regions to facilitate the schooling of their youth and to "*formar profesionales e*

*intelectuales comprometidos con el desarrollo de sus pueblos y regiones*” [professionalize intellectuals committed to the development of the indigenous communities and regions] (Ortega, 2014: 60). The first university was inaugurated in 2003 and due to the impulse of this program at the state level, today we find six-teen of them across the country.

In 2006, UIMQROO emerged as a joint effort of local scholars and activists that saw an opportunity in this federal program to foster projects in favor of Mayan culture and language in their region. Being funded by the CGEIB, it requires to follow the statutes that government agencies dictate. Although, the federal program suggest that these universities should contextualize the CGEIB’s intercultural model to correspond the characteristics of the region (Casillas and Santini, 2006). With that in mind, the Yucatan Peninsula presents a very complex sociolinguistic context where English language fulfills a key aspect in the economy of the region due to tourism. That is the reason why UIMQROO integrates English language as one of its linguistic pillars used for professional development and academic achievement. Other intercultural universities in this program include in their syllabuses ELT but with different mechanisms and strategies. Although, all universities share that students and teachers have to overcome the poor and inconsistent efforts in ELT coming from federal and state programs in previous levels of education to create materials, to train teachers and fulfill students’ needs among other issues (Hernández and Sima, 2015).

### English language teaching in public education

In Mexico, English language has increasingly gained prestige in national policies in recent years. In 2011, English language was even considered as a second language that should be integrated in primarily and secondary education curriculums (Mendoza, 2015). Before that, English language had a minor presence in secondary education according to local authorities and not within a single national strategy. This change in educational policies brought different implementations, first in a few states as pilot of the model. Then other states followed. In this regard, Fierro and Martínez (2024) argue that despite the efforts, there was no consistent language policy on foreign languages due to lack of teachers and materials, and that the only aim was to (discursively) insert the country into the global economy despite the results.

In Mexico, due to the lack of systematic supervision within educational policies, it is not possible to cover all possible appropriations on interculturality. However, the English National Program in Elementary Education (PNIEB, for its acronym in Spanish) incorporated the concept as part of the knowledge required in the social practice of language that students must develop (PNIEB, 2010). The program states that learning a language is an inherently intercultural process since it involves contact and interaction with others; knowledge and experiences exchanging; and awareness of one’s own culture and that of others. Therefore, interculturality is considered a state of relationships generated throughout the interaction. Secondly, interculturality in ELT is also used a

tool for building a better understanding of the ‘others’. That is, through the process of learning English, it is intended to generate positive attitudes towards language learning and foreign cultures.

These essentialist and dichotomous understandings of culture and identity can be found in multiple international organisms, such as the United Nations or the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, that latter became a referent for national governments. Here, I do believe in a more complex definition of interculturality that relies on political disposition and willingness to face current inequalities that converge in human differences: ethnic, cultural, sexual or religious. Current approaches in ELT have included a more situated and complex understanding of the concept. One example would be Will Baker’s (2016) elaboration on intercultural communication that reevaluates the relation between language, culture and identity with an English as a Lingua Franca perspective. Interculturality then integrates a more fluid take on identity where languages play a central role.

An important issue that should be pointed out is the lack of visibility of how the intercultural approach has been implemented in rural and indigenous contexts. The literature review produced by the National Association of Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES for its acronym in Spanish) revealed a gap and a lack of research in contexts of significant cultural and linguistic diversity (Ramírez, 2017). As we can see in Ramírez-Romero, Reyes y Roux (2022), there is a tendency among researchers to address and describe ELT practices in urban socio-educational contexts. I do not mean that the documented research shows no presence of such diversity in classrooms, but at least, authors do not emphasize it at all. The situation is problematic in the sense that it homogenizes the panorama of foreign language teaching in Mexico and does not make visible the product of the cultural and linguistic fabric represented by students whose first language is an indigenous language or who are already bilingual (in Spanish and other national language). Therefore, further work needs to be done to examine the contrastive elements offered by these contexts.

### Intersections of English language in the intercultural higher education system

CGEIB contemplates English language learning, primarily, as an academic tool. In the official intercultural model of universities, English language is part of the basic training area offered during the first year of studies. Although CGEIB promotes a specific structure of curricula about language and educational policies or institutional management, English language is described as: “an instrumental language and an essential tool to understand language and master the use of modern communication technologies that facilitate the students’ access to worldwide reference materials” (Casillas and Santini, 2006: 180).

Due to the lack of awareness (if not interest) and research on these multicultural and plurilingual contexts

related to ELT, there is little room for those English teachers working in intercultural universities can do to contribute to national or even international debates on this subject. Bertely, Dietz and Díaz (2013) also criticize another ANUIES state-of-the-art review that pays no attention to these contexts, even though it aims to present how intercultural education and bilingual education have been implemented for the last couple of decades. The volume limits itself to specify that foreign languages have no place in it, only publications related to intercultural and bilingual education system (Rebolledo and Miguez, 2013).

In both state-of-the-art reviews, there is no evidence of research that highlights the multicultural and plurilingual component of intercultural universities in Mexico within a n English language classroom. Nonetheless, something that can provide some insight into what is happening in indigenous and rural communities is the evidence coming from different educational levels. In this regard, López-Gopar (2013) argues that English has reached indigenous communities in the state of Oaxaca through public education, mass media, business, and migration to the United States. This has led to the existence of an ideology about languages that gives English language a more important status than Spanish and indigenous languages for social mobility.

López-Gopar and Clemente (2012) identify three principles that establish starting points for rethinking the educational approach in English teaching and that allow establishing new relationships and identities in these contexts: (1) teachers must recognize that students are active subjects in their learning and they have previous knowledge to share, (2) they must unveil discrimination and be co-participants in social transformation processes, and (3) generate opportunities for intercultural encounter and recognition between students and teachers through horizontal dialogue.

A further element to consider in pedagogical approaches for indigenous students is the territorialization of English and the influence of local culture and linguistic elements in the learning of a hegemonic language. León, Sughrua, Clemente, Cordova and Vázquez (2021) focus on the unique nature of the contextualized use of the English language influenced by the Spanish language and other regional languages. This approach may help to break the myth of the legitimacy of the native English speaker, the search for the “native accent”, and to shift the speaker’s perception only as a consumer.

Finally, some studies such as Sima and Perales (2015) point out that, ironically, in some cases, English language may be a tool that helps to resist the overwhelming dominance of Spanish over indigenous languages. Learning English can also mean a process of becoming aware of stereotypes about indigenous peoples. In this sense, Arzola-Franco and Arán (2023) comment that some indigenous students have been able to help their communities of origin by learning English, using it as an instrument of power in the face of social and institutional dynamics that privilege Spanish.

In the field of ELT, interculturality is generally associated with the acquisition of competencies that favor mutual understanding, harmonious relationships, and exchange with culturally different people. However, when situated in Mexico, and specifically within the intercultural universities program, other conceptual influences are also part of the understanding and appropriation of the concept and its articulation with ELT. Therefore, it seems necessary to explore the meanings that are present in the teachers’ discourses in order to know how interculturality takes presence in an educational field still under construction and the position that English teaching occupies in this space.

### **UIMQROO and the presence of English language at the Yucatan Peninsula**

The context of the study articulates a history of indigenous and rural regions with the integration of global processes linked to the economic sector. The dialectic interaction between the local and the global produces a unique space where indigenous people live between the margins of these two worlds, not in a fragmented fashion but continuously signifying communication codes and social dynamics relevant to their ways of life.

The Yucatan Peninsula encompasses three states: Yucatan, Campeche, and Quintana Roo. In the latter, is where UIMQROO is located: in a small town called José María Morelos, one of the poorest in the state of Quintana Roo (Navarrete, Olvera and Pérez, 2012). The region is marked by the presence of a large cultural and linguistic group: The Mayan. In territorial terms, the Maya culture extends over an area of more than 35,000 km<sup>2</sup> covering other Mexican states such as Chiapas and Tabasco, but also extends to Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras.

Today, the Yucatec Mayans are the second largest indigenous group in Mexico, surpassed only by the Nahua population. They are approximately 1.5 million people and represent a little more than a third of the total population of the Yucatan Peninsula (INEGI, 2016). Along with the ethnic character of the peninsula, great economic and social inequalities underlie the historical and colonial processes of discrimination and racism by Mexican State are still reflected in the labor stratification, the low level of schooling, and/or the high degree of marginalization of the communities categorized as indigenous. Although indigenous people are not reduced to rural areas, there is a correlation between the indices of marginalization, poverty, and vulnerability, and these spaces. In this case study, most students arriving at UIMQROO come from small towns in the area.

### **Linguistic diversity in the Yucatan Peninsula**

The sociolinguistic panorama of the region tells us there is a dominant language (Spanish) that has been promoted by government policies and education. This language is used in commerce, school, media, government Institutions, as well as the main communicative code to establish relationships in the Mexican Spanish-speaking society. Mayan is the second

language with the greatest presence in the Yucatan Peninsula due to its strong relationship with Mayan identity and the local practices. Despite the existence of national and state policies in favor of indigenous languages in Mexico, some authors point out that most programs undertaken from these political efforts have not had the intended effect (Guerrettaz, 2020). What is certain is that the process of acquisition and preservation of Mayan is diminishing. There are fewer spaces that require Mayan language without being the target of discriminatory practices and prejudices. The school system is not the exception.

It is not surprising that there is a correlation between Mayan language acquisition and the number of schools in the region that do not attend the students' linguistic needs. Taking into account the percentage of the indigenous population that inhabits the peninsula (approximately 38%), the number of indigenous schools does not correspond to the total number of elementary schools in the peninsula (only 10% of elementary schools). This unequal ratio shows us how indigenous education system is far from providing a culturally and linguistically relevant education to these indigenous populations (Ramírez, 2017). In the case of higher education, UIMQROO is the only one of its kind in the region, and thus the only institution that takes into account the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the local populations through an intercultural perspective.

The Yucatan peninsula is also characterized by a significant presence of English language, mainly in touristic destinations such as the Riviera Maya. The Riviera Maya is a touristic project that emerged in the early 70s as a strategy to populate and develop the Mexican Southeast, which was led by domestic and foreign investment groups, together with the state and federal government. Within the complex panorama of the position of English in the Yucatan Peninsula, two factors are essential for understanding how language works. First, English is part of the elemental composition of the tourism industry and the provision of services in large areas with natural and/or cultural attractions, and it even seems to be reaching lesser-known tourist sites organized by ejido cooperatives and the communities. Second, there is also the context of returned migrants mainly from the United States, but also from countries such as Canada or Belize where English is spoken as an official language. These people bring English language to their communities of origin and transmit it to their families.

## The English language at UIMQROO Resultados.

Due to the prevailing presence of the English language in the economic and labor dynamics in the Yucatan Peninsula, as well as in the academic field, this language has become a central part of UIMQROO's educational project. English language is in a privileged position as one of its linguistic pillars, the other two being Spanish and Mayan. In

this way, English is also taught in all undergraduate programs and plays a substantial role in the university identity. It is worth mentioning that depending on the program, there is a different number of required courses of English that students must achieve in order to graduate. The university aims not only to revitalize Mayan language and culture but also to disseminate it. English language can be a useful platform to carry local knowledge, voices and demands to different spaces through the professional and academic development of its students.

UIMQROO maintains a particular discourse on its identity as an intercultural higher education institution and its relationship with the regional context. The Institution has created a discourse of appropriation and revalorization of Yucatec-Mayan culture that defines their approach to interculturality. An example of the presence of this trilingual environment can be seen in its institutional motto 'slogan' since all three appear in it: "*Ser en el mundo, ser nosotros - Wiinnikil yóok' ol kaab, jée bixo' one'* - To be in the world, to be ourselves". Languages seem to have equal importance in the institutional discourse, which also reflects a distinctive element that does not appear in other Mexican intercultural universities (Ramírez, 2017: 68). However, in practice, the equality of the languages seems to depend on the teaching context and situation.

Two aspects set the tone of the teaching/learning of English at UIMQROO. First, the relationship students create with the languages. Delgado (2009) mentions there are linguistic conflicts in students' attitudes in which they find themselves unmotivated and insecure of speaking English and also there is a devaluation of their mother tongue probably due to their educational background. In this regard, Navarrete, Olvera and Pérez (2012) explain that most students encounter, for their first time, formal English lessons at UIMQROO because the previous education systems have serious deficiencies in that regard.

It is also important to describe students' composition at UIMQROO to contextualize ELT at the university. Ramírez (2017) conducted a survey with 90% of students enrolled in 2016 which provides important data to consider: 94.9% of the students come from the Yucatan Peninsula. The remaining percentage represents students coming from other Mexican states and Belize. The presence of international students, being English native speakers, introduces new variables to consider when working with already bilingual students.

In the linguistic dimension, results showed that Spanish is the language that most students use, at least with the ability to communicate successfully in a daily basis. However, it is noteworthy that 1.7% of them consider they do not speak (or do not speak well) the language. With respect to the Mayan language, 26.9% of those surveyed say they can engage in conversation and 8.6% say they can speak English. The study concludes that 35.5% of the total number of students speak at least two languages, which is significant since relatively few

students are bilingual.

## ELF studies

ELF is a relatively contemporary phenomenon due to its interrelation with major transformations in world communication and the expansion of English language in the world, especially in the expanding circle of Kachru's model of English (1985). Although the first research with theoretical references on ELF was carried out in the early 1990s, it was not until 21st century that the number of research grew exponentially to analyze the effect of English language in today's communicative practices in different geographical contexts (Cogo, Fang, Kordia, Sifakis and Siqueira, 2021).

This theoretical and research area of study aims to transform essentialist, vertical, and homogenizing views of analytical frameworks of English language contact by exposing the complex nature of power relations embedded in speech acts and communication circuits. The boundaries between the local and the global are blurred, increasing the hybridization of cultures (Tuncer, 2023). Currently, ELF research works from three different but complementary orientations (Cogo, Archibald and Jenkins, 2019): it can be related to scenarios of interaction and communication that pay special attention to speech events, their characteristics, use, and function in social interaction. Also, it is seen as a framework to explore linguistic repertoire, strategies, and resources available to enhance intercultural communication through ELF. Finally, it is a theoretical approach to addresses the phenomenon of 'Global Englishes' which recognizes multicultural and plurilingual spaces.

ELF studies indeed emerged in cultural and social contexts different from the one concerned in this research. This approach has had a substantial development in Europe and Asia since the 1990s and was proposed by Hüllen and Knapp (Cogo, 2016). In Latin America, its development has more than 10 years old and therefore some shortcomings and lack of reflection from the continental realities of the Americas can be observed in its theoretical frameworks.

In the Mexico, the situation is not different. Few studies have focused on at least one of the three dimensions of ELF studies (Ramírez, 2017; Pérez, Martínez, Hernández, 2018; Ronzón, 2019). It is worth mentioning that its scarce presence in Mexico could be due to the trajectory that language teaching has taken in this country through language policies or the theoretical trends that some researchers have chosen to develop. This does not mean that there are no critical perspectives in English language teaching, but that they have appropriated other approaches, such as critical pedagogy, critical applied linguistics, or intercultural studies to mention a few

## Research participants, methods and analysis

This section explains how I collected data and analyzed the discursive practices that teachers display when

addressing intercultural aspects in ELT. English teachers are a central figure as spokespersons of the institutional discourse on interculturality within the classroom by articulating their teaching practice with the objectives and principles that characterize UIMQROO's teaching model. However, in practice, it conveys some challenges for teachers due to various political, formative, and ideological factors. This study set out to explore the discourses of five English teachers at UIMQROO with different characteristics, in terms of academic background, teaching experience, years of working at UIMQROO and linguistic features.

One first step in the methodology was to obtain basic information about the English teachers at UIMQROO that present diverse characteristics that influence the appropriation of disciplinary concepts and university directives. Two of them are former students. Both finished their B.A. studies at the program "Lengua y Cultura" [Language and Culture] that specializes on language professionals in different areas: teaching, language promotion, translation and linguistics. One of them belongs to the first generation of students at UIMQROO and a few years later became part of the teaching staff. The second one just finished their studies two years ago and he is currently working as a teacher. An interesting fact is that both are not only English but also Mayan teachers. They are from communities near the university and developed their linguistic repertoire in three languages (Spanish, Mayan and English).

The other teachers have more than 10 years of experience working as English teachers at UIMQROO. They studied an English Language program, so they have training in teaching, specifically in languages. Two of them are from the Yucatan Peninsula and are also proficient in Mayan. The third one is from a different state and has acquired some skills in Mayan but can't communicate at a basic level. They all are experienced teachers of English and of other disciplines. These two groups of teachers represent a half of the English teachers at UIMQROO so we can have an outline of the possibilities related to demographics. With this information we can better understand the production of teachers' discourses on their own professional practice.

Discourses are defined here as "[...] o momento integrante e irredutível das práticas sociais que envolve a semiose/linguagem em articulação com os demais momentos das práticas: fenômeno mental, relações sociais e mundo material" [an unyielding moment of articulation between social practices, involving semiosis/language with the other phases of those social practices: cognition, social relations, and the material world] (Ramalho and Resende, 2011: 16). Discourses act as regulating entities between social structures in a broader dimension and social events in a limited dimension. This enables the creation of a space for action and transformation of subject's contingent realities. In that sense, discourses refer not only to the oral production of meaning but other practices that convey meaning such as teaching practices.

Based on Fairclough's (2011) theoretical contributions, discourses may allow the construction of meanings and, therefore, subjectivities in the way of representing and acting on and in the material and symbolic world. Since it has multiple functions, "discourse can be understood as a multimodal social practice" (Rogers, 2011: 1) that shows a self-reflective interpretation of its subjectivity when the collective and individual meanings of the world collide.

The above describes an implicit function of discourses that influence other social practices, such as teaching practices. Therefore, I am interested in addressing this construct as a mean to analyze what teachers say they do in the classroom. Within the complex field in which English teachers at UIMQROO find themselves, tensions arose between the various discourses that converge in the educational space and the possibilities of action and materialization of intercultural practices relevant to the Yucatan Peninsula.

Teaching practices, carry an ideological and cultural load mediated by a specific contextual setting. Thus, the materialization of these practices shows what the processes are like, who the subjects are and how they participate, and what are the circumstances in which they are produced (Fairclough, 2011). Due to the close relationship between educational processes and language (Rogers, 2011), teaching practices can be conceived as moments of social practice that allow the dissemination and reproduction of symbolic elements in the teaching/learning processes.

The study was carried out during the pandemic (2019-2023) so it required a methodological approach that took into account the online teaching context. It was necessary to work with a methodology that allowed me to work in the distance and at the same time fulfill an Important issue in narrative inquiry: the study of social practices through discourse and experiences. For this reason, the study will integrate a biographical approach and life-stories as the main method of data collection. Since this research is based on the stories and trajectories of English teachers, it seems to me necessary to locate a methodological proposal that accounts for the complexity of the construction of the narrative discourse.

In this sense, biographical methods make it possible to delve into, analyze, and co-theorize with the subjects of study their own experiences and historical meanings of their past. The biographical method is based on two perspectives that deal with similar phenomena: life stories and oral stories. Although both historiographical traditions have similar methods and techniques, the influence of other disciplines (besides history), such as sociology, psychology and anthropology, has broadened the vision and possibilities for action. Life stories contain three substantive phases: exploratory, analytical and expressive. Each one involves distinct but not dissociated processes. These processes are based on the recovery of collective and individual experiences and memories constructed in the present.

The study was considering teachers' experiences as practices that allow us to understand the emergence and construction of intercultural teaching practices situated in the present, as well as in their context. Given the importance of the biographical sense in the research, it is necessary to use certain interpretative frameworks, as well as research methods and techniques linked to the historiographic tradition and social psychology. The main figure here is the teacher, the source of stories where a set of practices, learning experiences and meanings met to provide meaning to professional practice in an IU as an English teacher.

Unlike other methodologies with a narrative approach, the biographical method focuses on the construction of meaning through correlations, norms, and processes that structure social life around the production stories. This ethnosociological approach of Daniel Bertaux (Huchim and Reyes, 2013) privileges the understanding of meaning through its limiting factors of production. In short, at the end of the analysis, the biographical method generates an autobiographical account that involves the reflective participation of subjects to discuss at a theoretical level their own experiences, practices and experiences (Macías, 2020). This approach also generates a different attitude towards research participants by involving them in the process of constructing the meanings obtained in the stories and recognizing their contributions as transforming agents of the realities in which they are situated.

For this research was necessary to implement a method that allows to obtain teacher's discourses related to their practice, the appropriation of the intercultural teaching model, and the awareness on their student's needs and context. That is why interviews will help to obtain teachers' experiences in their own words. Biographical interviews will be used to construct life stories on specific topics and experiences during teachers' professional trajectory. Interviews integrate an articulating axis that stimulates self-reflection and the construction of facts, events, and practices in their professional trajectory that had impact at some level.

Given the tripartite proposition in the analysis of the biographical method, the interview method takes on a different character in terms of the search for information, the design and implementation of the interview, as well as the final product (narrative). According to Muñoz, Frassa y Bidauri (2018), the biographical interview stands out for the detailed texture and the subjects' leading role in the reconstruction of events by narrators who offers as much information as necessary to illustrate the transition from one event to another. Throughout interviews, events are ranked according to the importance given to them by the narrator, considering the references to those events as well as the frequency and depth of details provided. In order to maintain in secret, the name of the participants, it was necessary to use pseudonyms to code each interview for the analysis process.

The starting categories of the informal interviews



conducted with English teachers focused on the process joining the teaching staff at UIMQROO, the understanding of the intercultural educational approach, the interaction with other educational actors of the same institution and, finally, the teacher training history. However, this article centers its attention only on the appropriation of the concept. Here it was necessary to examine the narratives on the materialization of the approach in their classes, the institutional and disciplinary limitations for its implementation and the ways in which diversity is expressed and worked in the classroom. Other elements present in the guide dealt with the diversification of professional practice, the reconfiguration of ideologies about the English language or the position of its teaching within the intercultural curriculum. Elements that won't be analyzed here.

### ELT practices from an intercultural approach

English teachers have had to assimilate and translate what an intercultural approach should imply to their teaching practices through their experiences in this educational system and the positionality they build upon the socio-political context in which UIMQROO is located. Under this premise, teachers reflect on their practice with a particular way of understanding interculturality and a personal vision of articulating it to the possibilities offered by the pedagogical context, the tensions generated when interacting with other actors, the resources (material and symbolic) available to the teacher, and the teachers' subjectivity.

This section analyzes how teachers discursively construct their educational practices in teaching English, as well as the arguments that characterize them as intercultural. In particular, I will focus on the meanings attributed to these teaching practices in the field of English language teaching from an ELF perspective, which moves away from a paradigm of cultural and linguistic enrichment and instead uses a critical approach that addresses issues of justice, emancipation, and social transformation (Dewey, 2014).

### Intercultural relationships

There is a continuity in teachers' discourses that reproduce a common understanding of interculturality related to coexistence, harmonious relationships, and mutual understanding (Ramírez, 2017: 156). This is part of the very nature of the concept itself because it emerges from the contact of people differentiated by social categories. Of course, there is an important distinction we have to face when dealing with idealistic definitions of the concept between interculturalism and interculturality. The first one states the 'normative' dimension of people's encounters that takes into account principles for positive interaction. The second one recognizes that interaction can be positive but also negative, depending on how the status quo affects people (Ramírez, 2017: 179). With that in mind, interculturality depends on axiological capabilities to face existing inequalities.

These two dimensions of the concept are represented by teachers' discourses. While some teachers base their definitions on concepts such as "ideals" that should be the guidelines of people's behavior when interacting with others, there are some teachers who move away from this utopian approach that only hides the problems they have to face. Nonetheless, both recognize that there is a wide range of strategies to follow attitudes, ethos, and values that may be beneficial for creating effective and healthy relationships.

In this way, interculturality applied to the classroom is a mechanism to confront the subjective and cultural differentiation their students point out when meeting the 'others' culture and language. In other words, interculturality is a way to recognize the other as a complex subject and to approach that individual respectfully. Teachers recognize that there are linguistic prejudices in the classroom due to linguistic ideologies, the media, and people's perceptions of the status of the languages.

Particularly, there is a recurrent prejudice towards accent, fluency, and 'nativeness'. In this regard, from an ELF perspective, the use of the English language in the region (the tourism sector) is precisely characterized by the presence of multiple accents, registers, variants, and linguistic mixtures around the English language. Therefore, the search for a static form of pronunciation would be a disadvantage in the face of the complex and diverse panorama presented in the region (Ramírez, 2017).

Through discourse analysis, the study found out three general categories that have helped teachers to integrate this dimension of interculturality:

- The awareness and humanization of social relations in the school context, which encompass a shift in capitalist views on caring for others and engaging with solidarity. Teachers find it more productive to focus on the transmission of commitment to students than teaching the English language itself;
- The establishment of patterns of respect for the 'other' and the different that engages in a complex process of meeting and collaborating and finding ourselves while doing it. This means to problematize the biased notions people consume to differentiate individuals. Here, translation and mediation are fundamental tools for teachers to present and work with other cultures, and
- The redefinition of educational identities and roles helped teachers to work with students' cultural and linguistic repertoire to shift ethnocentric visions about the Mayans. Some teachers use their English class to contribute to the ethnic reaffirmation that students may need. Also, the intercultural approach created new challenges for both teachers and students to open up to new creative and culturally relevant practices and roles during the English class. An example would be the decentralization of the teacher and conveying group responsibilities in

the learning process which is an unconventional practice since usually traditional pedagogies in English teaching do not have an approach that considers the multilingual context of the classroom, in which teachers may need students' linguistic repertoire to translate and help their classmates.

After having visualized English teachers' discourses, I can mention some reflections: first, teachers tend to create identity categories that oppose each other while defining interculturality. That is, teachers delimit and position themselves in the field of identities as a resource to facilitate the understanding of interactions between different cultures. Consequently, teachers' discourses contain references to 'Western' as opposed to 'local', or 'indigenous' as different to 'Mayan'. Thus, binomial 'interculturality-ethnicity' is an element present in the teachers' discourses.

Rarely, discourses allude to conceptual references or authors to explain what interculturality represents. Instead, teachers explain interculturality based on their experiences either in the educational field in which they work or on personal anecdotes. In other words, they link interculturality to pragmatic issues rather than academic knowledge. Even so, when teachers mention references or established definitions of interculturality, they use phrases such as 'the official discourse', 'what it says on paper' or 'what they say'. Mateos (2011) finds that interculturality can also be defined according to the context in which the actors live and, therefore, the Institutional definitions of Interculturality are only points of reference, but teachers find their way when it comes to understanding the model and how to Implement It.

### Interculturalization of ELT

Since UIMQROO's educational model proposes epistemological pluralism and dialogue of knowledge as fundamental elements to achieve the institutional objectives, it seems necessary to focus on how teachers understand their practice according to their context. The study finds three attributes needed to design teaching practices based on the context at UIMQROO.

The first element would be the connections between the contents and the student. This characteristic arises from the observation and comparison of English teachers' professional experience in different workplaces. This has led some teachers to identify the opposition of concepts such as local/western, indigenous/mestizo, or intercultural/conventional. It is suggested that the programmatic contents in the classical paradigm of language teaching tend to be homogeneous, folkloric, and superficial. Instead, teachers are aware of the value of adapting teaching materials to local realities. Teachers try to use local references that students can relate to; thus visualization and abstraction are fundamental cognitive processes for students' learning. The design of a contextualized pedagogy from an ELF-informed approach would privilege the presence of cultural local references that allow students a more natural use of the language.

For some teachers, an intercultural teaching would consider the design and implementation of teaching material that resonates with the students' background. One teacher mentions:

"But there are things that students don't understand or there are words that sometimes are not very common in Spanish. In Mayan I don't know, because I am not proficient in Mayan, right? So, how do you explain them to the kids? Then, it is important how to elaborate material that involves activities, words that also make sense here too and how they can use it. For example, if you go to the market, you go and ask the price... well... you are not going to use the example of asking the price of an asparagus. There are no asparagus here. Even the way we usually ask for information is different to the examples in mainstream books." (Alberto, personal interview, april, 2020)

Teachers mention the presence of stereotypes of native speakers of English and Anglophone cultures. So, the critics go in favor of integrating the local references and representing real expressions of culture and practices of native speakers of English. Other elements present in their discourses are the analysis of the local culture in class, the adaptation of syllabus to match students' needs and the community, and the need to rethink educational patterns and Institutional processes.

The second element that emerged from the data was the assessment techniques that don't adjust to the students' rural activities or the evaluation criteria that delimits interculturality to its axiological dimension (Ramírez, 2017: 172). This shows the limits of the intercultural approach when facing the bureaucratic and traditional structures of academia and its disciplines. A teacher mentions:

"Then, we would have to review when a farmer says 'my son is ready so he can now sow the corn on his own', or when a woman says 'my daughter is ready to take charge of a house', right? Or all those trades, occupations that are not part of a formal schooling process. And then, if we transfer that experience to our practice, then we could say that there is a .... there could be an addition of local culture to this [educational] model." (Maria, personal interview, june 2020)

Another example would be the integration of linguistic features that help students' comprehension of grammatical, phonological, or semantic aspects of the English language. Due to the accidental similarities between the Mayan language and the English language, some teachers have noticed the productive use of Mayan language references in their English classes (and vice versa). Also, they mentioned that students' perception and attitudes towards their mother tongue positively changed when use in a horizontal plane where languages work together.

This situation presents an opportunity for English teachers who use the Mayan language as another resource for learning English. Rosado-May, Olvera and Osorio (2015: 9) suggested

that the processes of learning English and Mayan can foster and complement each other when needed if this approach is maintained by all teachers at UIMQROO. In Table 1, Ramírez (2017: 175 based on Rosado-May et al., 2015: 9–10) presents a list of words teachers identify as tools to practice phonetics and pronunciation. When comparing the phonetic transcriptions between the Mayan and English words, certain similarities are visible in the oral exercise. However, they do maintain some important differences, especially concerning the vowels.

**Table 1.** Comparisons between English and Mayan words phonetics.

Mayan	Phonetics	Meaning	English	Phonetics
Kool	/ko:l/	Cornfield	Call	/kɔ:l/
Jool	/ho:l/	Hole	Hall	/hɔ:l/
Pool	/po:l/	Head	Paul	/pɔ:l/
Kiik	/ki:k/	Sister	Kick	/kɪk/
Suum	/su:m/	Rope	Zoom	/zu:m/
In	/in/	Mine (possessive pronoun)	In	/ɪn/
Am	/am/	Spider	Am	/æm/
Ax	/a:f/	Wart	Ash	/æʃ/
Baak	/ba:k/	Bone	Back	/bæk/
Bat	/bat/	Hail	Bat	/bæt/
Maan	/ma:n/	To shop	Man	/mæn/
Wix	/wi:f/	Pee	Wish	/wɪʃ/
Kan	/ka:n/	Snake	Can	/kæn/

Another example of the similarities between Mayan and English is the placement of the noun concerning the adjective. There are some grammatical features between these two languages, such as the place of adjectives and nouns in a sentence. In both cases, there is the adjective and then the noun. In the sentence “The black dog” (see 1a) there is the adjective and then the noun. The case is similar to the Mayan language (see 1b), whereas in Spanish, the order tends to be inverted.

- (1) a. The black dog.  
 (article) (adjective) (noun)
- b. Le boox pek'.  
 (article) (adjective) (noun)

So, this other similarity helps students to understand grammatical rules in the English language, by contrasting them with their mother tongue. Teachers claim to have witnessed positive attitudes toward these practices in the sense of recognition, value and recognition from their students. The use of this type of element for teaching English has to do not only with the knowledge generated by the contrastive analysis of languages, but also with the openness and commitment of teachers to involve this knowledge in the teaching of a foreign

language (Ramírez, 2017: 176).

The process of contextualizing teaching practice is, therefore, an act of recognition and respect for difference. It seems that incorporating characteristics of the local context also generates processes of revalorization of local culture and languages, which would mark a significant gap towards the homogenizing tendency of official education.

The third element would be the promotion of multilingualism in an ELT classroom. This means not only to recognize the linguistic background of their students and to foster their repertoire separately, but to complement each other’s literacies in the same teaching practice. Some teachers have realized that when exploring the English language, students tend to use their full repertoire to make sense of instructions and classmates’ interactions. They use their knowledge of/about the languages to express what they want, which sometimes is not as easy as it seems, to ask students to ‘think’ and translate into English what they meant.

Other teachers deem it necessary to encourage students to explore other varieties of English to foster a multilingual environment. Indeed, the languages in the classroom are mainly three: English, Spanish, and Mayan. Although the number of Belizean students at UIMQROO is increasing, teachers may need to problematize how they are conceptualizing the language. A teacher said:

“Another way to work on it [interculturality] is with vocabulary. There is a lot of vocabulary [in the region] that is not so common in English-speaking countries. What I do then is to look for information from a closer country with more common elements, such as Belize. For example, there are fruits that ask me ‘hey profe [teacher], how do you say that fruit in English?’. And I don’t know because there are no such fruits in those English-speaking countries. So, what I have to do is to search. I have to contact my friends in Belize and they tell me its name, at least the name they give it in Belize in English. So I think we are also trying to make it a little bit different, and a little bit more contextualized because English is so global.” (Roberto, personal interview, december, 2020)

Some teachers integrate English words and expressions from Belize where there are some resemblances in the culture and the geographical location. Multilingualism is not only encouraged inside the classroom, but also outside, where teachers exert a certain influence on the use of languages by example.

### Discursive tensions towards an intercultural approach

Finally, the last element mentioned by teachers about the intercultural adaptation of ELT is the development of critical awareness. In this regard, conflict sets the basis for becoming aware of social issues and taking action. This objective is intertwined with interculturality seen as an

instrument for awareness and transformation since it critically analyzes the social environment and proposes a platform for dialogue where the structures of domination are recognized. To this end, I find three pedagogical routes that some teachers mentioned in the search for social justice and emancipation.

The first one is the critical analysis of culture. Some teaching practices seek to develop in students a sensitivity to the explicit and implicit forms of domination found in contact with cultural elements foreign to the local culture. Some teachers find it productive to use cultural components found in the contents of the curriculum to generate reflection and confront the realities and structures that allow the reproduction of cultural, epistemic, political, and economic hegemony.

This is not only to know the other's culture and understand the deep meanings of their worldview through cultural awareness. It is meant to identify the intertwined symbolic meanings we use to make sense of our realities. The generation of cultural awareness is important because it may help students to handle themselves in diverse cultural contexts naturally and to acquire sensitivity in the process (Pederson, 2011). In the case of ELT, this requires abandoning simplistic and colonial categories (such as the idea of a native speaker or cultural authenticity) and finding relevant meanings in teaching practices. Teachers implement a different approach when addressing cultural traditions such as Halloween to find a deep understanding of the local *Janal Pixán* (which is a similar tradition to *El Día de los Muertos*) that is celebrated for the dead. This means not to antagonize the celebrations according to the student's cultural identity but to contrast and learn from them.

Another example is when in a class, an English teacher described his experience on the subway system in UK. He then compared it to the Mexican context (Mexico City) and finally focused on discussing the situation of harassment of women and the response of the capital's government to stop it. ELT can also be generated from a gender approach. That is a critical reading of the current situation of gender violence and harassment of women, the teaching of English can contribute to unveil this structure of patriarchal domination.

The second one is the integration of social issues in class debates and activities (Ramírez, 2017: 187–188). A significant character in the construction of intercultural educational practices is to approach the study of language in its historical and social context. That is, not to separate its study from the social events and phenomena that frame it, but a rejection of disciplinary boundaries and content neutrality in educational programs that only hinder the articulation of students' realities and the study of English. One teacher said:

“Well, my classes are mostly beginner levels, although I think I'm going to have a more advanced class next semester. I think I'm going to address American culture issues. So, there I can talk about racial prejudice and how there was a change during the sixties with the Civil Rights Movement and the peaceful protests. Then I can talk about

how it was that people decided to challenge the system but in a peaceful way.” (Julián, personal interview, april, 2020)

This quote expresses that exercising an intercultural practice also consists of incorporating historical elements in the teaching of English and approaching them critically according to the context in which we live. Here, the teacher tries to incorporate a social critique of U.S. history in his English classes and to contrast it with the realities of the students' lives and to see how learning can be produced beyond the strictly linguistic contents. In this regard, Kubota (2013) comments that from the perspective of critical multiculturalism it is possible to find the subtle forms of domination that are found around us. To this end, intersectionality, as a methodological approach, is a fundamental element in the pedagogical process, since without it the critique itself could fall into essentialism and sterile practice without any effect on our lives.

This interdisciplinary or “multimodal” perspective (Benchimol-Barros, 2013: 116) means transcending the structural dimensions of language and understanding its meanings through a process of reflection and critical reading of our environment. Here, some teachers bring social struggles that locals face in their daily lives, like water scares, feminist issues, or national debates that may help students to analyze the world through different eyes.

The third characteristic is that an intercultural approach allows alternative and critical discourses on interculturality itself. That means, the implementation of interculturality in pedagogical processes also allows self-reflection that leads to addressing issues within the university, the intercultural education system, or the concept of interculturality itself. Some teachers argue that students feel unrelated to the university and local issues addressed. They say students lack of voice to contribute to the solution. They say that UIMQROO is a bubble that separates them from the social injustices perceived in the communities. The intercultural discourse of the institution may lead faculty, to not complicate things, to carry out their assignments and to comply with the harmonious view of social interaction. Despite UIMQROO's model integrating a close relationship between the students' learning and their communities, some teachers argue that sometimes academic achievement comes first. In regard, one teacher said:

“We say a lot... but sometimes here is like having the same rules that in a [inaudible] school. We are an intercultural school with western pieces. Yes, but those western pieces don't change because those who control the system, come from... 100% made in Western schools and they can't change the pieces because the system falls down.” (Josefina, personal interview, june, 2020)

There is also a critical approach from students towards the university intercultural discourse because it has established guidelines and regulations for what is expected from an intercultural relationship. Teachers mentioned that

during class, some students perceive a difference between a prescriptive and bureaucratic definition of interculturality and a more conflictive and political one.

## Discussion

The official intercultural higher education system in Mexico represents a heterogeneous field of action that requires the articulation and collaboration of different actors and institutions at the national level. Heterogeneous field of action that demands the articulation and collaboration of different actors and institutions at the local, regional and national levels. On the one hand, these educational spaces require the intervention of trained professionals, but above all, aware of the regional context. Trained professionals, but above all, aware of the historical regional context and the social problems that the social problems that are hurting their inhabitants. On the other hand, it is also elementary that the governmental authorities assume their social governmental authorities to assume their social, political and economic responsibility towards these educational the maintenance of the institutions, the realization of intervention and research strategies and projects, and the intervention and research strategies and projects, as well as the development of social transformation processes derived from university social transformation derived from the university education of its young people.

In view of this situation, the teachers of the UIs are one of the pillars that make it possible to achieve the institutional objectives of culturally and linguistically relevant education, the social and economic development of the communities, as well as the construction of an ethnic conscience. To this end, within the different subjects and institutional projects, teachers would have to provide their students with the conceptual, methodological and political tools necessary to achieve these objectives. And the teaching of English would be no exception.

Through teachers' discourses, it is possible to find a diversity of appropriations on interculturality. This produces different translation and materialization practices in the teaching of English. Some of them define interculturality as mutual understanding and effective communication between cultures in favor of. Therefore, some of the teaching practices focus on the promotion of axiological elements in the search for harmonious coexistence. Other teachers understand interculturality as a paradigm shift in the way teachers perceive educational spaces based on social transformation and the development of local communities. In this sense, teaching practices focused on integrating cultural practices, knowledge, and experiences that the students themselves brought to class. This speaks of a change in the way of conceiving the roles of teachers and students, as well as their position in power relations.

Mateos and Dietz (2014: 65) comment that during this process of interpretation and constant resignification of the

'inter', combinations of sociocultural roles and identities arise. It is precisely under these conjugations that English language teachers create and identify with certain pedagogical practices, discourses and strategies that are part of a broader institutional culture. However, this process is not free of tensions and contradictions, so that the subjective interpretation of the intercultural is based on the diversity of discourses present at UIMQROO on this concept and the personal experiences in the classroom. Tensions seen as alterations of expectations in the interaction (i.e., in the exchange of meanings and values between the institution, other professors, students, teachers, and students), generates a process of identification with the institution and the educational model. In turn, this process guides the appropriation of what interculturality means, its application in the educational field, and its relevance in social context.

In the context of UIMQROO, the practices of teachers that show alignment with ELF perspectives allow a local understanding of English language learning and the representation of local realities and identities related to employability in the region. A more systematic and explicit engagement with ELF-informed ELT would represent a pragmatic advantage over teaching models that focus on a single standardized form of English and fail to meet the real communicative needs in this economic sector. An example of this would be the familiarization with vocabulary and expressions from Belize.

At the symbolic level, English would cease to be perceived as a borrowed or foreign language, which could develop processes of linguistic enrichment from the English-speaking countries to the ELF contexts and from these spaces of the English-speaking linguistic periphery to the countries that maintain control and hegemony over this language. In this way, the inhabitants of the peninsula are no longer considered consumers but now producers of the language. From this approach, the teaching of English should be methodologically, politically, and epistemologically open to the bilingual (Mayan-Spanish) context of the peninsula, to the local social practices of Mayan origin, and the existing philosophies of life of its students.

In the field of English language teaching, the study contributed to making ELF paradigm visible as a viable pedagogical and research route that is articulated with intercultural education in the Mexican context. An ELF-informed approach situates English language like a local and not an external element, which explores local forms of representation of English language and constant (inter) linguistic contact with other languages, in this case, other languages present in the Yucatan Peninsula. The discourses of these teachers contribute to debunking myths of the native speaker and the territorialization and privatization of the English language (Holiday, 2013). From this perspective, English language teaching could benefit from the symbolic and material elements found in the region and brought with the students.

From a critical approach, the pluralization of English and the search for new meanings would also be a bet on the transformation of the power structures that feed the supply and demand of languages. It is required to provoke a multi/pluri/transcultural revolution (Siqueira, 2016) to transform the structures that control the linguistic market and democratize, in turn, the identities and values assigned to this language of global presence.

In the case of UIMQROO, incorporating cultural and geographic variants that are closer to the students' realities presents a unique opportunity to appropriate new elements and re-signify linguistic attitudes and ideologies about English. The process of teaching/learning English would be based on an ethos that privileges the use of the language in regional contexts rather than pursuing social imaginaries about the economic value that has been assigned to English. Thus, these intercultural practices of incorporating and, above all, privileging forms and variants that have been left on the periphery of the linguistic market pose a change in the way of seeing languages and the power relations that keep them in certain positions.

Ortega mentions that "as an initial hypothesis, it is proposed that the university campus is the point where blocks of cultural resistance based on systematized or encyclopedic knowledge about diversity and identity recognition are developed" (2014: 46). Given this role of universities, it remains to point out that UIMQROO expresses its commitment to the communities of the region and its inhabitants. For English teachers, this element is characteristic of the intercultural education system, although in practice some elements are blurred or lost and generate in the teachers

a rapprochement or distancing with the institution.

One aspect of the research that could complement the appropriation of the intercultural teaching model of UIMQROO and the concept of Interculturality, would be the observation of actual teaching practices on sight. The possible gaps between discourse and practice would be relevant to know to what extent the symbolic elements affect their teaching, and the process of translation they carry on. Although, this exploratory study sets some possible areas of interest for further research and the landscape of meanings teachers have about concepts and approaches within the intercultural model.

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