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'Se lleva más hablarlo mal': indexicality and metasemiotic awareness among users of English as an additional language in Spanish-speaking university settings[1]

Abstract: As ELF scholars warn us against treating linguistic productions of 'non-native' English speakers as 'errors' when they are sociolinguistically-driven variation, it is necessary to investigate how speakers conceptualise, label and experience such uses themselves. This paper reports a qualitative study of the metalinguistic and evaluative practices of university students in Chile, Mexico and Spain. It explores how they ascribe (un)desirable meanings to different ways of speaking English as an additional language (i.e. indexical relations), whether these symbolic associations are seen to influence students' own linguistic use, and the extent to which such indexical relations are theorised as inherent in language form or as symbolic and negotiable (i.e. metasemiotic awareness). The analysis of more than 53 hours of elicited interview talk reveals a complex web of available social meaning relations and multidirectional accounts of the effects that such meanings have on students' linguistic and semiotic practices. Although many students display awareness of the contextual variability of social meaning-making processes (Coupland 2007), only a minority were able to directly challenge dominant indexical associations and stereotypical trait attributions. The findings underscore the need for English language teachers to understand their students' semiotic goals and interpretative repertoires, firstly to avoid discriminating against sociolinguistically-motivated variation in students' English use and secondly, to provide them with additional tools to negotiate their position as speakers of English as an additional language. The paper also reflects on the implications that these findings have for how we explain variation and attitudinal ambivalence in ELF research.

Keywords: language perceptions; social meaning-making; indexicality; metasemiotic awareness; Spanish-speaking contexts; users of English as an additional language

1 Introduction

Exploring perceptions of variable ways of speaking English – whether under the label of beliefs, ideologies, conceptualisations, orientations or attitudes – has become a highly prolific area of investigation in ELF research over the past fifteen years. The main 'boom' on ELF perceptions research followed Jenkins' (2007) publication *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. This monograph was a first major response to earlier calls to develop attitudinal studies in this field (Jenkins 2000: 234). At a time when ELF scholars were reconceptualising what counts as variation in the use of English as a lingua franca, it became imperative to understand whether users of English and ELT professionals were also 'rethinking' English speaker categories, how they perceive themselves and others, and the variable linguistic practices observable in ELF communicative contexts (e.g. Seidlhofer 2001: 152, 2011). ELF research has placed special emphasis on understanding attitudes and ideologies in settings where English is taught as Foreign Language (EFL), as these have been particularly criticized for positioning idealized 'native speaker' standards as the *only* legitimate and correct targets for imitation, and for constructing 'non-native' students who speak differently as 'failing outsiders' (e.g. Graddol 2006).

While attitudes and beliefs of 'non-native' speakers had been explored before, ELF perceptions research has a distinctively different starting point: it understands that speakers traditionally classified as 'Expanding Circle users' are not learning English to communicate with native speaker communities alone, and that they "can no longer be assumed to be deficient" (Jenkins 2007: 238) when their English

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use departs from idealised standards. These students have therefore been appropriately repositioned as speakers who can also be *remaking* "English on their own terms, according to their own needs, audiences, and knowledge of other languages" (Ferguson 2009: 124). Unlike EFL or World Englishes studies of attitudes (cf. Carrie 2017), which prioritise the investigation of established 'native or nativised varieties' in their methodological design, ELF researchers explore evaluations of the variable and non-easily categorizable linguistic practices that are observable in ELF interactions. In fact, much of this work also seeks to understand how sociolinguistic factors influence the emergence of such variation, and the extent to which perceptions, stereotypes and social meaning-making practices play a shaping role in these processes.

Although during the initial stages of ELF research some attitudinal surveys continued to frame investigations of emerging variation in terms of national or supranational 'non-native' varieties (e.g. Mollin 2006 on European ELF), most ELF perceptions scholars nowadays avoid defining and labelling 'Englishes' a priori and focus instead on the processes of metalinguistic construction and evaluation of our participants (e.g. Hynninen, 2016). This shift appears to mirror the evolution in theorising we experienced during the second wave of ELF studies (i.e. ELF2 in Jenkins 2015). As scholars' initial descriptive efforts discarded the possibility of codifying the linguistic features and norms of a new 'variety', the focus of descriptive and attitudinal work expanded towards the exploration of emerging *variability* and the communicative, symbolic and linguistic processes behind the use of English as an additional lingua franca. More recently, Jenkins (2015, 2018) also highlights the need to make multilingualism 'the' superordinate framework in the exploration of ELF communication (i.e. ELF3). This move entails paying even more attention to the full 'multilingual repertoires-in-flux' of speakers, as well as to the more-or-less visible 'permeability' of linguistic resources within them (ibid). As will be demonstrated below, this paper lends support to such a shift in perspective. The findings evidence the relevance of multilingual *and* interpretative 'repertoires-in-flux' for the linguistic and evaluative practices of users of English as an additional language, but also for how we explain such variability in ELF research.

The study of perceptions from ELF perspectives has so far been most prolific in East Asian and North-Central European contexts (e.g. Cogo 2010, Ishikawa 2017, Kitazawa 2013, Mortensen and Fabricius 2014), while the views and experiences of speakers from the Spanish-speaking world have received considerably less attention in ELF research. This is the case even though English is the most taught 'foreign' language in these contexts too (Cronquist and Fiszbein 2017, González and Llurda 2016). The existing body of attitudinal literature in these regions has mostly focused on the perceptions of English language teachers (e.g. Llurda, 2009, Ormeño and Rosas 2015, Véliz-Campos 2011) and Spanish academics (Dafouz 2018, Férguson, Pérez Llantada and Plo 2011). Although teachers are key frontline figures in the introduction of English to its 'new' users, the experiences of students are equally relevant and also deserve attention. Not only are students affected by the increasing role of English as a major gatekeeper in their life trajectories and the educational policies in their countries, but they also face pressures to achieve 'native-like' formal standards in their English use (see Section 5 and also Cutillas Espinosa 2017 for examples of Spanish press shaming English use that departs from native speaker models).

Among the few studies addressing students' perceptions of English in Spanish-speaking regions, the majority are quantitative attitudinal surveys on the role of English in local and educational settings (e.g. Chasan and Ryan 1995 in Mexico, Lasagabaster and Huguet 2006 in Spain), on its international communicative function (e.g. Kormos, Kiddle and Csizér 2011 in Chile), or surveys that measure evaluations towards specific Englishes that have been pre-defined, bounded and labelled by the researcher (e.g. Carrie 2017, Pellegrinelli 2011 in Spain). To my knowledge, there is still scarce qualitative work investigating how students in these settings conceptualise, label and evaluate aspects of linguistic variability in the use of English as an additional lingua franca themselves. While students in Spanish-speaking contexts are often accused of not speaking English 'well enough' (see e.g. EF's EPI 2019 results for the three countries under investigation), there is no sufficient understanding of how they may perceive and relate to their own use of English vis-à-vis the native-speaker standards they are expected to reproduce. Perhaps more importantly, policymakers in these settings continue to strengthen the role of English in an attempt to tackle concerns over 'poor' students' results (Lasagabaster 2017, Sayer 2018), without first analysing whether the English that is currently being

considered to be 'bad' or 'poor' may actually respond to sociolinguistically-driven variation, rather than to learning or cognitive problems.

The current paper seeks to address this gap, by investigating how Spanish-speaking university students from Chile, Mexico and Spain conceptualise and evaluate different ways of speaking English as an additional lingua franca[2] in elicited interview talk. I explore what desirable or undesirable meanings, qualities and attributes are associated with what types of English, the linguistic and communicative consequences that such meaning associations are reported to have in students' own use, and how these participants conceptualise social meaning relations themselves (i.e. their metasemiotic awareness). The latter goal seeks to comprehend whether participants feel able to challenge dominant negative social meanings that are frequently attached to 'non-native-like' English use. This study is also the first to compare university students across three Spanish-speaking national settings, to consider the possible influence that being a speaker of 'another' variably spoken language may have on the construction of said views. Rather than taking a quantitative and cognitive perspective to students' evaluative predispositions, I look at language conceptualisations, evaluations and social meaning-making practices as discursively and variably constructed phenomena.

The study shows that, in addition to the positive social meanings that had consistently been associated to 'native-like' English in earlier research (e.g. Carrie 2017, Véliz-Campos 2011), students in these settings also assign desirable connotations and identificational possibilities to ways of speaking English that depart from such standards. However, far from doing so in stable and fixed ways, the conceptualisations and evaluations of most individual participants were constructed variably throughout the interviews. I argue that, rather than concluding that these users of English are 'still' ambivalent, undecided or confused 'in their mind', they seem to be skilfully responding to locally (re)constructed symbolic and indexical norms instead. Perhaps more significantly, participants also reported that indexical relations between social qualities and perceived ways of speaking do influence the ways in which they style their English use. Hence, the 'different' English that many of these students report to speak seems to be motivated, at least in part, by identity and semiotic performance factors. Although many students displayed awareness of the multiplicity and variability that accompany evaluative practices and social meaning-making norms, only a minority were able to directly challenge status quo indexical associations. Overall, the paper underscores the need for English language teachers in these and other Expanding Circle settings to explore their students' metasemiotic awareness and interpretative repertoires, firstly to avoid discriminating against sociolinguistically-driven variation among their students and secondly, to provide them with additional tools to successfully (re)position themselves as speakers.

2 Language perceptions, evaluation and variation

Language conceptualisations, ideas and attitudes of ´lay´ speakers have for long been studied across multiple disciplines beyond ELF studies, from sociolinguistic approaches to stylization of speech, folk linguistics, accommodation and audience design studies, to linguistic anthropology and attitude research (e.g. Bell 1984, Giles 1973, Lambert et al. 1960, Labov 1966, Preston 2002, Silverstein 2003). This area of investigation has attracted extensive interdisciplinary attention because of the shared understanding that speakers' ideas about language are not just 'innocent' thoughts (Cameron 2004) held by non-experts. Instead, speakers' own ontologies of language and their metalinguistic evaluations can have a significant impact in situated communication, as well as in the construction of hierarchal structures of speakers in society and in the reproduction of inequality and discriminatory practices (e.g. Jenkins, 2014, Lippi Green, 2012). In sociolinguistics we have worked for some time with the assumption that "perception, evaluation and production are intimately connected in language variation and change" (Preston 2002: 50). In ELF research we argue that this relation of influence works for users of English as an additional language *too,* even if their agency to style speech has not always been recognized (cf. Rampton 2016). Rather than automatically assuming that any departure from taught

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[2] I deliberately talk about 'ways of speaking' to avoid pre-defining boundaries usually seen in the problematic distinctions between varieties, -lects or even between languages. The point of this study is, after all, to investigate what 'ways of speaking' are identified as such by participants themselves, and how these are talked about.

models is a cognitive or learning 'deficiency', these *differences*[3] may be explained by similar sociolinguistic processes to those driving variation for speakers associated to the 'native' label (see e.g. Cogo and Dewey 2012, Widdowson 2015).

A variety of research traditions have contributed to explaining how and when ideas about language seem to influence use. We know from early attitudinal work in 'the speaker evaluation paradigm' (Giles and Billings 2004) and from folk linguistics studies (Niedzielski and Preston 2009) that, as we use language to communicate, we make associations between linguistic features (or entire perceived ways of speaking) and certain social meanings and personal attributes (i.e. indexical relations). For example, we attach *status, prestige* and *correctness* to some ways of speaking, and *pleasantness* or *solidarity* traits to other (ibid). Linguistic anthropology studies also provide evidence that these symbolic associations can (un)consciously influence linguistic behavior and situated communicative choices (Eckert 2012, 2018), although most of these studies tend to focus on relatively stable 'speech communities' rather than on more fluid and transient lingua franca encounters. Nevertheless, there is evidence that linguistic features and styles that are noticed and evaluated in certain ways may be *recruited* or *avoided* by speakers, alongside other semiotic resources (e.g. clothing), to perform different identities in specific conversational settings (Coupland 2007, Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012). However, as scholars working on accommodation theory have shown, our linguistic practices do not just respond to our own goals as speakers, but they may also orient to our interlocutors, and to the inferences they may make from our speech in specific contexts. Speakers' expectations of imagined audiences can even have an impact on their own linguistic practices (Bell 1984). That is, in addition to immediate interlocutors, absent 'referees' and a variety of centers of authoritative norms can also be influential in speakers' linguistic design or stylisation ('policentricity' in Blommaert 2010).

While this body of work has contributed to establishing empirically that language use is indeed intrinsically intertwined with social meaning-making, identity and membership attributions, early approaches from social psychology perspectives have been criticised for their theorisation of how social meanings are related to language use. Specifically, efforts to 'isolate' social evaluations 'triggered' by linguistic forms in indirect approaches such as the matched-guised technique, have been accused of assuming the existence of a pre-defined, a-contextual, direct and linear link between linguistic features and social meanings (see Coupland 2007, Eckert 2018, Kitazawa 2013 for a critique on such assumptions and Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012 for shortcomings of deterministic and system-oriented approaches to style). Yet, as will be discussed below, the relation between desirable or undesirable social-meanings and language use is thought to be more complex and variable than that. Of course, how we understand this relation is also crucial for ELF perceptions research. If we conceive of social meanings as being directly linked to specific linguistic forms, then the expectation tends to be that a speaker should only display or 'have' a single, coherent and stable evaluative predisposition to a linguistic 'object' (e.g. Garrett 2010: 20). By extension, evidence of evaluative ambivalence would be seen either as a methodological problem (e.g. badly designed study, invalid data) or as an unusual and detrimental confusion or 'problem' for the participant displaying such ambivalence. Yet, as I indicate in Section 4, attitudinal ambivalence is very frequently reported in ELF perceptions studies, so it is worth considering how alternative theorisations of social meaning-making may help us explain this phenomenon differently.

# 3 Exploring semiotic signs and indexical relations

The nature of social-meaning making has been theorised further by indexicality studies and discursive approaches to speaker evaluations. Scholars in these fields have particularly explored the processes through which social or personality attributes and linguistic forms come to interact together, and how these arbitrary relations become 'common sense' or fade away. From these perspectives, linguistic forms are semiotic signs that may acquire different, and potentially multiple types of meanings (Pierce 1931). The semiotic relations between social meanings and specific linguistic features are not seen as

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[3] It is worth highlighting that linguistic practices observed in ELF interactions are as much about sameness as about variability. In my conceptualisation of ELF I do not seek to reinforce unhelpful dichotomies between the notions of English as a Native Language and ELF (see Sewell 2013).

inherent in linguistic forms or ways of speaking, nor directly connected to them in objective ways. Instead, they are theorised as intersubjectively and locally (re)created phenomena. In Piercean terms, rather than being 'iconic' or 'indexical' semiotic relations, [4] they are are discursively and politically constructed. That is, they are 'symbolic' social conventions that have been mediated by "ideologically constructed representations of difference" (Irvine and Gal, 2009: 375). Accordingly, speakers' ideologies of language, perceptions of individuals and of groups of speakers, and wider ideological positionings about world power structures and political economies, are not seen as external factors but as part and parcel of the construction of semiotic relations and linguistic evaluations. From this perspective, social meaning-making is best conceptualised as multi-dimensional, non-linear, variable, unstable and context-dependent (Blommaert 2014, Coupland 2007, Eckert 2018), and this is the position taken in this study.

Although the nature of these semiotic processes is best described as emergent and contextual, indexical associations sometimes become shared at wider levels and "naturalized" (Woolard 1998: 21) into stereotypical images of speakers. In consequence, "the use of a linguistic feature can become a pointer to (index of) the social identities and the typical activities of speakers" (Irvine and Gal, 2009: 375), and these widely shared meaning-relations (i.e. stereotypes) can inform the expectations and evaluations of our interlocutors. Drawing from this understanding, linguistic anthropologists have explored how arbitrary relations of meaning may go from emerging in situational contexts to becoming shared assumptions. For instance, Irvine and Gal (2000, 2009) identify three semiotic processes that commonly operate behind this kind of association and the ideological moves that mediate them: *iconisation*, *fractal recursivity* and *erasure*. Iconisation, a process under scrutiny in the present study, refers to the ideological process through which 'symbolic' social meanings are seen as 'iconic' or 'indexical', that is, as inherently defining characteristics of a specific linguistic sign or perceived variety and of the speakers that are believed to reproduce them. The arbitrary social meaning is treated as if it was physically or objectively connected to the signs (e.g. 'British English' as 'posh English'). On the contrary, erasure refers to the omission or linguistic practices that do not fit – or "cannot be seen to fit" (ibid, 2000: 38) – already simplified and essentialised images of meaning-relations and categorisations (e.g. the internal variation within 'British English' going overlooked). Erasure and iconisation often go hand in hand. Finally, I understand recursivity to be the reification of situational oppositions of meaning-relations and their fractal extrapolation onto other contexts, whether at higher or lower scale-levels (e.g. the creation of opposing divisions between and within groups, varieties or individuals' roles).

These processes often help socialise us into prejudiced or stereotypical views of language and speakers but, as Ochs (2009:412) argues, every interaction "has potential for both cultural persistence and for change, and past and future are manifest in the interactional present". This may be especially interesting in relation to users of English as an additional lingua franca because, as Hülmbauer (2013: 68) rightly points out, "the fact that there is a plurilingual dimension to ELF … involves additional meaning making potential". It is therefore of particular relevance for ELF researchers to investigate how speakers of English as an additional lingua franca reproduce, challenge or modify 'iconised' semiotic meaning associations to the variable and often stigmatised linguistic practices observed in ELF interactions, and the extent to which they may be ready to negotiate and deconstruct evaluative prejudice (cf. Zhu 2015). It is also important to remember that, while negotiable identities are likely to be "relevant to intercultural communication and ELF given the variability in such communication" (Baker 2016: 341), negotiation is not always possible or successful for the reason that identity is not an individual's "completely free choice" (ibid). In this paper I analyse whether speakers of English from Spanish-speaking university settings explicitly identify, challenge and/or (re) produce semiotic and ideological processes of this kind in their conceptualizations and evaluations of English, and the linguistic and communicative impact that these ideas are reported to have in their own linguistic use. Although the notion of 'metasemiotic awareness' has a long and complicated history in the study of metalanguage, I adapt the term from Jaffe (2016: 98) to refer to high levels of metasemiotic awareness as speakers' understanding of "processes of iconization as social and political rather than natural truths".

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[4] An example of iconic semiotic relation is how this sign ✉ is *'naturally' fused with* the image of an envelope and by extension with 'mail', whereas an indexical relation is exemplified by how a 'yawn' *points to* 'tiredness' or 'hunger' due to an observable relation of causality in the real world (Jaffe 2016: 83). Although the language-related connections I am discussing here are 'symbolic' in nature, given their character as socially-constructed, the study of different forms of semiotic relations is normally brought together under the term 'indexicality'.

4 ELF perceptions research: a picture of schizophrenia?

ELF researchers have investigated beliefs and evaluations towards the variability emerging from the spread and lingua franca use of English across a variety of domains. Studies have focused above all in business settings (e.g. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen 2010) and educational settings (e.g. Dewey 2012). In terms of findings, early attitudinal explorations of 'non-native' speakers' attitudes tended to report preferences for notions of native-speaker standards (i.e. American and British, and particularly RP) as ideal English targets and single authorities, with standard language and native-speaker ideologies being especially resilient in educational settings (see e.g. Forde 1995, Timmis 2002, Murray 2003). Similar results have been described by existing research in Spanish-speaking settings. For example, Véliz-Campos (2011) reports how pre-service English teachers in Chile favour 'British' over 'American' and 'Chilean' accent, considering the former to be *beautiful*, *pleasant*, *formal*, *precise*, *elegant* and *purer*. In Spain, Pellegrinelli's (2011) survey suggests that most respondents felt comfortable using English as a lingua franca but evaluated 'Spanish accented English' negatively and largely expressed desires to achieve a 'near native' English[5].

More recent qualitative ELF studies, however, seem to be principally documenting complex, ambivalent and apparently contradictory evaluations of variable English use. While being communicatively successful appears to be generally favoured over following native speaker standards 'accurately' in the real world, a preference for native standards is often reported for the English language classroom (e.g. Ranta 2010, Wang 2013). In most cases, the observed contradictions seem to emerge from accepting native-speaker norms as 'best' practice, that is, as the most *correct* forms and norms to use, whilst also: *a)* recognizing negative personal experiences or effects resulting from such beliefs (e.g. Jenkins 2014); *b)* prioritizing communicative function instead of 'accuracy' (e.g. Karakaş 2017); or *c)* not considering strict adherence to native-speaker norms as essential beyond ELT, that is, as not required or even appropriate for ELF communicative settings (e.g. Kalocsai 2009, 2014). In some studies, we can see that respondents continue to reward idealized 'native speaker Englishes' alongside *status* and *correctness* dimensions, while departures from standards can also be evaluated positively along *solidarity* dimensions – e.g. being 'tolerable' at worst (e.g. Wang 2013) and 'cool' or 'jazzy' at best (e.g. Cogo 2010). Although in a smaller scale, there is also some evidence of speakers of English as an additional language proudly constructing 'different' linguistic practices in their spoken English as their own creative use (e.g. Kalocsai 2009, 2014) or as natural variation that cannot be deemed 'incorrect' (Morán Panero 2016).

The level of attitudinal contradiction seems to be reported so frequently that, at her plenary speech during the 12th ELF conference hosted in Medellín (Colombia), Seidlhofer called for further meta-studies to explore "the possible underlying explanation for the observed ambivalence of attitude" (Seidlhofer 2019). In the attitudinal literature, this ambivalence has often been referred to as instances of *linguistic schizophrenia*. For example, this specific term was used in Jenkins' (2007) study by a participant and then explained by the researcher as the result of being "pulled in different directions" (Jenkins 2007: 223). The term schizophrenia had also been previously used in the World Englishes paradigm to refer to instances of competing norms, and the exhibition of an exonormative attitude coupled with endonormative behaviours (Groves 2011). However, when we use this medical metaphor, the language user seems to be positioned as a 'patient' who is 'suffering' from a 'syndrome'. It suggests that multiplicity of evaluations should be taken to be abnormal or infrequent. It focuses mainly on the mind as a container of evaluative predispositions, without giving sufficient consideration to the emergent, intersubjective and variable nature of social meaning making that is likely to influence linguistic and evaluative practices (see e.g. Hülmbauer 2013 on how this 'semiodiversity' influences the former).

Another way of seeing this ambivalence, is by starting from the assumption that multiple, and often conflictive ontological, indexical and evaluative dimensions are *regularly* available at once for language

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[5] While some studies have now begun to examine students' views in flexible and qualitative ways, these investigations focus mainly on perceptions of the internationalisation of Higher Education, the roles assigned to English in local settings and new educational policies, or issues of motivation, fluency and 'accuracy' in Content and Language Integration Learning (CLIL) and English as a Medium of instruction (EMI) programmes (e.g. Doiz, Lasagabaster and Pavón 2018, Martin-Rubió and Cots 2018, Vázquez, Luzón and Pérez Llantada 2018). Explorations of students' ontologies of English form and variability are still needed.

evaluation and judgement (e.g. Blommaert 2014, Coupland 2007). If we go beyond reporting ambivalent attitudes in the mind, we may find that each instance of variable evaluations may respond to specific contextualizing factors, situated goals, direct or imagined interlocutors and invoked or negotiated sets of norms. Rather than mental conflict, we may then talk about variably constructed social meaning associations and ontological representations of English, and about the multiplicity of social meaning-making. As Mortensen and Fabricius (2014) argue, this apparent contradiction may in fact be the "natural" result of locally negotiating language ideologies and practices. From this perspective, we should therefore not stop at reporting high levels of 'ambivalence' but strive to understand why seemingly incompatible evaluations may be variably co-constructed from moment to moment by the same speaker. A shift in focus towards approaching evaluative practices as social actions with specific situated functions, would also bring ELF perceptions studies in line with the recommendations that have for some time been posited by discursive psychologists for attitudinal research (e.g. Potter 1998).

For these reasons, in my own investigation of perceptions of English from Spanish-speaking settings, I take a discursive and phenomenological approach to conceptualisations and evaluations of language (see e.g. Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain 2009: 195). In this paper, representations and evaluations of language are understood as emergent, dialogic and context-motivated phenomena (Baird and Baird 2018). Rather than taking an attitudinal approach focused on making claims on the mental states of participants, I explore metalinguistic and evaluative practices as discursively constructed and situated social practice (see Ishikawa and Morán Panero 2016 for further elaboration). I therefore join a growing number of ELF researchers who draw from phenomenological and indexicality-informed perspectives to investigate the dynamicity of people's views, semiotic processes and identity positionings, and how these may influence, enhance or limit English users' own linguistic and metalinguistic practices (e.g. Baird et al. 2014, Baker 2015, Hülmbauer 2013, Hynninen 2016, Mortensen and Fabricius 2014). In this paper, I explore the reproduction or contestation of social meaning associations in the metalinguistic accounts of university students from the Spanish-speaking world, in order to understand:

1. Which social meanings are associated to what ways of using English as a lingua franca in the discourse of these participants?

2. How are social meaning associations seen to influence their language use and communicative experience, if at all?

3. How do the participants seem to theorise social meaning associations themselves? E.g. as iconic and fixed or symbolic and negotiable?

5 Methodology: context, fieldwork and analysis

This paper analyses the construction of social meanings and semiotic relations in elicited metalinguistic commentary of university students from Spanish-speaking contexts. The three research settings selected for the study are all heavily invested in providing their populations with English skills, as they are thought to be necessary to succeed in global spheres (González and Llurda 2016). Although each country follows different policy strategies and promotes English to different degrees, they all report to encounter difficulties in achieving the English language objectives that they are setting for their populations. The main concerns raised so far point to the 'quality' of the ways in which English is spoken, a claim that can be problematised from ELF perspectives depending on what is understood by quality or proficiency by assessors, but also issues of unequal access resulting in problematic distribution of speakers of English across the country (see e.g. Matear 2008, Oukhiar 2010, Lasagabaster 2017, Sayer 2015). In attempting to overcome on-going reports of English learning 'crises', policymakers in these countries have systematically increased the roles and presence of English in the educational domains of these settings. The strengthened role of English is observable in new educational policies such as the English Opens Doors programme in Chile (Barahona 2016), the recent expansion of English Language Teaching in Mexico's primary education (Sayer 2018) and the slow but growing introduction of English as a medium of instruction as part of experimental CLIL programmes in Spain (Lasagabaster 2017). However, educators and policymakers are engaging in policymaking without considering how

their students perceive and relate to this named language, or how sociolinguistic and communicative factors may be motivating them to use English in ways that can easily be dismissed as 'deficiencies' contributing to said ELT crises.

Keeping in mind that social meaning associations are "amenable to being discussed, argued over and renegotiated metalinguistically" (Coupland 2007: 23), I carried out semi-structured interviews in six different university settings across Chile, Mexico and Spain to elicit the construction of students' metalinguistic accounts. [6] Experimental and closed quantitative surveys were discarded as suitable approaches. It was important to avoid data collection methods that ignore the contextual nature of linguistic and evaluative practices, which elicit evaluations towards researchers' pre-defined and fixed constructs, or which assume sharedness of meanings behind constructs used by researchers and respondents (see Baird and Baird 2018 and Ishikawa and Morán Panero 2016 for criticisms of such methods). As I have argued before, semi-structured interviews "allow participants to introduce, draw upon, redefine or even reject linguistic notions, ideas and experiences in their own ways during the formulation of situated evaluation" (Ishikawa and Morán Panero 2016: 91).

Participant recruitment took place among university students, for they were deemed more likely to have experienced lingua franca communication than students in primary or secondary education. A comparison element between Latin American and European Spanish-speaking settings was also relevant to collect views of students from contexts that engage in different supranational organisations (e.g. EU, MERCOSUR, APEC) and have different historical experiences of the spread of English and Spanish as global languages. I visited a university in one of the nation's largest metropolises and a university in a smaller city in each country (i.e. Barcelona and León in Spain; Mexico City and Cancún in Mexico; Santiago de Chile and Viña del Mar in Chile). The participants were all young undergraduate students (between the ages of 19 and 26) in non-linguistics degrees, and therefore not familiar with ELF research. All students had experienced the compulsory study of English as a Foreign Language as part of their primary and/or secondary education, and only some of them were studying English at the time. In total, 48 students provided interview accounts, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes long. During the interviews, I encouraged students to describe their history with English, their language learning experiences, their own English use and that of others, and their experiences with and perceptions of the use of English as a lingua franca.

More than 53 hours of interview data were recorded and analysed (see Appendix A for transcript conventions). The data was generated as part of a broader study with additional goals to those reported in this paper (Morán Panero 2016). The analytical strategy of the main study entailed *qualitative content analysis* (see Saldaña 2016) as the first layer of systematic interrogation, and the identification of discursively constructed *interpretative repertoires* (Wetherell 1998) – an analytical construct from Discursive Psychology – as the second. The qualitative content analysis served as a means to organise and categorise the data by topics and experiences brought up by participants, descriptions of English – both as a global resource and in terms of its linguistic form – and to identify main language-related notions used in the construction of the metalinguistic accounts of the participants. [7] I then returned to the coded data to identify what sets of 'interpretative repertoires' (IRs) had been constructed in the metalinguistic accounts of these students. IRs are relatively coherent ways of talking about or constructing a social object or process (Edley 2001). Potter and Wetherell (1987: 138) define an IR as "a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events". IRs are seen as the basis for launching descriptions, evaluations and justifications in *a given context*, rather than as evidence for stable mental attitudinal predispositions. The identification of IRs also requires the researcher to consider the ideological and "locally managed positions" (Wetherell,

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[6] The interviews were undertaken and analysed in Spanish but the extracts here presented were translated by the author to English for wide dissemination purposes.

[7] The first coding cycle, which was carried out with the assistance of NVivo qualitative data analysis computer software, combined 'in vivo', 'descriptive', and 'analytic' codes and produced 132 free-standing codes. As Saldaña (2016) explains, 'descriptive' codes are chosen by the researcher to describe topics that were talked about (e.g. *English_In_Local_Setting*). 'In vivo' codes capture the content of the data analysed by using the literal words uttered by participants (e.g. *Chile_Isolated*). 'Analytical codes' are based on researchers' scholarly knowledge (e.g. *English_Ownership*). During subsequent axial and theoretical coding cycles, free-standing codes were merged together when no sufficient qualitative differences were found between them. This process reduced the total number to 80 free-standing codes, which were eventually organised into *ten* overarching themes in the main study (see Morán Panero 2016).

1998: 401) that are performed by interviewees in their descriptive and evaluative efforts. I used this tool to distinguish students' conceptualisations of the spread of English and its lingua franca use (see figure 5.1. below for the latter), and to observe how different repertoires were assembled *across* and *within* participants' accounts to offer specific evaluations. As a discursive unit of analysis, IRs provided me with a meticulous and systematic approach to examining participants' complex and variable metalinguistic practices. Engaging in a cyclical and multi-layered analytical process also ensured that the findings and interpretations here reported are appropriately evidenced empirically.
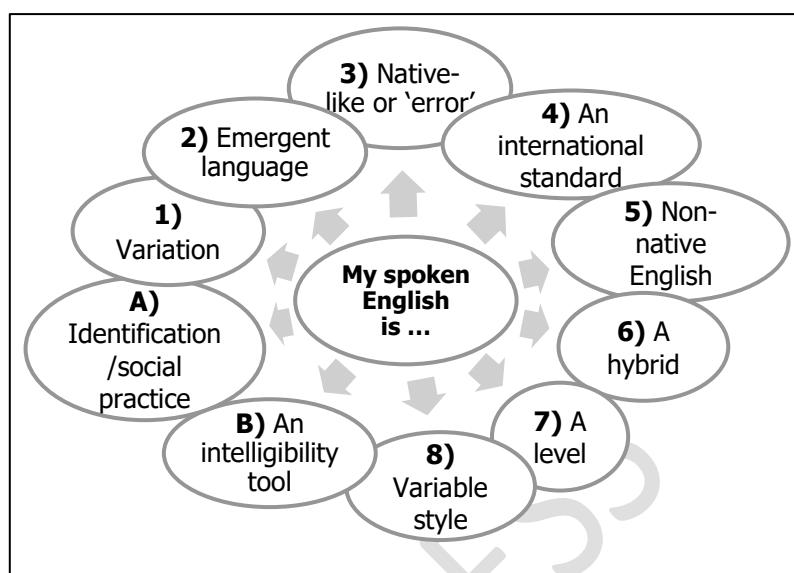

Figure 5.1. Interpretative repertoires constructed to conceptualise individuals' own ways of speaking English as an additional lingua franca (adapted from Morán Panero, 2016)

To answer the questions posed in this specific paper, I have tracked all the social meaning making associations that emerged in the data. Indexical relations constructed by participants were brought together under the analytical code '*Identity_Function*', where I compiled all metalinguistic comments that explicitly drew a link between perceived ways of speaking English and social meanings and identity projection potentials attributed to such use. Attention was also placed on identifying any reported consequences of indexical relations constructed during the interview (e.g. influences on linguistic choices made by individuals and material, affective or symbolic effects experienced as a result). In seeking to establish how participants conceptualised the nature of indexical relations, I drew from the constructs of 'iconisation' and 'metasemiotic awareness' discussed in Section 3. I regarded instances in which a single set of coherent meanings were presented as 'naturally inherent' to linguistic forms (i.e. iconised indexical relations) as examples of 'low' metasemiotic awareness. Alternatively, evidenced awareness of (sets of) indexical relations as multiple, variable, socially constructed and negotiable were considered to demonstrate 'advanced' levels of metasemiotic awareness among participants. Although quantifications were not an objective of the study, some figures have been produced to provide a sense of major and minor trends within the dataset. However, these are not to be taken as generalisable findings on themselves for reasons I expand upon below.

6 Findings

In the following sections, I present the pool of social meaning associations that were constructed in the data, supported by examples of which forms of English they were frequently attached to, and the experiential and linguistic influences that these social meaning relations were reported to have on participants' linguistic and communicative experiences, as well as their sense of self as a speaker. I then discuss the metasemiotic processes and levels of awareness that are displayed in the data.

6.1. Labelling speakers and ways of speaking

In order to explore what social meanings were associated to which kinds of English use, it is first necessary to identify the variety of labels and speaker groupings used by participants to describe their own and others' ways of speaking English.

In ELF and Global Englishes studies, scholars have established the multiple, complex and fluid forms of cultural and group belonging that are enacted from moment to moment by speakers in ELF interactions (e.g. Baker 2015). Yet, my interview participants still predominantly grouped users of English according to nationality in their descriptions (see e.g. Extract 1 in Section 6.2), and they often used these references to talk about how the official named languages of these nations are influencing their somewhat different spoken English. To a lesser extent, my participants also made use of larger supranational labels such as Latin American, Hispanic, African or Asian speakers of English. In other cases, speakers of English were also explicitly grouped according to the 'mother tongue' or the linguistic repertoire that my participants imagined other users of English would have. Overall, it seems that a nationalistic and monolingual view of language users was largely informing the labelling practices in the interview accounts. However, there were a few instances in the data in which participants grouped speakers by profession to talk about English use (e.g. 42S on the English of lawyers) and, although inconsistently, one participant actually rejected the use of essentialising nation-oriented grouping practices in parts of their interview (i.e. 22DF explicitly rejected national groupings as stereotypical in one part of the interview but reproduced stereotypical groupings in another). While the explicit use of the labels 'native' and 'non-native-speaker' were not dominant in the data, this dichotomy was highly present in an *implicit* way. Participants frequently brought British, Americans and Australians together to talk about their English and they would also group other nationalities to talk about users of English as an additional language. At times, references to native-speakers of English as a category, were encapsulated in the simple use of 'they' or 'them', as if the referents to these pronouns were obvious in any conversation about English. [8]

All participants displayed awareness of the status quo assumption according to which there is a model or standard of English, and that users of English as an additional language are generally expected to orient to it. Nevertheless, when describing their own English use, only three participants from Latin American contexts, out of the total 48, referred to their spoken English as equal or highly similar in form to a native-speaker standard or variety (e.g. 33C reported to have "all the American accent"). The rest, on the other hand, described their English by noting that it is *particular* or *distinct* in one way or another (e.g. "Spanish-ised", "tropicalized", "Mexican", "Chilean", "an American raised in the sea" but also "bad" or even "ugly"). While a few participants showed alignment with the status quo assumption mentioned above, many others showed disagreement as well. For example, among the students who did not describe their English use as being 'native-like' to begin with, that is 93.75% of the total number of participants, only 12.5% explicitly reported to desire that their spoken English becomes 'native-like' or 'perfect' English. This trend contrasts sharply with earlier survey findings reported in Section 4 (e.g. Pellegrinelli 2011). Moreover, 20% of this group constructed positive evaluations of their spoken English use *consistently* throughout the interview. This 20% included positive evaluations from participants who had conceptualized their 'different' English as natural variation but also from participants who had described their English as imperfect English. The dataset also contained instances of six participants overtly rejecting the pursuit of a native, standard or perfect spoken English for themselves, although this claim did not exclude reported wishes to improve other aspects of their English (i.e. fluency).

These findings display a level of challenge to native-speaker and standard language ideologies that had not been previously recorded in these settings (see Section 4). Of particular relevance is the identification of repertoires that construct departures from 'native-like' English as natural variation, which were frequently paired with comparisons of the diversity of Spanish as natural variation too. However, while these figures may provide a general picture of the tendencies that emerged in the

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[8] Whenever participants used seemingly group-less or abstract labels such as 'perfect English' or 'them', I requested elaboration on the meaning of the terms used. Participants' clarifications frequently produced references to imagined or idealised standards, i.e. named native-speaker Englishes, or simply references to 'the English of' native speaker groups (e.g. British, Americans). I have only coded and included cases where sufficient clarification was given by the interviewee.

dataset at the point of collection, they should not be used to draw fixed conclusions about what these participants 'think' a-contextually or to predict participants´ future evaluative behaviour. They should also not serve to extend generalizations to wider groups these participants may be perceived to belong to (see Baird and Baird 2018 on the shortfalls of making attitudinal claims about national groups such as Chinese, Spanish or Japanese students). If, as discussed in Section 3, social meanings and their associations to specific ways of speaking English emerge in context and, if even widely shared 'status quo' indexical relations can be negotiated locally, then any of these participants *may* evaluate the same way of speaking differently across conversations. In fact, the majority of the participants in this project (67.5%) were already constructing variable and seemingly 'conflictive' evaluations of their own spoken English from moment to moment during the interview. For this reason, the rest of the paper focuses on the qualitative analysis of the role that social meaning making and metasemiotic awareness played in these evaluative practices, by establishing what meanings were associated to what ways of speaking together with the reported effects and nature of such symbolic links.

6.2 Emerging social meaning associations

In the interview talk, ways of speaking English that were associated to more 'established varieties' or 'native' groups of speakers were unsurprisingly assigned positive social meanings that are widely shared at macro-levels. These ways of speaking were said to index *professionalism*, *perfection*, linguistic *correctness* – and by extension *diligence*, *competence* and *a hard working attitude* for 'non-native' speakers that are able to imitate them. They were also said to index *naturalness* and *authenticity*. Curiously, participants in Chile and Mexico also identified speaking English in 'native-like' ways[9] with indexing *higher social class* or *socioeconomic status* in their local settings. Displaying that English is part of one's repertoire had already been linked with 'educatedness' in Mexico (e.g. Sayer 2015), but this data confirms that the *kind of English* used by speakers is also seized by 'non-native' speakers as a resource for 'doing' social class.

As expected, undesirable social meanings were also associated to ways of speaking English that were perceived to depart from such native-speaker oriented standards. Users of English as an additional language who were seen to speak a "Spanishised English", for example, could index negative social meanings such as *imperfection*, *laziness*, *conformist attitudes*, *unprofessionalism* and even *incompetence* or *inferior intellectual abilities*. For instance, in the extract below, participant 32C proposes a conceptualization of language according to which a "perfect English" implies *not* having a 'non-native accent', with the latter being seen as laziness or conformism and an obstacle to intelligibility.

Extract (1)

    R: ok what were those accents *{repeating participant's construct back}* like the
        ones that they had the different people you encountered

    32C: er yeah well er YEAH many people had the pronunciation corresponding to
        their mother tongue right? yeah:: a **japanese** well she pronounced english
        with a japanese accent right? people in **italy** with a little bit of **italian** right
        but there were people who DIDN'T the opposite because you would not
        even notice that they were er:: for instance **french** no and they spoke
        PERFECT english […]

    R: ok what do you think about finding those different accents or people who
        brought a bit of their accent from their mother tongue how do you see those
        differences

    32C: well i think that that's:: eh well like everything right? eh people learn in
        different ways and maybe they **lack a little of perfection** in their english
        because they:: well want to have that level **some people settle for that**
        right? speaking eh **simply speaking it** but **not making it perfect** their

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[9] In this case meaning native-like from a *formal* perspective but note that some participants may use 'native-like' to mean 'fluency' instead (e.g. Kitazawa 2013, Baird and Baird 2018).

pronunciation but i think that in order to speak a language one must must
make perfect it to a high level right [...]

The participant does not assign any degree of positive value to phonological variation of 'non-native speakers' throughout the interview, nor does he consider that alternative identification goals may be driving such use. However, unlike 32C and contrary to much attitudinal research carried out in Spanish-speaking settings and beyond, undesirable social meanings such as *pedantry, snobbishness* or *inauthenticity* were also attributed to idealized native-like English across all university settings. In fact, most of the students who suggested that a 'native-like English' may be used to perform a *high social class* in their context, generally concluded that rather than successfully indexing a higher status, this practice would more likely earn the speaker negative evaluations of *inauthenticity, fakeness,* and even the poorly perceived identity categories of being a *USA assimilationist* and a *social climber* (e.g. a *Gringo* "*wannabe*" and an "*arriviste*" *according to* 23DF, 33C or 42S). Hence, this study suggests that social class indexicals are also influential in participants' styling practices, whether to earn or avoid specific categorisations by others.

Participants across all university settings also described ways of speaking English which were perceived to depart from 'native-speaker' ideals as indexing highly desirable social or symbolic meanings. These included indexing *belonging* to group constructs that were reported to be valuable to the participants (e.g. mentioning national, supranational and cosmopolitan identities) as well as the ability to perform positively evaluated indexicals of *genuineness* or *authenticity*. Hence, while authenticity was assigned to commodified 'standard' ways of speaking associated to Anglophone contexts by some, others constructed it as 'locally variable use' as well (see Heller 2003 for similar findings in relation to French as a global language). Interestingly, participant 11L even defended her explicit rejection of passing as a native speaker of English or of any other 'foreign' language, by arguing that a noticeably different English indexes attractive 'distinctiveness' as a multilingual in a world that is increasingly perceived as homogenized (e.g. 11L: "it's a differentiating factor"). This 'visible multilingualism' was also said to index positive attributes such as *diligence* and *hard-working attitudes* among speakers of English as an additional language.

Extract (2)
    R: mhm ok very well interesting ehm and how do you feel about those different
        adaptations *{repeating participant's construct}* that you could find

    11L: well i think they are **positive** because for me **now all the differences**: tch
        at a time in which **we are so globalised difference now starts to be::**
        the point:: the point:: **that provides:: benefits** right? so i think that's
        positive

    R: ok

    11L: because if we were all the same in the world many things would not make
        any sense (.) like travelling or::

Participants who constructed such positive indexical associations in the interviews tended to conceptualise departures from standards produced by non-native speakers as natural, inevitable, useful, and even as identity-motivated variation in their interview talk. Nevertheless, students who constructed consistently positive or negative views and evaluations, whether informed by variation or standard language ideologies, were the minority in the data. As I explain in the next section, most participants drew from seemingly incompatible views and ideologies of language at the same time and assigned multiple and competing social meanings to specific ways of speaking English as an additional language.

6.3. Indexical processes, reported influences and metasemiotic awareness

In this section I analyse how participants talked about the above identified social meanings, how they reported to employ, manage and experience these associations themselves, and the extent to which

they had any awareness of such semiotic relations being negotiable rather than inherent in language.

As expected, processes of iconisation were reproduced in the interview data. Instances of iconisation entailed the repeated construction of one perceived way of speaking English as inherently 'carrying' a set of coherent indexical associations throughout their interview account. That is, without displaying awareness of possible alternatives or of the artificial nature of such assumptions. Students who reproduced iconisation were thus treating 'symbolic' meaning associations as 'icons' that are directly and naturally linked to a language construct. Since I consider evaluations of 'neutrality' or 'correctness' to be symbolic meanings widely attached to specific linguistic forms or ways of speaking, descriptions of English uses along these lines were also included in this category. The following example of iconisation comes from an interview with a university student from Barcelona. When discussing descriptions of his own English use, the student complained about not speaking a "perfect English". Upon my request for elaboration, 07B explains that while a "good English" allows him to have a fluid conversation, a "perfect English" is the one that does *not* point to other multilingual resources being present in his linguistic repertoire and, more specifically, one that does *not* point to a Spanish national membership:

Extract (3)

> **R:** ok when you say a perfect english::: what would that be for you? a perfect english
>
> **07B:** […] i consider that i speak a good english:: **[…] they tell you** tch **you speak english very well but you speak like a spaniard […]** tch i can have a **fluid** conversation with no problems but i lack:: well the accent and that
>
> **R:** when they say:: in those situations that they say that […] ehh how does that make you feel?
>
> **07B: it angers me** right@@ because it's a bit like **DAMN i would like to speak an english:: yeah a perfect english** but well **it also makes me want to improve** right? […] and: and i'm going to come here and watch twice as many movies in english i'm going to practice english more and **if necessary i will pick up a book and start studying again**

According to 07B, other users of English tell him that he speaks "like a Spaniard", and the student constructs this label or identification as a sign of *unsuccessfulness*, that is, as indexing some level of *incompetence* as a learner[10]. In fact, 07B reports that this experience motivates him to work on his English twice as hard and to return to education, even though he believes he has no major communicative or fluency issues. The indexical association constructed here seems to affect him negatively, as he even reports to feel anger as a result. Speaking an additional language like a 'native-speaker' appeared to be the only way to index desirable social meanings and identities for him, thus constructing a coherent stance. Standard and native-speaker ideologies were constantly reproduced in his account, and the possibility of using English differently to perform group memberships was never discussed as an option. This is not to say that 07B does not see English as a language for identity or that he was eager to 'adopt' the national identity of a group of native-speakers. Instead, later in the interview, 07B showed interest in indexing the identity of a 'successful learner' who has worked hard to achieve *perfection* – a goal also informed by standard language ideology, but one he claims he can benefit from when speaking French because of his reported ability to 'pass as a native-speaker' in this named language. There were more instances of participants who engaged in similar iconisation processes throughout the interviews. Although correctness and perfection were the most recurrent examples, other instances of iconisation also included the persistent description of perceived accents as 'naturally' indexing speakers' 'real' national identities in fairly essentializing ways (e.g. 25DF: "it shows who you are right? if you are italian you speak like an italian").

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[10] Although speaking like a 'Spaniard' may be seen as negative for a Catalan participant due to misalignment with the participants' own sense of national identity, in this case it was constructed in relation to a learner identity instead.

Nevertheless, most students displayed some awareness of the co-existence of conflictive (rather than coherent) indexical relations instead. These participants assigned multiple, competing or even incompatible social meanings to specific linguistic practices at the same time, or at different points in the interview. Evidence of this multiplicity was identified in relation to both specific linguistic variables *and* perceived ways of speaking English. Extract 4 below is an example of the latter. Participant 01B reveals a conflict between the desirable and undesirable social attributes that are assigned to "perfect" or "bad" ways of speaking English as an additional language. As I asked the participant to talk about experiences in her international biology laboratory in Catalonia, where she uses English as a lingua franca on a regular basis, the student highlighted a tension between seeking the benefits of evaluations of '*correctness*' in her English use, and the simultaneous need to avoid projecting '*pedantry*'.

Extract (4)

R: ok ok ok very good ehm::: well and if for instance when you are:: speaking with your laboratory colleagues:: […] if i:: mm if it was if it was THOUGHT that if they recognise you as a spaniard due to the way you speak::

01B: yes @

R: what do you think about that? how would that make you feel?

01B: ah well **i have accepted that** @@@ yes:: no of course i don't i don't speak (.) i speak with an accent […] but yes yes **i have accent** of course **but i don't:** well **NO it's not that i don't CARE** (.) i would like to speak it **better**: but:: for instance i think that here in spain it is also very **embarrassing** to change and **put that accent on** and when someone here starts speaking **perfect english** people think it is a bit **pedantic** or something @@@ yes

R: aha::

01B: it is more **fashionable** to speak it **badly** {'se lleva más hablarlo mal' in Spanish}

R: @@ why do you think this could be? do you have an idea::

01B: well due to **SHAME** i think i don't know

This participant shows awareness of the fact that forms typically associated with "good" English (i.e. not having "an accent") do not just 'carry' one single meaning but may index multiple competing meanings at once. On the one hand, these perceived standards of pronunciation work are presented as ways of indexing *correctness/perfection* and possible associated attributes (e.g. being a successful student). On the other, they are also said to signal *pedantry* (i.e. an undesirable attribute). It is thus not strange to observe 01B's evaluative conflict over the extent to which she cares about speaking English 'better' or not. The pressure to conform to correctness stops 01B from saying that she does not care about 'having an accent' ("but i don't: well NO it's not that i don't CARE"). Yet, she also uses the fact that speaking "badly" is generally "more fashionable" in Spain to explain why she does not conform towards correct or "good English". The participant therefore suggests that avoiding "pedantry" indexicals exerts a stronger influence over her linguistic behaviour when using English as a lingua franca in Spanish settings. This is an example of data that would often be reported as an ambivalent or schizophrenic attitudinal position. However, rather than expecting 01B to only hold a single evaluative predisposition in her mind, this data suggests that her evaluation of speaking "with an accent" is likely to variably respond to local interlocutors, her own goals, and the indexical norms that become 'dominant' in each situated context (e.g. participant 42S talked about 'native-like English' as *inauthenticity, fakeness* and *arrivism* in relation to one context, but as *successful camouflage* in another). Equally, the extent to which we can claim that these indexical associations act as opportunities or constrains for the speaker will depend on the situated combination of interlocutors' goals and

expectations, and any negotiating practices taking place in interaction. As I will discuss in the conclusion, this example also encourages us to think about how we explain observed linguistic variability in ELF studies, and particularly to reconsider suggestions that users of English as an additional language experience conventional or normative constraint less.

The meanings of *incorrectness*, *imperfection*, *unprofessionalism*, *laziness*, and *intellectual incompetence* attributed to non 'native-like' Englishes were also frequently positioned in direct conflict with desires to express national identities and supranational group memberships (e.g. indexing being 'Spanish' or 'Latino'), or to perform *authenticity* and avoid '*wannabe*' or '*arrivistic*' categorisations. These indexical tensions were also reported at the level of individual linguistic features. Participant 42S, for example, raised this issue after associating *fakeness* with imitating native speaker norms, and *genuineness* to speaking "naturally like one speaks and (.) with your own sounds". In particular, 42S reported that producing the *correct* postalveolar affricate phoneme /ʃ/ in the pronoun '*she*', can be detrimental when other Chilean interlocutors are present due to the stigma associated to this specific sound. According to 42S, in Chile this phoneme is associated with speaking Spanish *badly*. As a Chilean colleague has confirmed (Carmen Gaete Mella, personal communication), this sound can grant indexicals of 'uneducatedness' if used in Spanish speech. As 42C's recounts: "i had classmates and when we were speaking together they would say chi" – that is, [ʧiː] instead of [ʃiː] for 'she'. This instance of variation goes beyond not being able to reproduce this sound due to lack of capacity or knowledge (i.e. not a learning error); the production of that sound in certain circumstances is reported to be actively avoided due to equally relevant social conventions[11], in this case, by the shame or embarrassment that would be caused by having to adopt a sound that can earn you undesirable evaluations.

Finally, while many interviewees identified multiple and competing semiotic relations to orient to, instances of participants explicitly recognising such competing meanings as socially and discursively constructed, a therefore as negotiable rather than inherent in specific language forms, were very scarce. Only a small minority of students talked about status-quo indexical relations as arbitrary in their interview accounts, and not always consistently. For instance, only four participants constructed 'correctness' as a subjective meaning or social convention in the interview (see Extract 5). While these participants like 30C were able to challenge some widely-shared indexical and ideological assumptions during the interview, there were no instances of students reporting to have successfully renegotiated negative social meanings attached by others to their own English use in *real-world* lived interactions.

Extract (5)

    R: mhm mhm so how would you describe your pronunciation for instance

    30C: my pronunciation:: (.) is eh (.) **i cannot say good or bad** because that
            would be getting into **the subjective** […] i am happy with my
            pronunciation (.) i consider that it is not bad and **whoever listens
            shouldn't:: shouldn't judge me** me for how i pronounce because:: if they
            understand about globalisation they understand that:: well:: that the english
            i learnt i learnt it in mexico and i am going to pronounce the way it is
            pronounced in mexico the closest to the place in which learnt it

7 Conclusions and implications

As the data presented above demonstrates, a complex set of social meaning associations were attached to different ways of using English as a lingua franca (i.e. **question 1**). As anticipated, and in line with previous research (e.g. Carrie 2017, Pellegrinelli 2011, Véliz-Campos 2011), most participants displayed awareness of widely-shared 'status quo' semiotic relations. For instance, 'native-like' English use was said to confer desirable social qualities such as *perfection*, *correctness* and *professionalism*. However, the data in this study demonstrates that university students in Spanish-speaking settings are *also*

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[11] The specific indexical association is, paradoxically, likely to be mediated by standard language ideologies behind the spread and use of Spanish as a global language, where the postalveolar affricate phoneme /ʃ/ is dismissed as 'uneducated' Spanish.

assigning desirable qualities to their own uses of English as an additional language, when these differ from the native models they are expected to orient to in ELT. This analysis therefore builds on existing research in these settings, by identifying indexical relations constructed between self-reported "Spanishised" or "tropicalised" English use (among other labels) and the desire to signal *multilingual competence, genuineness* and different forms of group belonging (e.g. being a *Latino* speaker of English). Despite the widespread iconisation of 'native-like' English as inherently 'perfect' or 'correct', some students described departures from idealized standards as *natural*. Even in a more unprecedented move, a few participants challenged status quo understandings of correctness in English language use. Although I have not included the specific data extracts in this paper, some of these participants explicitly drew from their awareness of variation and variability in Spanish to describe their 'distinctive' use of English in a positive light.

There is also evidence that some of the positive indexical relations that have typically been 'reserved' for idealised native standards are now being extended to variable ways of using English as an additional lingua franca as well. For instance, participants suggested that it is possible to index *competence*, *authenticity* and *hardworking learner ethics*, both when conforming to and departing from native English models. Conversely, other indexical relations remained exclusively assigned to specific types of English. Indexing *pedantry*, a higher *socioeconomic status*, and the rather unwelcoming identity categories of being a *Gringo wannabe* or a *social class climber*, for example, were solely attached to Spanish-speaking users of English as an additional language who were perceived to follow native-like normative use. Although social status has been regarded in ELF research as an identity category that 'non-native' speakers of English are likely to dismiss in favour of effective communication (Breiteneder 2009), my data suggests that it might be more relevant than previously thought – especially in lingua franca interactions where several interlocutors share linguacultural backgrounds and previously conventionalized indexical norms.

Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis of students' ontological and symbolic descriptions of English revealed that most participants display variability in their construction of semiotic relations and evaluative practices. Different and opposing social meanings were often associated to the same way of speaking by the same participant across interactional moments. While this finding had not emerged so clearly in prior qualitative or quantitative surveys in Spanish-speaking settings, it has been more frequently reported as 'attitudinal ambivalence' in ELF research from different settings. I argue that this evaluative and semiotic variability seems to respond to the situated, non-linear and inconsistent nature of social meaning making as theorised in Section 3. Hence, rather than simply concluding that these users of English are 'still' ambivalent, undecided or confused 'in their mind', the data suggests that they could be skilfully responding to locally (re)constructed symbolic and indexical norms (e.g. as 42S considers 'native-like' English to index desirable or undesirable meanings in different situated contexts, depending on who the interlocutors may be).

It is therefore not the intention of this summary to generalize from the pool of semiotic relations constructed in the interview accounts, nor to predict the evaluative behaviour of participants beyond the interview context. The data is nonetheless highly valuable in helping us understand what indexical relations may be *possible* among speakers of English as a lingua franca. Identifying these relations is also a necessary step in the broader goal of establishing how they may actually influence the (meta)linguistic practices and communicative experiences of these speakers (i.e. **question 2**). In this respect, participants also reported a direct link of influence between the indexical relations described above and the stylization of their own spoken English. While some students claim to work towards 'native-like' English use to index *competence* and *hard-work* (e.g. 07B), others also report to intentionally style their English in ways that differ from perceived standards in order to project desirable group memberships and positively evaluated social attributes (e.g. indexing *Latino membership* for 47V or a valuable *multilingual identity* in times of globalization for 11L), and also to avoid undesirable indexical relations (e.g. escaping performing social meanings of *pedantry*, *snobbishness*, *arrivism*, *assimilationist intentions* and even *uneducatedness*) [12]. Some participants also reported to style their

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[12] The study of social meaning-making processes with participants from different sections of society, with varied access to material and symbolic capital, and with different educational and life experiences is also necessary to enhance our understanding of the shapes and consequences that indexical relations may have for different users of English as a lingua franca.

speech in one way or another depending on the situational moment in which they were using English (e.g. 22DF reported to style-shift depending on the group of friends he was with during his Erasmus year). This study underlines the contributing role of perception, social meaning-making and evaluative practices for the variable use of English of these participants, although I am not suggesting that these may be the only influencing factors. It also challenges the appropriateness of traditional ELT approaches that systematically dismiss and penalize all departures from native speaker standards as cognitive or learning problems, and which therefore fail to distinguish sociolinguistically-motivated variation emerging from students' use.

Additional research is necessary to explore how perceptions, symbolic semiotic processes and language regulation practices influence each other in actual on-going interactions before we can make definitive claims about their impact on linguistic practices. Yet, I believe that the semiotic processes and experiences gathered in this data have implications for how we explain the variation of multilingual users of English in ELF research. In particular, the cases of 01B and 42S reported above suggest that departures from native-speaking standards are not always the result of being 'detached from' normative constraints. In ELF studies, we have argued before that "lingua franca users tend to experience less normative constraints than monolingual native speaker users" (Hülmbauer and Seidlhofer 2013: 394). But, while this *may* be true for some 'non-native' speakers in relation to norms associated with the use of English in Anglophone 'speech communities', the multilingual and complex interpretative repertoires of users of English as an additional language can also bring forward the influence of indexical norms which have been conventionalized elsewhere (e.g. native-like English being *pedant* among Spanish speakers, according to 01B's experience). We therefore need to be cautious not to predefine English-native-speaking conventions as 'constrictive', or to conclude a priori that influences associated to other plurilingual resources are always "liberating" (ibid: 400). In 42S's case, the alternative pronunciation feature preferred by some Chilean students is not so much responding to a playful exploitation of resources, as it is informed by alternative indexical pressures that are widely shared in the student's context. While this symbolic pressure is related to the use of Spanish as a standardised language, it appears to influence this specific phoneme when deployed in English communication too. In my view, this is an example of translingual influence or permeability at interpretative and semiotic levels. For this reason, I argue that in repositioning ELF within a framework of multilingualism (Jenkins 2015), we also need to analyse how ELF variability may relate to the interpretative dimensions of participants' multilingual 'repertoires-in-flux'. That is, to consider the role that may be played by linguistic *and* indexical resources brought by different speakers, as well as norms and meanings that may be emerge 'anew' in local interactions (Hynninen and Solin 2018).

Finally, as far as the metasemiotic awareness displayed by students is concerned (i.e. **question 3**), the data showed that participants engaged in processes of iconisation between ways of speaking English and social meaning relations, with the link between 'correctness' and 'perfection' and 'native-like' ways of speaking English being especially reproduced. While most participants displayed awareness of competing desirable and undesirable meanings being potentially assignable to the same perceived way of speaking English, only a minority of students explicitly described social meaning associations (whether status quo or not) as socially constructed and political conventions. The data set therefore did not yield much evidence of students' being aware of the potential power to resemiotise their own English use, when faced with negative social meaning associations and evaluations (e.g. when accused of being *lazy*, *incompetent* or *intellectually inferior* because of their English use, but also when accused of being a *Gringo wannabe*).

The findings to the three questions posed in this paper have important implications for the English language classroom too. For one, it would be especially useful for English language teachers, assessment professionals and policy makers in Expanding Circle contexts like the ones under investigation here, to explore how semiotic and identification processes may be motivating linguistic variation among the use of their students, and the extent to which that variation may have been systematically treated as learning 'problems' or instances of 'poor' English instead. In other words, eliciting explicit discussions between students and teachers around semiotic processes and indexical relations may help teachers develop and apply the ELF-informed pedagogical practices that ELF researchers have for long been advocating for ELT (Sifakis and Tsantila 2018). Teachers should also promote critical thinking about the nature and negotiability of semiotic meanings associated to

perceived ways of speaking English as an additional lingua franca and other linguistic practices more widely, and encourage reflections on the social and material consequences of reproducing discriminatory evaluative behaviors that are based on symbolic – rather than inherent – meaning associations.

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Appendix A Transcription conventions (adapted from VOICE Project 2007)

Transcript Conventions	Explanation/meaning
xxxx	Unintelligible speech.
(perceived speech)	Unclear/guessed speech.
CAPitals	Emphasis.
* between stars *	Utterances which are noticeably quieter than surrounding speech.
Elongation::	Noticeable elongation in word utterance with approximate length marked by repeated colon symbol.
(.)	Short pause (1 second or below).
(6)	Longer pause in approximate seconds.
?	Rising intonation (question-like).
@@@ <@speech@>	Laughter. Speech uttered whilst laughing.
{*researcher's information*}	Additional information provided by researcher.
[…]	Indicates that some data has been edited out due to not being key for the discussion of that particular extract.
in bold	Item(s) highlighted by researcher
[ ]	Phonetic transcription of a specific utterance.

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Bionote

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