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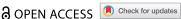
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Becoming "Global" in Higher Education: Positioning and Agency in Young People's Language Biographies

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the discursive construction of a "global persona" made by undergraduates ending an internationalised degree. By means of two case studies, we analyse their positioning regarding the university's diverse definitions of "globality" and "global personae" as they emerge in institutional webpages. We look into how students' (mis)alignments with those definitions are shaped by academic expectations and choices, and the material conditions they enjoy. Multilingualism plays an important role in these definitions, along with features assigned to neoliberal subjectivities. Results indicate that there are many ways of "being global." While one of the participants orientates herself towards a "global persona" as internationally mobile, the other aspires to remain locally while being able to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Results may prove useful in informing internationalised universities and degrees in Europe in terms of images projected to prospective students and how internationalisation is experienced by undergraduates.

Introduction

In Catalonia, the increase in higher education degrees delivered in English derives from decades of effort by the Catalan government to implement English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), as in other European countries, alongside the local co-official language(s), Catalan and Spanish (Cots, 2012; Llurda et al., 2013; Sabaté-Dalmau, 2020; Trenchs-Parera, 2019). As in other education systems in Europe, labels such as "international" or "global" are applied to graduate and undergraduate degrees, such as International Business Economics or European and Global Law, which are taught through EMI. Such degrees cater for both local and non-local students of a high academic profile and with a good level of English. These students are promised a set of skills and symbolic assets, including linguistic ones, to respond to expectations of future employability (Urciuoli, 2008). Indeed, recent research has shown how a sort of Englishisation (Wilkinson & Gabriëls, 2021) has been structuring new dispositions and reinforcing neoliberal orientations amongst recent cohorts of young people (Codó & Patiño-Santos, 2018; Sabaté-Dalmau, 2020).

This article engages with this body of knowledge by discussing how two students from a group of undergraduates enrolled in a highly internationalised university in Barcelona (see Research Context section) position themselves regarding the institutional discourses about what counts as "global" in this context, and the ways in which they make sense of their 3-year undergraduate degree, delivered fully through EMI. We aim at exploring qualitatively the development of an identity beyond what is local, in EMI contexts (Baker & Fang, 2021) and internationalised classrooms (Pastena, 2022, 2021; Trenchs-Parera & Pastena, 2021) as an issue that has been little examined. To do so, we take

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a university in Catalonia as a case in point, since it is an officially and socially bilingual region where there are competing ideologies as regards Catalan and/or Spanish as the language(s) of national identity, together with a strong social presence of English, especially in Barcelona. In this context, multilingualism and multiculturalism, enhanced by the presence of international migrants, add further complexities to an already complex sociolinguistic situation and, thus, add nuances to words such as "international" and "global."

Thus, we aim to contribute to current research on the internationalisation of higher education, providing evidence on how undergraduate students may align themselves, or not, with official academic discourses around "globality" and multilingualism, including English as an asset, as well as on how personal circumstances in the course of their studies might contribute to those positionings and play a crucial role in students' academic and professional paths. In sum, this study may prove useful in informing internationalised universities and degree courses in Europe about the "image" they project to prospective students and how they engage with this image during the course of their studies.

The discursive construction of "global": Positionality and stance

To analyse the ways in which the category "global persona" is constructed, at different scales, by the various social actors involved in the communicative practices of the university, we will draw on the notion of positionality in discourse. Positionality in discourse focuses on various processes at the same time:

> How speakers and writers are necessarily engaged in positioning themselves vis-a-vis their words and texts (which are embedded in histories of linguistic and textual production), their interlocutors and audiences (both actual and virtual/projected/imagined), and with respect to a context that they simultaneously respond to and construct linguistically. (Jaffe, 2009, p. 4)

One of the discursive tools to explore positionality is positioning. As explained by Kayi-Aydar (2019):

> Positioning theory (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999) studies the rights, duties, and obligations distributed among interlocutors or characters in and through conversations or narratives. The aim is to understand how those rights, duties, and obligations shape social structures while being shaped by them. (p. 1)

Biographical accounts are suitable communicative resources to understand subjects' positioning through their recalled courses of action and the reasons they give for them (Busch, 2016). People's stories of lived experiences, understood as social practices (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008), allow us to explore how the participants construct coherent past lives (Linde, 1993), with projected futures imbued with emotions and moral stances. In their storylines, individuals take different positions reflecting their understanding of the institutions that they navigate, their agency, decision-making, transformation, and their own interpretations of their actions (Patiño-Santos & Poveda, 2022).

Positioning theory will allow us, first, to analyse the imagined "global student" being constructed in public and official documents. We choose as data the university's website and, specifically, the webpages covering the undergraduate degree course of our focal students (see rationale in the Methodology section). In our analysis, we will focus on the characteristics assigned to prospective students, whom the website addresses, covering certain attributions, (linguistic) skills, and aspirational stances, but also aiming to engage the students in courses of action materialised in concrete modules, academic paths, and social activities.

For us, the students start to navigate the official "globalities" from the moment they consider a degree that proposes particular ways of being and enacting "global," before committing to enrolment. To see temporal changes, we will pay attention to the students' positionings across time and their reflexive accounts (Patiño-Santos, 2017); thus, stance-taking, namely, "taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance" (Jaffe, 2009, p. 3) will be central to our analysis. We will also pay attention to how they "simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural

field" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163). Furthermore, we will examine, not only what the tellers narrate in their stories, but also the nature of their stances since, according to Jaffe, "both affective stances that represent emotional states of the speaker and epistemic stances that convey speakers' degrees of certainty about their propositions are socially grounded and consequential" (Jaffe, 2009, p. 7). Affective and epistemological stances will be marked in the biographies co-constructed with the participants in interviews, by drawing on varied communicative resources: emotive expressions, lexical choices, and small stories, amongst many others, as will be seen in the analysis.

The participants of this study produced what youth studies (Furlong, 2013) have described as "normal biographies," making relevant characteristics that marked their parents' lives: security and lifelong work. During the analysis of these biographies, some traces of neoliberal subjectivities (Urciuoli, 2010) emerged. For that reason, we drew on this notion. It evokes "an ethics of entrepreneurial-self management" (Urciuoli, 2010, p. 162) in which individuals construct themselves discursively as their own projects, focused on productivity and on gaining all the skills that allow them to market themselves and which make them competitive (e.g., flexibility, mobility, responsibility for their own projects).

Research context

As the context for our study, we chose what we have called "a multi-dimensionally internationalised classroom" (Pastena, 2022, 2021; Trenchs-Parera & Pastena, 2021), being the ideal site in which to explore how undergraduate students engage with the imagined "global" persona. This classroom is "multi-dimensionally internationalised" for several reasons. The degree chosen by our participants was the 3-year-long undergraduate degree Global Issues and Topics,[1] which was the first attempt in Spain to offer "an interdisciplinary degree focused on the importance of globalisation and its effects," as the website says.

Regarding its student makeup, each year, up to 40% of the places are offered to students on degree mobility. In fact, our participants' class in their first academic year (see Methodology and Data section), included 56.8% students from the Catalan education system, 21.6% from the rest of Spain, and 21.6% international students on degree mobility, a total of 74 students, of which 31.1% identified as male and 68.9% as female.

The degree focuses on the study of globalisation and international affairs. As the website states:

> The degree course is intended for students from all over the world interested in understanding the cultural, economic, legal, environmental, political, social, and technological phenomena that affect us regardless of our precise geographical location, the understanding of which requires a transdisciplinary approach and a comprehensive view of human beings. (see the first section in Results)

The degree is organised by the Faculty of Humanities but includes staff from other faculties. It is characterised by full EMI teaching in the first two academic years. The third year includes a mandatory 6-month stay abroad and optional courses offered in Catalan, English, or Spanish. Finally, the degree promotes multilingualism further by including compulsory 18 ECTS in a foreign language of the student's choice, including Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish for international students.

The university itself, a state university located in Barcelona, provides additional levels of internationalisation[2]: (a) the international outlook of its local undergraduates: 38% go abroad on credit mobility, a percentage far higher than the 20% set as an EU objective in the Erasmus+ programme; (b) its attractiveness to incoming international students: 5% BA, 36.2% MA, and 50.6% PhD students are on degree mobility and every year the university receives more than 1,500 foreign students on credit mobility; (c) its attractiveness to international instructors, who amount to 25% of the teaching staff; (d) the increasing internationalisation of its curricula with courses or even full degrees on international issues; recently, this internationalisation is being enhanced with the university's inclusion in an alliance of several European universities with EU funding; and (e) its multilingual, multicultural urban context in a city that has been labelled as

"global" and "glocal" with widespread local bilingualism as well as a culturally and linguistically diverse local student population. (For an in-depth discussion on the challenges brought about by internationalisation and glocalisation in Catalonia and its higher education context see Trenchs-Parera, 2019.)

This university promotes both institutional and individual use of the two co-official local languages, Catalan and Spanish, and, as a third working language in everyday use, English. One of the consequences of the university's language policy has been the normalisation of EMI in both compulsory and elective courses in all BA degrees (28% of all teaching hours) and MA degrees (61%), which, in turn, has contributed to the above-mentioned attraction of international students and instructors. Finally, predominant teaching methodologies enhance a student-centred approach, which necessarily entails, not only the academic validity of students' voices in group debates, but also oral interactions among students of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and, consequently, the spontaneous, unregulated use of different languages in small group work, not necessarily the language in which their course is officially taught (Trenchs-Parera, 2019).

Methodology and data

This study was initiated as a part of a broader mixed-methods and longitudinal, ongoing study begun in 2017 and investigating undergraduates' language practices, identities, and intercultural competencies in a multi-dimensionally internationalised classroom: the TRANSLINGUAM-UNI project.[3]

For the present study, we generated three main sets of data and a supplementary one in order to triangulate our results. First, a corpus of discourses related to the word "global," was collected by searching out this word in both textual and audio-visual materials from the university's website. The aim was to map out the constellation of discourses related to what is considered "global" at the university. These are the discourses to which both students and prospective students, in general, would have regular access when looking for information on the university website. This website corpus finally consisted of the university's homepage along with the webpages of several academic degrees (see the first section in Results).

Before embarking on their degrees, future undergraduates become acquainted with the panoply of degrees offered by the university and the institutional discourses about them. Typically, besides attending on-site open days and education fairs, students in Catalonia take a look at university websites in search of information about available degrees and their characteristics. Discourses on globality may be voiced by a multiplicity of agents at the university. However, we chose to focus exclusively on university webpages since, according to yearly institutional surveys, these are the resources that future undergraduates most often consult for institutional information (in contrast to the printed material or other sources).[4]

Webpages are also the most far-reaching public expression of the university's mission, vision, and values, and reliable sources of lasting institutional information (in contrast to more ephemeral tweets or Instagram posts).

As a second set of data, we collected data by means of a sociolinguistic questionnaire administered at the beginning of the first academic year, which allowed us to describe the linguistic, cultural, and educational profiles of the students enrolled in the multi-dimensionally internationalised classroom, including our two case study participants. Thirdly, we conducted semi-structured individual interviews with students from this classroom at two different moments in their academic trajectories: Twenty-three students took part in the first interview, conducted at the end of their first academic year, and 10 students were interviewed at the end of the third year, just before finishing their studies. The interviews were conducted in either Catalan, Spanish, or English, according to the student's choice. Finally, as a supplementary method of data collection, in-class observation was conducted both by one of the researchers on-site during the first two terms of the first academic year and by another researcher during the last term of the third year who attended the virtual classroom through which one of the students' compulsory courses was taught during the

COVID-19 lockdown. These observations provided us with insider knowledge about the students and the classroom context.

From the group of 23 students, two young female participants, Rosa and Laura, who participated in the various phases of data collection, stood out in their narratives of being "global" and became case studies for the present article. They were interesting cases because, first, their biographies depicted different ways to navigate the discourses related to what is "global," echoing those reported by the other participants in the group; and second, during the first academic year, they showed two different patterns of in-class interaction and social networking, as explained in a previous study of ours (Pastena, 2022). Furthermore, they were both 19 at the time of the first interview, reported speaking Catalan as their first language, and studied Chinese to fulfill the elective language requirement of their degree course.

For the analysis of the institutional discourses and the interviews, we have relied on the positionality theory outlined above. A discourse analysis approach has allowed us to detect how, on its website, the university positions itself in relation to the "global" by exploring the possible definitions of this word as well as other words and textual contexts with which the word is usually associated and, therefore, its connotations. We then analysed the two interviews, focusing on the social positioning constructed in the participants' stories. We paid attention to the social images that the two interviewees constructed of themselves and the discursive resources that they drew upon in their stories (i.e., definitions, comparisons, metaphors, and small stories). Results from this analysis were compared to the participants' self-reported courses of action, and those captured during our classroom observation.

Results

The discourses on what "global" signifies at the university

In this section we attempt to map out the constellation of discourses related to the word "global" at the university, and, consequently, the "global personae" that are constructed therein. This information is relevant because it may reinforce (or not) the tropes that the students receive from their academic environment about what and who counts as "global."

The word "global" is present in all webpages as part of the name of the university's "global" Intranet. After enrolling, the word also becomes part of students' daily academic life since all subjects have their specific "global" Space, a virtual classroom that provides support for face-to-face teaching. This Global Space can only be accessed from the Global Intranet. So, academically, the word acquires the meaning of being accessible worldwide, but exclusively for those belonging to the university community. These two connotations of the word will be further commented on below.

On the university webpages, potential students will also encounter the word "global" in the names of one undergraduate degree course, four master's degree courses, and one inter-university graduate programme. Although potential undergraduates may not be interested in graduate studies, webpages offering information about each bachelor's degree present possible postgraduate itineraries. All these degrees and, consequently, their possible "global" characteristics are also the of news pieces on the university homepage and in internal e-newsletters sent out regularly university-wide.

For the present study, we chose participants from the BA degree in Global Issues and Topics as the degree that, after the analysis of its webpages, presents more nuanced polyhedral uses of the word "global." Such representations construct potential recipients, and ultimately define an imagined "global persona." On its webpages, the word is conflated with universality since, for the Faculty, these are studies of a "universal scope," tackling present-day challenges and social threats that need to be considered from concentric geopolitical spaces, that is, "the local, national, regional, and global levels." When presenting the degree's focus, the word "global" is used several times in the phrase "global problems," described in the promotional video as "affecting every human being" and dealing with climate change, migration, war, and violence, along with race and gender issues. The repeated

association of the word with terms with negative connotations (e.g., problems, challenges, threats) problematises "globalisation" as a "complex" [*sic*] phenomenon. This attribute is further highlighted in an annual series of lectures within the degree, also called "Global." These lectures revolve around a different topic every year but always, as the website explains, from the perspective of "globalisation." No definition of globalisation is provided and, thus, it is left to the interpretation of the website readers, but the lectures have so far been related to such topics as nationalism, Islam, and gender equality, thus, addressed to those who have an interest in social concerns or issues of "universal" scope.

The degree is further promoted from the "conviction" [*sic*] that "global problems and challenges" involve "reconciling, from a humanistic perspective, the mentalities, ideologies, and particular visions of the world with which they are perceived locally in the planet's different regions." "The local specificity," as mentioned in the promotional video, will allow "us [*sic*] to understand the planet." As in other degrees, the text puts forward the argument that an understanding of what is global necessarily calls for an understanding of what is local. In contrast to other degrees, what is local here is not restricted to the university's local context but a multiplicity of local contexts: "the planet's different regions." The degree's webpage repeatedly addresses directly an "us" interested in understanding various phenomena "that affect *us* regardless of *our* [emphasis added] precise geographical location." The idea that this "us/our" refers to students from any geographical origin is underlined in the phrase "students from all over the world," and is repeated. This worldwide belonging is visually highlighted in the promotional video by means of images of the Earth from space. The potential student is drawn in as a member of a worldwide community, through the repeated use of the words, "us" and "our." As such a member, the future graduate will have acquired "cross-disciplinary and in-depth knowledge, analytical resources, language skills, and international experience" as a result of the additional foreign language courses and the compulsory stay abroad. These features are presented as facilitators of career prospects at the "local, regional, national, and international" levels, though much emphasis is placed on the international level by mentioning such workspaces as the "diplomatic corps," "import and export firms," international NGOs, and "international consultancy services."

The presumption that "global" is a positive attribute is strengthened when accompanied by the word "truly" in the following extract that grounds interest in the degree in "the conviction that the dimension and depth of these challenges and threats have helped to crystallise a *truly global society* [emphasis added] for the first time in human evolution," thus casting a positive light on "global society," that is, on the world population, on people rather than on "problems." Similarly, the university's webpage for a programme on "global health" places the focus on the world population as a whole, again as a community whose health issues are shared and interconnected. Concretely, prospective graduates are described positively as future professionals who will improve health in a globalised world, by working in such international organisations as Ministries of Health, cooperation and development agencies, and "other stakeholders of the global health international community."

The word "global" does not seem to carry exactly the same meaning in other academic programmes. A degree from the Law School defines "a global perspective of law" as "legal education in various fields of European, international, and global law" and "combin[ing] transnational, international, comparative, and global perspectives with a European emphasis." No clear difference between "international," "transnational," and "global" is provided but both the webpages and the promotional video explicitly appeal to cosmopolitanism ("inspired by a cosmopolitan and global view with a European flavor"). This cosmopolitan perspective further contributes to the "global persona" that this potential law student will become ("the knowledge and training a global jurist and lawyer requires in the 21st century"). Interestingly, the "cosmopolitan and global" interests of this potential student seem limited to what is "European."

Despite this emphasis on cosmopolitanism and international careers, the prospects of these potential Law students explicitly include "local" careers such as legal and political consultancy and public administration. The link between global and local career prospects appears again in the webpages of a degree on translation and "global" [*sic*] languages (i.e., Chinese, Spanish, and English). Interestingly, in contrast to the Global Issues and Topics degree, the career prospects

highlighted do not refer to any career path or profession abroad. Rather, the "global persona" that these potential Translation students will become is identified as an "intercultural mediator" ("translating from one language to another is like building bridges,"[5] "the connection between cultures is a present-day challenge"[6]) situating future jobs in the local context rather than abroad. Similarly, the webpage of a Master's degree in History of the Asia-Pacific area outlines both prospective careers abroad ("international delegations or branch offices of international companies with operations in Asia-Pacific") and local jobs in the mediation and local management of immigration, and cultural management.

A final academic activity from this constellation of discourses on "global" is a cross-disciplinary programme of elective courses that "are not only core academic areas both at the university in our study and a university in the USA, but also knowledge fields that reflect the creativity, the industries and the social, political and cultural background of the host cities." "Global" acquires a nuanced meaning here since it is used to refer to qualities that a Catalan and a North-American city share. The programme is addressed to "outstanding" "European, North American, and other international students" and therefore echoes a notion of distinction. This distinction is further highlighted when the webpage mentions, as amongst the "added values" of the programme, the possibility of mobility between the two universities, and, thus, between countries, as well as "the opportunity to mix in the classroom and enjoy a unique academic and cultural experience." Thus, the "global persona" that the student is, or may become, is someone who has experienced such intercultural encounters.

Two academic trajectories, two stances towards "being global"

Here, we focus on the narratives of Rosa and Laura, two young women who enrolled in the Global Issues and Topics degree. We aim to explore the image that they construct of themselves, how they make sense of "being global" throughout their academic trajectories, and the role of languages in this process.

Rosa: A "global" (language) learner

A portrait of Rosa

In our data, Rosa constructs the social image of an enthusiastic language learner. Raised in an upper middle-class family (from an engineer father and a physician mother), she has been socialised into multilingualism since primary school. Her self-reported L1s are Catalan, predominant at home, and Spanish, and she is one of the few students in the cohort studied who had completed Batxibac[7] studies.

Rosa displays a "global" social positioning which matches the "planetarian" image constructed by the institution. At the beginning of her studies, in the questionnaire, she formulated her interest in this programme as arising "Because I was concerned about global issues. I see the world as a single place, I want to contribute to equality between people from different countries and to find explanations for the several international problems." Rosa positioned herself as a "global citizen" by taking an epistemological stance, voicing discourses on globalisation and social justice. Such discourses construct the world through the metaphor "single place." Her definition obliges her to clarify the apparent paradox: a single place imbued by diversity (i.e., "different countries," "several international problems"). The single place evokes ways of being that Rosa makes sense of by drawing on a hypothetical future narrative. There, she positions herself as a person "contributing to equality" and "finding explanations for several international problems." Importantly, at the end of her first academic year, she explicitly defined herself as a "world citizen," in the belief that "sometimes people who come from very far away, or who speak a very different language can have a lot much more [*sic*] in common than ... your neighbour, someone that you've shared your life with."

Two years later, approaching the end of her studies, Rosa recalls her rationale for doing this degree in more detail:

Excerpt 1

[8]I decided to do this degree because I had good grades at secondary school, but it's not like I was outstanding in anything in particular. Everyone told me "You can do whatever you like with your life." And I was like, "I don't want that answer because I don't have a clue about what I want to do." ... I chose Global Issues and Topics because it's like general. It's in English and I have always enjoyed languages and to do with Social Sciences, which I like a lot, more than Science!"

This revisited rationale brings out two important aspects regarding Rosa's choices. The first relates to her understanding of undergraduate studies as a liminal space for her to think carefully about her future. Unlike her parents, who, according to her, "had everything clear" and chose their higher education degree during their time at secondary school, Rosa, depicts herself as a "good schoolgirl" with a lack of clarity about her future orientations. In her small story about her school days, she recalls herself as a person who hoped for some sort of clue to guide her in deciding on a degree. The adults' voices evoked in the story encouraging her, are evaluated by taking an affective stance, as a burden that entailed pressure, rather than as offering positive advice ("I don't want that answer because I don't have a clue about what I want to do").

A second aspect of Rosa's choices is her association of "global" with the English language, and with social sciences-based curricular content. These two aspects, explored in the next two subsections, index a set of orientations and dispositions that have been acquired across her academic biography.

An agentive language learner

Rosa reports her contact with English from a young age, when her father spoke "a bit of broken" ("un poco chapurreando") English with her, "basic things" such as "the numbers from one to ten." This contact would continue over her basic education:

Excerpt 2

R: But I started, I have always been in state education. In primary education [I did] English but the quality was not very high. People were not very interested either. When I went to secondary, I did 3 years in a language academy, while I was at school. I did 1 year of First, 1 year Advanced, and 1 year of Proficiency. I obtained Proficiency when I was 17 or 16.

A: So, you loved English and you did it well.

R: Yeah, I mean it opens so many doors. We used to travel and in the end it was me who spoke for the family. That really encouraged me a lot, it's useful.

In this interaction, Rosa takes an epistemological stance to construct two facts: firstly, the importance of English, drawing on utilitarian tropes reported in the literature ("it opens doors"); secondly, that a state education impedes the process of learning English, speaking of a school with "no good quality teachers" and no interest in the language (for a discussion on English in the Spanish education system see Zafra, 2019). This "fact" allows her to depict herself with a high degree of agency by indicating how she, against all odds, managed to complete her Certificate of Proficiency in English at 16 or 17. In her storyline, her parents act as supporters who enrolled her in extracurricular English classes and summer schools, with some periods abroad in English-speaking countries. After finishing school, she also volunteered abroad for an international charity. Although aware of her advantage, she was also quite critical of the role of English as an international language, believing that native English-speakers do not "have to adapt to anything." In fact, she broadened her plurilingualism continuing to study French and adding German and Chinese to her repertoire as an undergraduate.

A global persona

Already at the end of her first year on the degree course, Rosa was aware that her linguistic and academic trajectories were aligning her life "around international issues." After her degree, she felt that

it had fulfilled most of her expectations. The following excerpt summarises, not only the communicative, but also the professional skills she believes she has acquired:

Excerpt 3

My personal life is all in English. I think this is thanks to the B.A. I don't know whether without having studied [this degree] I would feel so comfortable having a relationship in English. In my social networks I'm also always speaking in English because I have many followers and friends around the world. I have many friends in Greece, in Belgium, in Indonesia, because I went there, in the States, so with all of these I always communicate in English. Professionally too. For example, in LinkedIn, because I sometimes write articles. I do everything in English because in the end I know this is what job recruiters are looking for.

Rosa makes the presence of English in her personal and professional life relevant. Personally, she is in a relationship with an English-speaking boyfriend. Professionally, she teaches English and music to children in her village. Indeed, during our observation of the online classes in her third year of studies and her work in teams, Rosa was engaged with English more often than most of her colleagues. While the others relied on Spanish and Catalan to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher, Rosa conducted all activities in English.

In the excerpt, Rosa also reports skills for participating in social networks, international communication with "followers and friends" from around the world, using professional platforms (LinkedIn), and knowing what "job recruiters are looking for." She also recalled her participation in clubs and student associations from the beginning of her B.A. As we can see in the following excerpt, English continues to be foregrounded as a medium to master other skills and to develop professionally:

Excerpt 4

[Name of international student organisation] helped me loads to discover what I like, to work in a team, coordinate, because they give you loads of responsibilities that, up to that age, no one has given you. And the fact that we attracted volunteers here from across the world and we had to organise the experience for them, talk to schools, because they work in schools, with their families, managing all that and English was really important for all that.

Rosa displays what has been identified as a neoliberal self (Urciuoli, 2010) by portraying herself as a person who makes the most of the activities in which she participates. She positions herself as a reflective human being able to recognise the value of her experiences: being able to coordinate, work in teams, organise activities, and so on. Such a positioning, however, does not guarantee her feeling confident about the future. When asked about her plans after graduation, she indicates that she has applied for a Master's degree in Communication abroad. She feels a B.A. is not enough and that she needs further time to decide what she wants to do.

Laura: An unconvinced "global" learner

A portrait of Laura. Laura is from the Balearic Islands, a Catalan/Spanish-speaking region in Spain. She has taken an increasingly critical stance towards her "global" degree since the first year. In her biographical accounts, she displays the social image of a young person disengaged from what she has studied, even though she recognises that she "learnt a lot." In the questionnaire administered at the beginning of the first year, she explained her decision to enroll in the programme: "Because I was not sure about what did I want to do, and this degree seemed like an interesting option to me." After 3 years, and closer to graduation, she continues questioning her choice:

Excerpt 5

Thinking about it now, I think I didn't think it through very well. But at that time, I was so overwhelmed that it was like, this looks interesting, so I'll do it. The thing is I think if I had really thought about what I wanted to do in the future, I wouldn't have chosen this.

Laura displays a reflexive self by constructing the B.A. as a way to delay important decisions about her future. In her storytelling, she positions herself as a confused young person who made a choice that she regrets. However, she does not assume the entire responsibility for this choice: she felt the degree had promised her a set of skills and opportunities that, since the beginning, she was not sure were going to be provided. In the end, she feels, she did not find what she was looking for:

Excerpt 6

... From my point of view ... for me it's a course that gives you a lot of things but there is no logical thread connecting it all up. In the end it's as if you've read a book, like an encyclopaedia that talks about everything but in the end it doesn't tell me anything. That's what I think about this course.

Laura's lived experience of being enrolled in Global Issues and Topics was one of dissatisfaction, defined by combining epistemic and affective stances and by bringing personal past decisions into the present. Thus, she defines the situation by stating that the curriculum needs some focus on actual, practical problems and better internal connectivity. This criticism was echoed by several of the students interviewed.

A self (language) learner. As in Rosa's biography, Laura understood, from the start, that English language proficiency would be central to her academic life:

Excerpt 7

When I started my degree, I knew it was in English and I was a bit scared because, even though I like it and at secondary school I always got good marks, I mean at the school you have a facility, it's easier, I mean, and then at the university you start and they presume you speak English and if you don't understand it, it's your problem. But the truth is I adapted to it very easily.

English is vested with a series of emotional responses associated with two different spaces: easy at school, and scary at university. The university is depicted as not supporting students enough. A child of two Catalan language teachers, she was encouraged by her parents to learn an additional language and Laura and her sister engaged with English from a young age:

Excerpt 8

At school I learned English from the age of 3 ... The school gave me the basics, but it's something I've learned on my own because I love watching TV series in English. Since I was little, I've listened to music in English. I've never been to a language academy or any extracurricular activity in English. Neither have I had anyone supporting me in the language, but I have always learned on my own ... with my sister, we would always put on her [Hannah Montana's] songs and films and all that and it was in English ... now I listen to podcasts in English or watch YouTube videos in English. When I was little, I understood English but just in certain contexts and now I feel I can hold a conversation, I mean, maybe not specialised, but about anything.

In this excerpt, Laura depicts a DIY (Do It Yourself) social image (Gershon, 2017). From the beginning of her English language biography, she positions herself as an agentive person who knows how to learn autonomously, in contrast to Rosa's formal EFL instruction. The list of activities constructed with the "never" and "always" statements emphasises the merits of her narrated position as self-taught. It is important to highlight that the basis for this agency is her enjoyment of English reflected in her watching TV/YouTube, listening to music, and singing in English. Her small story about watching and singing Hannah Montana videos and songs with her sister illustrates such feelings well. She is also aware of her own transformation, by recognising that she is able to follow any conversation. Actually, we witnessed how well Laura communicated in English. During our classroom observations, Laura, in the small group discussion, switched to Catalan and Spanish but, during the presentation on a topic she had prepared, she drew on fluent English, displaying strong communicative skills.

A small-town girl

Laura was undecided about her future degree when she finished school. Even though she saw in the Global Issues and Topics degree an opportunity to leave her place of origin and have new experiences, living far from home and the degree itself soon made her more aware of her sense of belonging to the small island she came from. At the end of her degree, aged 21, she was not convinced about her former decision to study for that degree in Barcelona. In fact, she wanted to take a break and think about her future carefully, while most of her colleagues were enrolling in Master's degrees or applying for jobs and internships. She did not feel ready for another transition in her life. In fact, Laura and her cohort experienced the Covid lockdown. This, and her rediscovered connection to the local, caused her to return home during her second year. There, she realised that her dreams had changed:

> Excerpt 9
>
> I don't know. I'm trying to discover it, right now with the end-of-degree project and I was in Barcelona, but, because everything was online, I came back to [her island], which has also been a change. And right now, it's not clear for me. I'd like to, maybe in the future, I'm going to apply for some internships with some organisations in Barcelona, let's see if they take me ... Being from here [her island] it's not like you're from a city, which perhaps has more job vacancies related to this degree. Me, here. I should have thought about it before because I don't know what I want to do or where I want to live, but I want to have a job because I know I'm going to want to grow old here, probably, because I have my family here and I love it and I've been in Barcelona, and I liked it but it's not like being at home ... I was thinking of doing a Master's ...

Laura continues to position herself as confused and lost about her future. This example shows how she constructs this affective stance triggered by an unexpected event (the lockdown), which made her return "home." She redefines this move "like a change." Uncertainty about her future plans is constructed through a set of ambivalences but also, paradoxically, some certainties. Thus, her plans revolve around applying for an internship or a Master's degree in journalism, going to Barcelona, or remaining in her small town, with what each place offers to her professionally. Her hypothetical small story reveals her high degree of certainty: her wish to grow old on her small island, which she depicts as "home." She is aware of the difficulty of finding a job locally, since a small place does not offer what a big city might. Her experience vests her with the knowledge that the degree she did is addressed to those who project an ambitious self (elsewhere she states that "if you go for it, you can get into something to do with the European Union"). But she has realised that this is not for her.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article was two-fold: first, to explore what is considered "global" in a higher education institution in Barcelona, which defines itself as highly internationalised; and second, to look at how two undergraduate students, who attended a degree focused on "global issues," position themselves as regards "globality" and "being global" with respect to the constellation of institutional discourses to which they are exposed. Therefore, we have looked into the discursive constructions of one or multiple "global personae" in the official online documents of the university, offering a wide range of courses that the university labels "global." As we have seen above, a first assignation of "global" is as a synonym for "international," as reported by previous research (Doiz et al., 2012; Llurda et al., 2013). However, we have identified that the word acquires other nuanced meanings, depending on the specific academic programme.

Overall, "global" is used either to describe geographical and geopolitical spaces or to hint at the interconnectedness of individuals of diverse cultural origins, as well as their (shared) problems, locally or beyond borders. This seems to address potential students interested in these issues, constructed by the institution as having a "humanistic perspective" and, therefore, associated with Social Sciences studies. Being a "global persona" also entails, in the webpages, embracing a set of principles and important aspirations, such as being aware of cultural diversity, actively participating in intercultural spaces (such as those of future jobs in local mediation or in companies abroad, and the participants'

classroom itself), and having the capacity to establish intercultural social relationships, either locally or abroad. The kind of skills promised by this institution has been widely discussed in other university contexts, such as in the United States and South Korea, in critical studies that understand them as markers of neoliberal selves (Block, 2016; Park, 2009, 2017; Urciuoli, 2008).

Our focal students took the Global Issues and Topics degree course, which, among all the academic programmes offered, is the one that presents the most comprehensive and detailed discourse on "global." On its webpage, the potential student is envisioned as a member of a "worldwide community" who will acquire the skills and competences, as well as the "cosmopolitan" outlook that, according to the institutional discourse, are "necessary" to successfully function in multilingual and multicultural societies. These skills and competences include intercultural awareness, and the ability to analyse global problems and reflect upon global issues from different perspectives. In fact, the course is taken by significant numbers of international students, who do not necessarily speak the official languages of the region, Catalan and Spanish. The role of English in these intercultural relationships is critical, even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the programme presentation, and an English test is not required for enrolment. English is not the only language offered in the curriculum either. In fact, learning another language such as German, Arabic, Russian, or Chinese, is an explicit and essential part of the curriculum. However, English, as the language of instruction, is an implicit prerequisite to taking this "global" degree.

Our examination led us to explore, through the lens of positionality in biographical accounts, the ways in which two young females who are about to finish this "global" degree course had experienced the programme and the language practices in which they had been embedded for over 3 years. In their reflective accounts and questionnaire information, we have identified the "global persona" that they construct, how they position themselves regarding what they expected from the programme, and what it actually afforded them. We found important alignments with the documents analysed, but also some discrepancies, or better, unexpected ways of understanding the education policy of this university.

A "global persona" in these biographies emerges as the result of long socialisation processes shaped by various discourses produced by these students' families and the institution chosen for their higher education. Such discourses cannot be detached from some class-based dispositions and material conditions that have given these two students access to certain symbolic and economic resources that they have managed differently. Thus, both Rosa and Laura, despite their different academic trajectories, understand the institutional discourses around "globality" similarly, but they each engage with them differently. Both understand "being global" as the capacity to make connections with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds and develop intercultural awareness. This is described in their words as "an interest in social sciences" and "social justice," which foregrounds content and knowledge about history, politics, and current affairs in the world, and also echoes the "humanistic perspective" mentioned in the official documents.

Although both students verbalise these forms of "being global," they mobilise them and orientate towards them differently. Rosa embraces "being global" by enacting a neoliberal subjectivity (Sunyol & Codó, 2020; Urciuoli, 2008): as a mobile, flexible person, a "citizen of the world," willing to continue studying and working abroad. Laura, on the contrary, orientates herself towards what is "local." After 3 years of living and studying in a big metropolitan city, relatively far from home, she has realised that she wants to return and remain on her island of origin. Interestingly, these two different orientations were already visible during the first year of their studies, when they reported two different patterns of in-class interactions and social networks (Pastena, 2022): Rosa interacted equally with both local and international classmates for leisure and study purposes, but showed a tendency to form closer relationships with those born and schooled in Catalonia like herself. Laura, although coming from a different region, maintained an in-class network mainly formed by classmates from Catalonia. In this sense, once again, Laura's network and decision to return to her place of origin show that a more local identity orientation does not exclude the possibility of establishing relationships with people beyond one's community.

Another important alignment that we found was the central role that these students give to English, not only for their academic but also for their personal lives. Both students reproduce all the tropes around English as the language that "opens doors" or "the language of the future" (Baker & Fang, 2021), in addition to valuing plurilingualism as a characteristic of that imagined "global persona." Both have learned other languages since childhood and have continued to do so during their undergraduate studies as part of the curriculum and in extracurricular activities. These tropes around English are reported to have been learnt at home and were promoted by their contact with English at an early age. We might recall Rosa's father talking to her in English and her achieving her Certificate of Proficiency in English before finishing secondary education. Laura's contact with English by means of watching different series in their original versions with subtitles was less formal, while also distancing her from her parents' experiences.

All in all, these stories have shown how the concept of "being global" is associated with "mobility abroad" (whether physical or symbolic) (Hannam et al., 2006), membership of a "planetary community," and "plurilingualism with English" as a must-have requirement. They have also shown how that concept may be accepted or questioned by the students at the end of their undergraduate academic trajectories. These leavers may accept the definition offered by the programme they choose, but, in the end, sets of circumstances lead them to align with or question such institutional discourses. Rosa and Laura show us that there are at least two possible ways of making sense of "being global," and that they respond to particular conditions of socialisation. The panoply of particular stories of other participants whose positionings could lie in-between deserves a future study.

Notes

1. We provide pseudonyms for the names of degrees, the university, and academic activities, courses, and spaces with distinctive names.
2. Data from the university's own website.
3. See more in http://www.upf.edu/es/web/translinguam-uni
4. There were 1,477 of the 5,175 (29%) undergraduates who started their degree at the chosen university in 2022 and answered the institutional survey regarding enrolment said that, before enrolling, they consulted the university webpages to find information on the degrees. Other sources of information were the "university's informative sessions" (17%), "friends" (17%), "family" (12%), and "high school teachers" (9%).
5. "Traducir de un idioma a otro es como construir puentes."
6. "La conexión entre culturas es reto de la actualidad."
7. Batxibac is the popular name for dual 2-year secondary school studies in Catalonia in preparation for university entry, carried out in Catalan, Spanish and French. It offers a mixed curriculum with both contents of the Batxillerat in Catalonia and core knowledge about the language, history, politics, and culture of France from the French Baccalaureate. Students who apply for this modality need to have a B1 level of French to enroll.
8. Please find the originals on the website of the TRANSLINGUAM-UNI project.

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