12 Literature for critical cultural awareness

Leticia Yulita

Introduction

This chapter is based on an empirical case study that demonstrates ideologies of gender identities of cultural *others* can be uncovered through foreign language literature for the development of 'critical cultural awareness'. The study describes learners' responses to an Argentinian short story in an undergraduate final year module in a British university. The study was testing a pedagogical tool implemented in a class of students learning the Spanish language with an intercultural focus. As the students read the short story in Spanish, they interconnected their personal experiences with the literary text in a network of links not only from within, but also outside and beyond it, and created a hypertextual mosaic of other (imagined and real) texts in the reading process. These texts (referred to as 'student texts' in this study) displayed essentialising notions of the subaltern Hispanic *other*, which dichotomised 'us' and 'them' in a process of *othering*. The chapter presents an analysis of these 'student texts' that arise out of the reading, whilst it seeks to develop Byram's (1997) notion of *critical cultural awareness* with a view to refining it using the concepts of 'ideology' and 'anti-essentialism'.

Critical cultural awareness

'Critical cultural awareness' is defined by Byram (1997, p. 53) as 'the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries'. For Byram (2009, p.324) "explicit criteria" means that 'the intercultural speaker has a "rational and explicit standpoint" from which to evaluate'. These "explicit criteria" can also be explained through the notion of "ideology", which McLaren (2009, p. 69) defines as:

> *the production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs and the manner in which they are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups*. Simply put, ideology refers to the production of sense and meaning. It can be described as a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations *that we tend to accept as natural and as common sense*. [italics in original text]

McLaren (2009) identifies a positive and a negative function of ideology. The *positive function* of ideology is to supply concepts, meanings, representations, categories, images, ideas that help us make sense of the world; the *negative function* is that it 'excludes, because it appears to be 'natural' and therefore unchangeable and 'selective', because the ideologies of some groups are dominant, thus privileging certain groups over others. The negative function of ideology is that it systematically perpetuates asymmetrical power relations through the inculcation of certain values, beliefs and behaviours:

> **The most difficult task in analyzing these negative functions of ideology is to unmask those ideological properties which insinuate themselves within reality as their fundamental components**. Ideological functions which barricade themselves within the realm of commonsense often manage to disguise the grounds of their operations (...) If we all can agree that as individuals, we inherit a pre-existing sign community, and acknowledge that all ideas, values, and meanings have social roots and perform social functions, then **understanding ideology becomes a matter of investigating *which* concepts, values, and meanings *obscure* our understanding of the social world and our place within the networks of power/knowledge relations, and which concepts, values, and meanings *clarify* such an understanding**. In other words, why do certain ideological formations cause us to misrecognize our complicity in establishing or maintaining asymmetrical relations of power and privilege within the sociocultural order? (McLaren, 2009, pp. 70-71) [italics in original; emphasis added]

Ideologies exist 'at the deep, embedded psychological structures of the personality' (Darder et al., 2009, p. 11) and manifest themselves in the ways we relate and behave with others (Allman, 2009, p. 420). McLaren's point here is that the 'natural' and

'commonsense' character of ideologies needs to be investigated, in particular to make evident what ideologies do to us, i.e., how they influence the 'ways we relate and behave with others', to use Allman's terms.

Research for the empirical case study I discuss here took the responsibility of 'investigation' as part of the pedagogical process to make these ideologies evident – or 'these criteria explicit', in Byram's terms – in the teaching. Holliday (2010, p. 261) similarly defines ideology 'as a system of ideas which drives behavioural choices' and refers to these ideas or commonsense assumptions as the 'default ways of thinking', particular frameworks that individuals use to make sense of the world. Interesting here is that he uses this theory to analyse intercultural relations between people from different countries, whereas McLaren and others in the field of Critical Pedagogy have usually focused on relationships of groups within a society or country. The pedagogical practices in the case study I discuss aimed to raise learners' awareness to 'make these criteria explicit' and to unmask the ideologies the learners use in their critical cultural evaluations. Holliday's focus on people of different countries was a useful additional perspective.

The teaching resource

A short story entitled 'Norma y Ester' by Argentine writer Carlos Gamerro (2005) was the literary text chosen for this study. The main aim in choosing this text was to bring views of Hispanic gender identities to the fore for students' reflection and analysis, as a consciousness-raising pedagogical strategy. 'Norma y Ester' concerns the relationships and experiences of two women from impoverished suburbs of Buenos Aires, who wash men's hair in the back room of a hairdressing salon. Set in the early 1990s in a patriarchal social structure where salon customers take advantage of Norma and Ester, it shows how from a subordinate position they fight to gain more space and recognition in

a male-dominated context. The reader first encounters Ester wearing revealing clothes and discovers that she has been instructed by her boss to dress provocatively to please customers. Indeed, the reader discovers that Ester is expected to give sexual favours to these men. Ester's best friend, Norma, has been dismissed from the same job for refusing to continue giving in to the sexual demands of Víctor, the salon's most valued customer. In an attempt to avenge Norma's misfortune, Ester manages to get the same job and plots to take revenge by strangling Víctor as she washes his hair in the back room. Víctor is depicted as an arrogant, powerful and sexist man who abuses women verbally and sexually. The reader is led to believe that Norma and Ester accept these working conditions for financial reasons, since they come from a low socio-economic background. The economic factor is present throughout the story, and readers gain insights into the motivations and actions of the characters to secure a better and more secure financial position.

The pedagogical approach

The teaching focused on uncovering the students' ideological standpoints on Hispanic gender identities through reading this short story. To this end, the study's pedagogical approach consisted of five steps, as in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1 The Study's Five-Step Pedagogical Approach

	AIMS	INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TEACHING STRATEGIES	TASKS

	AIMS	INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TEACHING STRATEGIES	TASKS
Comprehending the Text	Students comprehend the story	Students comprehend the story's main events	Skim text; scan text Create mindmaps Summarise the story Draw timeline for the story	Students built a mindmap of the story's main events Students created graphic and visual organisers to represent main events

	AIMS	INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TEACHING STRATEGIES	TASKS
Student Response	Students learn how to create 'texts' out of the reading Students develop a 'generative theme approach'	Students can explain how they relate their own personal experiences to the story	Encourage students to: respond freely and emotionally to the story link the story to personal experiences justify their answers	Students discussed the lived, virtual or mediated experiences they related to the text, guided by questions in class
Recording the Response	Record students' 'texts' Embrace a 'problem-posing' approach to education	Students can appraise their emotional response to the literary text	Build portfolios Keep diaries Write essays	Students wrote diary entries to record their responses to the text

	AIMS	INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TEACHING STRATEGIES	TASKS
Analysis of Responses	Identify stereotypical and prejudiced attitudes in students' 'texts' Reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions and ethnocentric viewpoints	Students can: describe ideologies embedded in their own emotional response to a literary text identify stereotypes held against of Hispanics analyse and interpret other students' 'texts' examine beliefs, behaviours, values and attitudes towards others	Analyse students' 'texts'	Students analysed responses to the text from a previous cohort of learners Students wrote a reflective piece analysing their own 'texts' within themselves

	AIMS	INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TEACHING STRATEGIES	TASKS
Awareness Raising	Promote a 'self-regulation strategy' through an appeal to emotions for attitude change Uncover ideologies Develop the ability to be 'onlooker' of one's own texts Identify and modify essentialist and culturist language in students' 'texts'	Students can: demonstrate the development of their own worldviews critically evaluate and analyse their own 'texts' illustrate chauvinistic culturist language with examples evaluate commonsense assumptions in their own texts critically examine their own beliefs, behaviours, values and attitudes towards others	Discuss stereotypes, prejudices and ideologies Answer questions based on the students' 'texts' Analyse one's own images and discourses of *otherness* in closed pairs Improve the reflective essay based on class discussions	Students noted the stereotypes, prejudices and linguistic choices that denoted essentialist and chauvinistic attitudes on strips of paper as they analysed other students' 'texts' Students critically evaluated their own reflective essay and further analysed their own images and discourses of *otherness* with a view to improving their piece of reflective writing

Comprehending the text

Reading of the short story 'Norma y Ester' was facilitated through comprehension tasks that included a glossary of key terms, questions, summaries, use of graphic/visual organisers, mindmaps, key information about content, poster production, descriptions of characters. For example, students were asked to build a mindmap of the main events of the story to check their comprehension of the storyline, and this served as a springboard for clarification, expansion and character portrayal. As a comprehension task, small groups were asked to choose an episode in the story to create a new mindmap collaboratively, stating the cause and effect of an incident, the characters involved, and a timeline detailing the events leading up to the incident. Students later displayed and shared these mindmaps with other members of the class, providing a chance for them to focus on the story in greater detail.

Student response

After students had come to comprehend the literary text, they responded to it emotionally and freely, whilst responding to questions such as: "*What do these incidents / attitudes / events remind you of?"; "How do you relate this incident / attitude / event to your experiences with Hispanics?"; "Can you relate this to any of your personal experiences? Or to anything you've read or heard?"; "If so, how?"* "*What makes you say so? Why do you say that? What exactly makes you think this way?"* Students were encouraged to discuss lived, virtual or mediated experiences that they related to the themes, events and situations in the literary text, and to explain and justify the links and connections they made. Students described these experiences triggered by the literary text, and justified and validated their answers. The questions posed aimed to encourage students to talk about their own experiences in relation to the literary text with a view to exploring the 'texts' within themselves. These new 'texts' were the students'

articulations of past experiences, feelings and images, which they created as responses to the literary text. Kramsch (2000) calls this new 'writing' the 'students' texts', which provide a learning opportunity for analysing students' ideologies in relation to foreign *others*.

Recording the response

Students recorded their responses in diary entries, which they later used for analysis and reflection. The decision to include this activity was informed by Brenner's (2010, p. 136) idea of encouraging learners to record their own responses to fiction to raise their awareness of the influence of aspects of their own identities in their subsequent analysis. Kramsch (2000) advocates that students explore their 'students' texts' to help unmask the influence of their own ideologies, for in her empirical research she found no evidence of students' intercultural learning where they had not prepared and explored their 'students' texts'. So students can discuss and reflect upon what they bring inherently to their personal responses to fiction, they need to record these responses in some format such as the 'students' texts'.

Analysis of responses

At this stage the study required the students to undertake two tasks. The first was a group discussion analysing responses to the literary text by a previous cohort of learners. The second, which followed, required students to prepare a reflective piece of writing in which they analysed their own responses. For the students' analysis of previous learners' responses to the literary text, these 'texts' were transformed into a pedagogical task. For ethical reasons, the students' own texts were not chosen for class discussions. Instead, fragments of past students' 'texts' were used as a pedagogical tool in order to avoid offence or discomfort. The aim of this task was for the students to

identify ideologies embedded in the responses of previous students – final year undergraduates – to the same literary text. A key learning outcome of these two tasks was for students to appreciate and understand how to reflect upon the taken-for-granted assumptions displayed in both sets of responses.

Awareness-raising

The current students identified the influence of ideologies in the previous students' thinking about Hispanic gender identities when responding to the short story, and wrote these on strips of paper that were later blu-tacked onto a board. With all paper strips displayed on the board, I posed to the students questions such as: *What makes these students see Hispanics in this way? Why do the students perceive Hispanic people in this way? What do Hispanic people do to be perceived in this way? Can you find any essentialist comments among those of the previous students? If so, explain.* Students were encouraged to justify their responses, and in the discussion phase, class members were asked whether they identified themselves with having any of these beliefs about Hispanics. Students agreed that generally, they shared most of the perceptions and views claimed by the previous cohort of learners. At this point some students exhibited feelings of discomfort as they openly recognised sharing some of the earlier students' prejudices. Research in the field of social psychology found that becoming aware of one's own prejudices and biases may lead some people to experience feelings of guilt, self-disappointment, discomfort and threat. Especially people with a firmly egalitarian disposition engaging in processes of reflection can routinise less biased attitudes and generate less biased responses by default as a 'self-regulation strategy' for attitude change.

The study

The research consisted of three case studies replicated with a total of 68 students who were international and home fourth and final year undergraduates undertaking a BA in Spanish in a British university. The vast majority were aged in their twenties, with a few mature students, and all are referred to by pseudonyms in this study. Each case study was nested one upon the other, moving from a potential action research project to a case study of critical cultural awareness. The guiding research question was: *How can critical cultural awareness be explained within the context of this study?* Research was conducted in a Spanish language oral class where literary texts, among other types of texts, were used with the aim of improving students' language skills and developing their intercultural competences. Data were collected systematically, using both transcriptions of digitally recorded class discussions, oral presentations and interviews, and students' learning diaries, in an attempt to bring a multiplicity of perspectives to the understanding of the study. This study used content analysis – 'the process of summarizing and reporting written data – the main contents of data and their messages' (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 475) – to analyse data through some of the methods, tools and approaches of Grounded Theory (GT) as an analytic tool. Themes emerging from the data were identified, and new data were collected, exploring those themes in more depth and from different angles in the replication studies with a two-fold purpose: to validate findings and to gain new insights into the issue under study. No attempt was made to generate theory in this project.

Essentialist ideologies

This study sought to identify students' 'default ways of thinking' to understand the ideologies that are embedded in their experiences and permeate their discourses of Hispanic gender identities. As its starting point to explore 'commonsense' assumptions,

the study took on the questioning of McLaren (2009) as to what 'values, beliefs and behaviours' are being 'inculcated' that 'maintain asymmetrical relations of power and privilege' between the students and Hispanics? In this section I discuss analysis of the data to help identify the students' 'natural' ideological standpoints (Byram's 'explicit criteria'). Findings from this analysis, in search of the ideologies that 'obscure' (McLaren's term) students' understanding of the complexities of Hispanic societies, suggest these ideologies were mainly essentialist. Essentialism is probably one of the most negative characteristics of stereotyping, i.e., the mental representations and categorisations that we have of others are essentialist by nature. Essentialism refers to our tendency to act as if there was an inherent essence, a fixed biology or an underlying homogeneous structure to make groups of people the way they are. Holliday (2011, p.4) explains that:

> Essentialism presents people's individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are. The most common aspects of essentialism (...) are to do with separate cultures as physical territories.

Recent research demonstrates that many people believe social groups have their own innate essence (Demoulin, Leyens & Yzerbyt, 2006; Denson et al., 2006; Prentice & Miller, 2006), as reflected in a variety of popular expressions and deeply held racist beliefs. Holliday argues that essentialism gives 'easy' answers for culture, and that the constructions it makes are never neutral, but ideological. This type of essentialism is what Holliday terms 'culturism', which he equates with the same essentialism that drives sexism and racism, and defines in the following way:

> From essentialism there is just a small step to *culturism* (...) This is similarly constructed as racism or sexism in that the imagined characteristics of the 'culture' (or 'women' or 'Asians') are used to define the person. (Holliday, 2010, p. 27)

According to Holliday (2011, p. 4), essentialism occurs when one believes that behaviour is 'defined and constrained' by culture, especially when separate cultures are viewed as physical territories, to which Leyens & Demoulin (2010, p. 200) add:

> It is well-known that people who are convinced of the reality of a given idea unconsciously behave in a biased way. Because people treat assumptions as facts, they display biased behaviours that transform the idea into reality […] Even when they have almost no experience with exemplars of specific out-groups, people readily attribute [to] out-group members the stereotypes shared by their in-group.

Data analysis from this study reveals the students believe that cultures are territorially and geographically bound, supporting Holliday's theory that the most common aspect of essentialism has to do with 'separate cultures as physical territories'. The study findings indicate that students imagine Hispanic gender identities as homogeneous, fixed and static, as can be gleaned from these data:

> I **imagine** Latin American **men as very chauvinistic**, with no consideration for women's feelings. I **imagine** them only interested in women's bodies and wanting to be with many women as if it was a contest. (Sarah)

This is what is expected of women in the story – to look sexy and please men sexually.

> This is what happens in any patriarchal society, like the one in Latin America. (Suzanne)

The data indicate a tendency among the participant students to *imagine* 'all' Hispanic men as being chauvinistic. The 'all' remains implicit but its universalising character is important. The students generally construct (or imagine) this '*other*' – the man portrayed in the story as chauvinistic, who the two women of the hair salon plan to murder – through the stereotype of male chauvinism in the Hispanic world, a concept reinforced by the literary text. For some of the students, the short story represents Latin American patriarchal society, where men treat women as if they exist only to satisfy the men's sexual needs and use vulgar and obscene language to belittle and underestimate them. Suzanne expresses this notion well when she comments 'this is what happens in

any patriarchal society, like the one in Latin America'. In this categorical assertion, she is making an essentialist observation bound territorially and geographically to the Latin American world.

The clothes that the female characters in 'Norma y Ester' wear provided a forum to discuss clothing as a semiotic text, and serve as a springboard for comparing and contrasting dress sense displayed by Hispanic and European women. Some students expressed their understanding that Hispanic women tend to wear revealing clothes to please men and draw male attention. Fiona, for instance, opines that:

> in Mexico and Cuba, women wear revealing clothes with **tight** jeans and blouses that show too much flesh. Cuban girls wear **minute** lycra skirts and **tiny** tops, suitable for beach wear, in the streets. **This is not down to the hot weather** – since in the Sahara Desert women do not dress like this – **they have *other* motives for dressing this way** … [emphasis added]

Although Fiona does not state precisely why she perceives these women wear the clothing she identifies, she discards that it is due to the hot weather. She describes the clothes that Mexican and Cuban women wear as 'tight', 'minute' and 'tiny', adjectives that emphasise these women's attempts to show the shape of their bodies as much as they can to attract male looks. This piece of data suggests an implicit condemnation of the social practice of this type of clothing and provides evidence of Fiona *othering* Mexican and Cuban women. As Holliday (2010) would argue, Fiona has excluded these women from what she imagines to be her own 'normal', 'superior' and 'civilised' group. In Pickering's (2001) terms, Fiona's stereotypical *othering* is a form of social exorcism, placing the other in the periphery as if they had some sort of deficiency in behaving in such a way. Since the comparative element is absent from this thinking about 'her own culture', Fiona has not reflected upon women's dress code in her own country, and therefore her comment lacks critical cultural awareness.

Another student called Anna juxtaposes Argentine and European views of a miniskirt:

> (…) **an important aspect that distinguishes my European culture from Argentinian culture, is the presence of *machismo* in Argentine society**. In fact, this is a very important and relevant factor in **the ways a miniskirt is viewed, since it can be interpreted in different ways according to one's position with regard to women**. What I mean is that, for me, if a woman wears a miniskirt, it is simply because she likes it, or because it is hot, but I would not read too many connotations in it. However, it seems to me that if a *machista* man sees a woman wearing a miniskirt, from his point of view it would mean that the woman is easy and would read it as a way of provoking him sexually. [emphasis added]

Anna presents the Argentine and European as a dichotomy – a miniskirt, as a semiotic text, can be read as *sexual provocation* or as *a matter of personal choice*. Anna regards herself as European, and appears to be aware of the different readings a sign can have, although it is interesting to note that she compares a whole continent with a country. This is a recurrent dimension in the data, that is, the fact that students regard cultures as being territorially bound and geographically limited, and tend to compartmentalise cultural notions and practices into neat boxes for analysis and comparison. In Anna's case, she presents her voice as representative of the European viewpoint, which she describes in positive terms; thus positioning the Western perspective as superior to the Argentinian, which is described negatively.

Some of the students recalled personal experiences to illustrate the viewpoint that 'Hispanic men' are disrespectful and inconsiderate to 'women'. For these students, reading 'Norma y Ester' brought back memories of trips to Latin American countries and encounters with Latin American people on their home soil. From the study findings, it is feasible to suggest that in general, students confirmed the stereotypes they brought with them to the literary text, as this piece of data from Lizzie indicates:

> **Latin American men** have little respect for women. They think that women should be submissive and obedient. In my culture, if a man is **disrespectful** to a woman, there would be serious consequences for the man, because we have managed to get the law on our side (…) When I read this story, it made me think of my trip to South America because there I met such **arrogant** men that matched the image of **male chauvinism.** [emphasis added]

Elsewhere in her comments, Lizzie claims to have met the most sexist and arrogant men during her travels in South America, and feels that she was too naïve at the time. She acknowledges it is only through reading 'Norma y Ester' as a final year university student of Spanish that she is better able to understand many of the situations she experienced in those travels. Lizzie describes South American men as 'disrespectful', 'arrogant' and 'chauvinistic', highlighting the negative image she has of 'the' Latin American male *other*. Lizzie essentialises the personal qualities of men across this entire continent by suggesting these men have an inherent essence; she explains their behaviour as if determined and constrained by the physical territory in which they live.

(Neo-) essentialist ideologies

Holliday argues that many of the current intercultural communication studies and training recognise problems associated with essentialism, but follow a neo-essentialist model because:

> basic cultural models implicit in the work of theorists like Hofstede are often implicitly maintained so that diversity continues to be the exception to the essentialist rule rather than being recognised as the norm. This results in a dominant paradigm, which remains neo-essentialist. (Holliday, 2010, p. 261)

This neo-essentialist view, which appears to be dominant in western contexts, can be perceived in much of the data in this study, for example in student comments about the protagonist, such as 'Ester is quite unique'. Most of the students agreed that in the Hispanic world there is a pervading expectation that women should be submissive and obedient to men. Usually for those with this view, Latin American women can be

assigned positive attributes like ‘strength’ and ‘power’ only as their reaction to patriarchy. For example, women are strong and powerful in order to fight against male chauvinism and to survive in a male-dominated society, in an ever-lasting battle against gender inequality. Holliday (2010, p. 266) observed that many western students of Spanish language see this type of women as ‘quite unique’ in Latin America, as if such behaviour is ‘unexpected’, ‘unusual’ and not really Hispanic. Sally's comment in her learning diary represents this neo-essentialist ideology that permeates the data gathered in the study:

> It seems to me that **Ester is quite unique**. In England, we do not have such a male chauvinist culture, so it is much more likely that English women would not tolerate sexist behaviour. [emphasis added]

According to Sally, even though – indeed, because – the protagonist in ‘Norma y Ester’ is a woman who fights for gender equality, she is ‘quite unique’ in Argentine society. Sally claims that by contrast, ‘it is much more likely’ the majority of English women would not tolerate such a male chauvinistic attitude, implying that most English women would fight for gender equality or would at least actively resist sexist behaviour. Sally appears to have constructed notions of women’s empowerment in both countries, which she presents as binaries, suggesting *the majority of English women would or actively resist male domination* as opposed to *the minority of Argentine women who would or actively resist male domination.* The participating students generally see Ester as unique and exceptional, whereas they believe that in their society in Britain women are more – Sally says ‘much more’ – likely to not tolerate sexist behaviour; there are no challenges to the generalisation. Lindsey’s experiences in Salamanca during her year abroad placement also illustrate the dominant neo-essentialist view:

> I’d always believed that, in general, Hispanic men were chauvinistic, sexist and sexually perverse, like the male characters in “Norma y Ester”. My first impressions for quite a while after I arrived in Spain were that this generalisation

> was correct. Every evening that I went clubbing, it was always the Hispanics who came up to me and asked me "*¿guapa, quieres bailar*? [*babe, wanna dance?*], while the rest of the nationalities, for example, the British would sit in a corner chatting away in a low voice. These Hispanics seemed to be full of self-confidence, and at times, I even thought that they were really trying to conform to the stereotype! ... however, I later realised that not all men were like this. In Salamanca, I met shy and honest men, respectful of women.

It is interesting to note that Lindsey perceives men in nightclubs who informally asked her for a dance (Hispanics) as chauvinistic and perverse, and perceives shy men in nightclubs, who minded their own business (whom she exemplifies as British), as honest and respectful of women. She has clearly idealised men from her country, whilst demonising Hispanic men. Lindsey's starting point is essentialist, as indicated in her linguistic expressions such as *in general, Hispanic men, the British* and *this generalisation was correct*. She conveys her neo-essentialist view in claiming *not all men were like this*, as if 'diversity' is 'the exception to the essentialist rule rather than being recognised as the norm', as Holliday (2011, p. 7) explains. Lindsey's assertion that she later realised not all Spanish men are like this – *in Salamanca, I met shy and honest men, respectful of women* – implies by default that she regarded men in Salamanca, or in Spain at large, as dishonest and disrespectful of women, except for the few she met in Salamanca who she believed were not. It also suggests that she perceives British men as honest and respectful of women. Ideologically this viewpoint can be explained as a 'natural' or 'commonsense' element of the essentialism underlying her worldview.

Some study participants expressed their opinions that Hispanic men believe they can 'control', 'dominate' and 'own' women, some claiming, even to the point of choosing the clothes that women should wear. They described Hispanic women as submissive, subservient and obedient to men. These data demonstrate rigid essentialist

views of human behaviour as predetermined and confined by sovereign or other geographic territories. Examples include ‘Latin American men have little respect for women’; ‘The Italians and the Spaniards are well known to be the opposite of the English’, and ‘In England we don’t have such a male chauvinistic culture. English women would not tolerate sexist behaviour’. Data analysis reveals in the participants’ responses to the story the commonly held belief that worldviews and behaviours can be geographically prescribed, determined and expected. Important for our critical understanding of this essentialist discourse is that its adherents consider their judgements – e.g., that ‘our women are protected by the system’, that ‘women can choose who they want to be and how they want to live’ – as ‘natural’, ‘common sense’, and beyond challenge. That is, although these are unquestioned ideological judgements, their essentialist adherents uphold, or at least assume, these to be objective truth.

Implications for pedagogy

Guilherme (2012, p. 360) has suggested that Critical Pedagogy can be used effectively to develop ‘critical cultural awareness’ through analysis of ‘experiences of cultural difference’. She postulates that Critical Pedagogy:

> unsettles **deep-rooted** values and principles, **unquestioned** concepts and **automated** routines, all of which lead to **unconscious criteria** and **uncontested judgements** […] It is always a challenge to attempt to deconstruct and uncover ideas, feelings and behaviours that are generally **taken for granted** or are **often hidden from view** and to invite students to address and explore them. (Guilherme, 2012, p. 368) [emphasis added]

For Guilherme, Critical Pedagogy is engaged in the uncovering of 'unconscious criteria', or what Byram would term, in making the 'criteria explicit' so students can use them in their critical cultural evaluations. Guilherme describes these 'unconscious criteria' as 'unquestioned concepts' and 'uncontested judgements', which are 'generally taken for granted' and 'often hidden from view'. The proposal for developing ‘critical cultural

awareness' is to 'address', 'deconstruct', 'explore', 'uncover' and 'unsettle' these 'deep-rooted values and prejudices', with a view to unmasking the 'natural and commonsense ideologies' that essentialists project onto others in a hegemonic process. Gamerro's short story 'Norma y Ester' served an important function as the text through which the students could seek to uncover their 'unconscious criteria'. It provided opportunities for the students and the researchers to gain insights into the UK-based students' essentialised notions of Hispanic gender identities and the associated prejudices against Hispanic peoples. The pedagogical interventions in this study aimed at raising the students' awareness of these ideologies ('unconscious criteria' or 'default ways of thinking') underlying their views of Hispanics. To this end, one of the teaching approaches employed was to use fragments of the data collected from previous cohorts of students to help make these criteria 'explicit' to the students. These sample fragments were transformed into pedagogical tasks for other students to identify the ideas, values and beliefs underpinning their own perspectives on the story. The theoretical justification for using personal experiences for textual analysis lies in Darder et al. (2009, p. 11), who postulate that ideologies manifest themselves 'in the inner histories and experiences'.

One occasion when I conducted these pedagogical interventions in the classroom, I drew on the board a table with two columns headed 'Hispanic men' and 'Hispanic women'. I asked the class to read the personal experiences and identify the 'commonsense' and 'natural' ideas, values and beliefs embedded in the past students' 'histories and experiences' as per the two columns. The students were provided with strips of paper to write down their ideas, and these were later blu-tacked onto the board in the corresponding columns. After students completed this task, the columns on the board read as we see in Table 12.2.

Table 12.2 Hispanic Gender Stereotyping of Previous Students

Hispanic men	Hispanic women
• need to spread their seed, are hot-blooded and have many women • cannot control their actions or emotions due to this internal urge • engage in the cultural practice of catcalling and wolf-whistling • sexually objectify women • do not take women's emotions into account • are chauvinistic • are controlling • are lecherous • are disrespectful • are arrogant • are inconsiderate • are sleazy	• wear revealing clothes to please men and to get their attention because they [men] want sex • are submissive, obedient, subservient and fragile • are used to being sexually harassed • are not respected or listened to • lack self-confidence and so do not fight for their rights • are treated as sex objects • conform to the traditional role of a woman • serve their husbands • are more accepting of their husband's authority • let men exercise control over them

This table demonstrates the ideologies underlying the students' stereotypes of gender identity in the Hispanic world. From the students' perspective, Hispanic men perceive themselves as 'superior' and 'more powerful' than women, whilst Hispanic women perceive themselves as 'different' from and 'inferior' to the men. Most would see all of the attributes as negative. Hispanic men are perceived as womanisers, chauvinistic, disrespectful, inconsiderate, arrogant, lecherous and sleazy, whereas women are viewed as vulgar, needy, subservient, traditional and fragile.

Holliday (2011) observes that by constructing demonized images of others, we support an idealised image of 'us'. These binary oppositions reveal a hierarchal structure that privileges ideologies of supremacy, with positives and negatives. Thus, male attributes related to affection, emotion, consideration, kindness and generosity;

and female attributes of power, control, strength and dominance are valued. These ideological standpoints, which the students associated with Centre-European cultures, permeate their discourses, and become the unquestioned norms to be adhered to. Pedagogies that encourage students to recognise the existence of these binaries and the hierarchal structures they unwittingly embed in their discourses, can open up a space for students to explore how they project their ideology onto others in a process of hegemony. Later I conducted this exercise with the students again, presenting a table with two columns this time headed 'Us' (the students) and 'Them' (the Hispanics). When the activity was complete, the columns read as we see in Table 12.3.

Table 12.3 Idealised Self / Demonised Other

Us	Them
• our women stand up for themselves • our women are protected by the system • what our women wear is a sign of elegance and femininity • our women can choose who they want to be and how they want to live	• their worldview is antiquated • their men are disrespectful and inconsiderate to women • their women are submissive and obedient • their men are arrogant, sexist and chauvinist • their women are unprotected by the system • their men are protected by the system • their men offend women in the streets and invade their private space • their women lack self-esteem and self-confidence • their women are sexually objectified • their women exercise agency only through their bodies • their women are victims of the patriarchal system • their women wear revealing clothes to attract male attention • their women are vulgar

Us	Them
	• their women are either 'completely subservient' or 'totally manipulative'

As can be gleaned from Table 3, the students have offered much more detail about the *other*; they have offered comparatively little reflection upon the *self*, and in particular, upon their own personal discourses when referring to *otherness*. This table thus contains much more information in the 'them' column than in the 'us' column. Furthermore, it reveals that the students view 'them' as inferior to and less civilised than themselves, by associating 'them' with negative attributes ('antiquated', 'disrespectful', 'inconsiderate', 'arrogant', 'sexist', 'invasive', 'offensive', 'vulgar', 'traditional', 'passive', 'victims of a patriarchal system', 'manipulative'). In the column representing 'us', however, the students identify themselves with only three qualities – 'independence', 'equality' and 'elegance' – all of which the students perceive to be positive. This exercise with the students reveals how these discourses are essentialist and project an 'idealised Self', which self always imagines to be modern, independent, civilised, elegant and advanced (Holliday, 2011, p. 3). The students' ideologies become apparent as they speak from a position of power and privilege, projecting through their words an assumption that they have used 'commonsense' and 'natural' criteria in their critical cultural evaluations, thus perpetuating asymmetrical power relations. They appear to judge any gender attributes opposing those that they have articulated as inferior to and less civilized than theirs.

Conclusion

This chapter provides both empirical evidence of *what* 'critical cultural awareness' means in this study and suggestions on *how* it can be developed pedagogically. It discusses the data from a case study of students studying Spanish at a British university to refine Byram's concept of 'critical cultural awareness' (1997). In particular it seeks

to clarify what is meant by 'explicit criteria', using the theoretical constructs of ‘ideology’ and ‘anti-essentialism’. One of the pedagogical implications of this study lies in raising students' awareness of (neo)-essentialist discourses that prescribe behaviours as geographically determined and expected, by appreciating one's own discourses of supremacy that privilege the ‘us’ as opposed to ‘them’, and by understanding that, and how, binary thinking can lead to ethnocentrism. Critical Pedagogy was found to be particularly useful to raise awareness of commonsense assumptions through the examination of asymmetrical power relations and privileged positions. Importantly, this study highlights the ideological standpoints that many in Northern contexts accept unquestionably as ‘commonsense’ and ‘natural’, or as ‘default beliefs’ in Holliday’s terms, and use them to make judgements of what is right and wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, appropriate or inappropriate. Evidence from the case study discussed here suggests that the consciousness-raising exercise of identifying values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that students might otherwise have not noticed can serve as a springboard for the students to reflect on their ideological standpoints. Studies that contribute to a broader understanding of ideologies of cultural *others* are necessary for their pedagogical potential to use students' experiences and narratives as teaching resources.

Developing intercultural communicative competence in language teaching is an educational challenge, which can be complex to undertake. It involves dealing with attitudes, values, beliefs, perceptions – notions that can be unsettling for the language teacher given their lack of clarity and possibly contentious nature. It also means coping with issues such as bias and prejudice, which requires the creative translation of theoretical concepts into teaching practicalities. As the empirical research discussed in this chapter has demonstrated, students’ critical reading of Gamerro’s short story

'Norma y Ester' could bring their Hispanic gender stereotyping out into the open and provide opportunities for them to develop 'critical cultural awareness' through pedagogies that investigate assumptions and unmask dominant discourses. Developing teaching approaches that encourage learners to interrogate their own ideologies can pave the way for viewing the world through a more intercultural lens.

Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to John Manders for his careful assistance in polishing the language, proof-reading, formatting and editing this chapter. I also wish to thank him for designing the tables in this work. Above all, I am greatly indebted to him for his bright suggestions and comments as an intelligent reader.

References

Allman, P. (2009). Paulo Freire's contributions to radical adult education. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (417-430). New York: Routledge.

Brenner, D. (2010). From core curricula to core identities: On critical pedagogy and foreign language/culture education. In G. Levine & A. Phipps (Eds), *AAUSC 2010: Critical and intercultural theory and language pedagogy* (pp. 125-140). Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning.

Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2009). The intercultural speaker and the pedagogy of foreign language education. In D. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 321-332). London: Sage.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*, (6th ed.). London: Routledge.

Darder, A., Baltodano, M., & Torres, R. (2009). Critical pedagogy: An introduction. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 1-20).New York: Routledge.

Demoulin, S., Leyens, J. P., & Yzerbyt, V. (2006) Lay theories of essentialism. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 9,* 25-42.

Denson, T., Lickel, B., Curtis, M., Stenstrom, D., & Ames, D. (2006) The roles of entitativity and essenciality in judgments of collective responsibility. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 9,* 43-61.

Gamerro, C. (2005). Norma y Ester in *El libro de los afectos raros*. Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma.

Guilherme, M. (2012). Critical language and intercultural communication pedagogy. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 357-371). London: Routledge.

Holliday, A. (2011). Intercultural communication and ideology. London: Sage.

Holliday, A., Hyde, M., & Kullman, J. (2010). Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book for students. London: Routledge.

Kramsch, C. (2000). Teaching language along the cultural faultline. In D. L. Lange, C. A. Klee, R. M. Paige, & Y. A. Yershova (Eds.), *Culture as the core: Interdisciplinary perspectives on culture learning in the language curriculum* (pp. 15-31). Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

Leyens, J. P., & Demoulin, S. (2010). Ethnocentrism and group realities'. In J. F. Dovidio, M. Hewstone, P. Glick, & V. M. Esses (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination* (pp. 194-208). London: Sage.

McLaren, P. (2009). Critical pedagogy: A look at the major concepts. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 61-83). New York: Routledge.

Pickering, M. (2001). *Stereotyping: The politics of representation*. Hampshire: Palgrave.

Prentice, D., & Miller, D. (2006) Essentializing differences between women and men. *Psychological Science, 17,*129-135.