



# The Analysis of the Editorial Process in an Information and Media Literacy Platform that Promotes Intercultural Awareness: *Postscript Magazine*

El Análisis del Proceso Editorial en una Plataforma de Información y Alfabetización Mediática que Promueve la Conciencia Intercultural: *Postscript Magazine*

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## Abstract

This article explores the relations of intercultural factors that are inherent and rarely detached to the process of learning a second language. The study was carried out in the developmental frame of an extracurricular project of a Colombian higher education program in bilingualism. The notions of interculturality presented here are drawn from an editorial team of a magazine

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called the PostScript and these serve as a diagnosis that grounds the first phase of a research process about the development of intercultural awareness of pre-service English teachers. Using interviews, reflection logs, and the stimulated recall method, it was found that the editors of the magazine have an incipient awareness and intercultural competence that allowed them to build a cultural identity projected in the products of the magazine. Furthermore, it was found that PostScript operates as an information and media literacy platform that promotes intercultural awareness in the process of bilingual education.

***Key words.*** *Culture, bilingualism, awareness, competence, interculturality.*

En este trabajo se exploran las relaciones de los factores interculturales que son inherentes y en ocasiones desligados a los procesos de aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. El estudio se desarrolló en el marco de desarrollo de un proyecto extracurricular de un programa de educación superior en bilingüismo. Se presentan las nociones de interculturalidad de un equipo editor de la revista llamada PostScript, estas nociones sirven como diagnóstico que fundamenta la primera etapa de un proceso de investigación sobre el desarrollo de la conciencia intercultural de profesores de inglés en formación. Por medio de entrevistas, diarios y el método del recuerdo estimulado, se encontró que los editores de la revista poseen una conciencia y competencia intercultural incipiente que les permite construir una identidad cultural proyectada en los productos de la revista. Además, se encuentra que PostScript opera como plataforma de alfabetización mediática e informacional que promueve la conciencia intercultural en el proceso de formación bilingüe.

*Palabras clave.* cultura, bilingüismo, conciencia, competencia, interculturalidad.

## Introduction

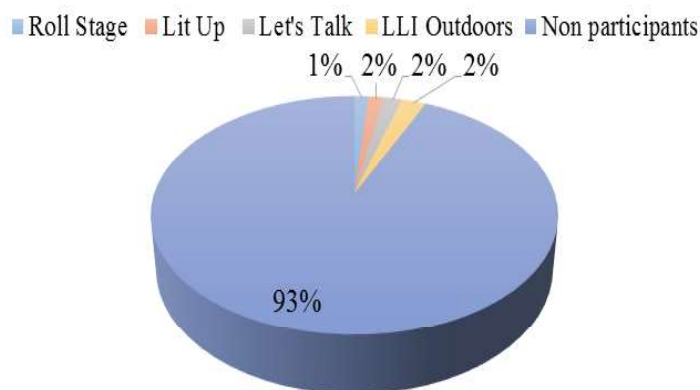
The close connection that bonds language and culture has been widely discussed over the years (D'Andrade, 1990; Byram, 1997; Geertz, 2001; Jiang, 2000; Kramsch, 1993) which has settled an undeniable argumentative floor to implement processes that promote the intercultural competences of students and teachers of languages. However, the inclusions of these aspects is still considered a didactic challenge since it is unknown if the inclusion of cultural knowledge in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom enhances student's intercultural awareness. As Olaya & Gómez (2013) have stated, the struggle of including intercultural competences in the language curriculum is mainly attributed to the overemphasis that teachers give to the linguistic structural components of the syllabus which ruptures the dialogical relation mentioned earlier.

It is based on these assumptions that the promotion of intercultural awareness has become an object of study in higher education programs that prepare language teachers. Parallel to this matter, the Ministry of Education in Colombia has established a set of bilingual policies<sup>21</sup> that seek to strengthen the language teaching and learning system to guarantee the quality of linguistic development by allowing students to use the English learning process as a vehicle of social and cultural exchange which provides several opportunities to recognize the value of the own and other cultures.

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<sup>21</sup> See from MEN Colombia: "Plan Nacional de inglés: ¡Colombia Very Well! (2015-2025)"

Consequently, it is required that all levels of the educational system in Colombia implement curricular adaptations and innovations regarding cultural enhancement that follow national policy demands and local plans of bilingualism and internationalization<sup>22</sup>. In response to this proposal, the higher education program *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés (LBI)* has decidedly executed innovative practices that involve total immersion camps, literature, theater, and conversation clubs.



**Figure.** Students' participation in extracurricular activities related to the program LBI.

As it is portrayed above, the participation of students is very limited and, to the date of the development of this study, only 7% of the total of students LBI has attended constantly to these activities. An alternative solution to reach the remaining 93% (641) of the student population was the distribution of information by means of a magazine.

<sup>22</sup> See PDI (2009-2019) Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.

The present study focalized on the interactions of the editorial board of the PostScript which is the official magazine of the program LBI. Its influence as an information tool impacted the whole academic population providing useful data that serves as an initial diagnosis of the state of intercultural awareness in this specific context. The implications derived from this research process should be used to consolidate curricular adaptations in higher education programs which align with the transitions suggested in the national policies of bilingualism.

## Conceptual Framework

### Culture as a Key Component in Language Learning

The concept of culture is faced from the linguistic point of view due to the relations between language learning and culture connected in this study. D'Andrade (1990) states that culture is a learned system which shares meaning and understanding through language, it also involves the nature and the real world.

So, culture is understood not only as a conglomerate of customs, habits, knowledge, but also it is the result of psychological and sociocultural processes in which the patterns of interaction emerge as a social system. Similarly, Geertz (2001) conceives it as an ordered system of meanings and symbols that are used to define the world and interact among humans, whereas Ruiz-Román (2003) describes it as a system of meanings that are created and shared by humans in a community, and it is represented through communication to educate.

From the notion of culture, cultural awareness is thought to be a set of inner attitudes towards own and other cultures. This concept is developed by Byram *et al.* (1994) as the language users' intrinsic ability to recognize their own culture and the target language culture. Likewise, Tomlinson (2001) in Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) pointed out that the cultural awareness is the recognition of the speaker's own culture and the other's culture. The speaker's understanding of both cultures is the result of an inner sense of cultural identity that grows up while the social agent establishes similarities and differences among the cultures.

### **Interculturality and Intercultural Awareness**

The global dynamics invites people to approach to other cultures, and the language learning has become a pretext to know about them. As a result, a foreign language speaker becomes an intercultural speaker. However, before defining interculturality, it is important to differentiate it from multiculturalism due to its conceptual proximity. According to Hernández (2009), multiculturalism is the co-existence of different cultures that share the same geographical position, but it does not imply an exchange among them. While multicultural societies have different perceptions of realities, intercultural societies create common perceptions of realities resulting of the interaction among them.

Interculturality involves the understanding of the cultural differences that are evidenced when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact among them (Gómez, 2011). Furthermore, Hernández (2005) argues that interculturality also requires a comprehensive communication of the

communities that share the same territory in order to generate a mutual enrichment as a process of recognition and valuation of the cultures involved.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), the relations between the “world of origin” and the “world of the target community” are framed into the intercultural awareness due to the perceptions in terms of similarities and differences that emerge in the process. As Yassine (2006) stated, for the cultural awareness, the individual is required to know his/her own culture to then recognize others’ cultures, whereas in the intercultural awareness, the speakers are expected to develop awareness of the target language culture as well as the mother’s culture. The latter implies a dual process of recognition of the internal and external aspects of culture of an individual, which in turn, prompts metacognitive process that rely on complex instructional procedures.

### Literature Review

The development of intercultural communicative competences has become a challenge for the ELT field since it allows the language learners to recognize the cultural dimension of the target language. As a result, the studies that are presented in this paper deal with the relevance of the intercultural awareness in the learning of English as a Foreign Language in different sociocultural contexts.

Olaya and Gómez (2013) developed a qualitative research project, which had as main objective to diagnose the perceptions that 51 pre-service teachers of

upper intermediate English course from three Colombian universities had towards culture in the language classroom. The main findings pointed out that the definition of culture is static as long as the participants referred to it as set of terms related to identity, values, and habits. The researchers also found that the EFL learners are not aware of the relevance of culture in their language learning process and their professional development. The study concluded the diagnosis by suggesting the importance of balancing foreign language learning by including the cultural component in the universities' curricula.

In the same line, Casteñada (2012) conducted a study in a public school in Bogotá that aimed at exploring the students' understanding towards the didactic material, which was permeated of cultural aspects, in order to describe their perception about culture. The target population of this study was 51 students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade between the ages of 11 to 16 years old with elementary English language proficiency. The findings showed that the students approached to other cultures by comparing to their mother culture to then contrast both. Furthermore, Casteñada (2012) found the contributions of mass-media ("especially national TV") to understand foreign cultures. To conclude, the students activated their schemata (prior knowledge) by taking their immediate context as a point that encouraged them to compare and contrast their own culture and the target-language-cultures.

In contrast to the previous studies, Turizo and Gómez (2006) presented an academic reflection based on a practical experience. They developed a reading and writing activity for an undergraduate EFL course at Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla that encouraged the language learners not only to discuss about their



perceptions about culture but also to reflect on the relevance of culture in the development of communicative competences inside the EFL classroom. The main findings revealed that the purpose of empathy does not affect the identity sense in a negative way since “placing in others’ shoes” also involves their own cultural perception to understand the other one. Finally, the researchers recognized the teachers’ need to enhance their teaching abilities (teach-ability) to include cultural components that lead the learners to develop sense of empathy when designing lessons.

Similarly, Bruguier & Greathouse (2009) measured the impact of an English course through a research study. Their aim was to explore how non indigenous and indigenous learners of English developed their own sense of identity while they improved their communicative-language skills. In the study participated six indigenous people from Mexico and eighteen non-indigenous, including two professors from Canada and USA. The course lasted thirteen weeks, and the students took three hours of class per week. According to the students, they became aware of personal feelings; at the end of the course, it made them realize the importance of understanding other cultures.

## Methodology

### Type of research

This study seeks the understanding of phenomena (Merriam, 1998), then it is framed in a qualitative research since the intercultural awareness is set as a phenomenon to be observed. Additionally, this study has an interpretative approach due to the fact that it aims to make sense of the participants’ perceptions

towards intercultural awareness. Based on what Yin (1993) and Merriam (1998) argue, this research is framed in a case study because it investigates the phenomenon of some particular members of the editorial board of the PostScript in its authentic context.

## Context

This research was conducted in the *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés* at *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira*. This program was founded in 2004 as *Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa*. However, it changed its denomination as a response to *Resolución 02041 del 03 de febrero de 2016*. As a result, the academic program puts more emphasis on aspects such as interculturality because of its close relation to bilingualism and bilingual education.

## Setting

This study was accomplished in Postscript Magazine, which is the cultural magazine of *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés* at *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira*. This project started its activities in 2008, and it continued until 2010. The group re-started its activities in 2012 with the purpose of promoting the interaction in academic, technological, and cultural topics in the language teaching program.

## Participants

The participants of this research study were four females and six males, who play different roles in the Postscript such as the coordinator, the editors, the photographer, and the graphic designers. The target population were selected purposively (Patton, 2002) based on the roles they assume in the magazine. The participants selected have the three following profiles:

1. Participant A: Student of *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés* and her labor is oriented to edit the cultural section of the magazine.
2. Participant DM: Professor of *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés* and he is the coordinator of the PostScript project.
3. Participant J: Student of *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés* and his activities are oriented to edit the technological section.

## Data analysis and collection process

As this research frames in a qualitative research, the instruments to collect the data are stimulated recall (SR), interviews (I), and reflective journals (RJ). These instruments are the base to organized process of data analysis. To carry out such analysis, the data was coded using the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Data collected through each instrument was transcribed and later coded following the categories identified as tendencies. Those categories were triangulated across multiple sets of data. To confirm the validity of the data all categories were related to the questions.

The following table 1 relates the research questions that encompassed this study with the main findings thereof.

*Table: Relation of research questions and findings of the study.*

Research Questions	Results
1. How has the Postscript project contributed to the development of Intercultural Awareness in the <i>Licenciatura</i> program?	The creative, planning and editing sessions of the magazine contribute to the development of intercultural awareness
2. How has the construction of a magazine affected the perceptions of culture within the Postscript members?	Culture as a mutable and self-constructed notion in the editorial process of the PostScript  PostScript Magazine shapes cultural identity as a result of the constant reflection on multiculturality
3. Which aspects of Intercultural Awareness do the project Postscript impulse?	Otherness as a characteristic of the intercultural awareness of the members of PostScript

*Source: authors' own elaboration. 2018. Findings*

The data analyzed in this study mainly revealed that the PostScript functions as a platform of information and media literacy that triggers the intercultural competences of the members of the editorial board; likewise, the project focalizes on the promotion of intercultural awareness in its readers. In

order to provide detailed explanation, the above mentioned, the following categories will present samples and interpretations that led to the main findings.

### **Culture as a Mutable and Self-Constructed Notion in the Editorial Process of the PostScript**

The construction of a magazine indicates dialogue-based exercises where different notions and interpretations of the world become part of the editors' statements, that is, why the editorial process is conceived as a dynamic exercise which derives from the constant upgrading of themes and the reformulations of how the members of the magazine represent national and international cultural aspects. In the design of the magazine, there were several moments that editors used to express their notions about culture, as it is manifested in the following stimulated recall excerpt.

Sample (1):

P.A: "For me, culture is what defines one society and what this society creates throughout time (...) maybe, through the editing of certain texts, with certain publications, with certain products, I think that... it helps me perceive culture as something we build together."<sup>23</sup>

In this sample, participant A reveals a contrastive analysis developed by correlating what she has studied as the theoretical conceptions of culture and compares it to the editing process in the magazine. The participant establishes

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<sup>23</sup> These fragments are translations made by the authors of the original participants' samples in Spanish which are found in the appendix section of this article.

from her practical view that the cultural notions of the magazine are co-constructed by the members who are involved in the decision making which implies choosing the thematic, how products are edited, and what type of texts are accepted to be published. In this sense, the notion of culture for PostScript is the result of insights gleaned from social and human manifestations that arouse from the interaction of editors with the information curated and handled in the magazine. This view is also found in Trujillo (2002) who emphasizes that is the communicative act which shapes the cultural notions of individuals in a continuous process of transmission and modification. On the contrary, this is a divergent result in contrast to what Olaya & Gómez (2013) found: they state that in other language teaching programs, culture is conveyed without important alterations. This implies a static view that is not assumed in the context of this project; for instance, as exhibited in sample 2.

Sample (2):

RS: « (Through the research and editing process of the PostScript) it came to me the idea to see this (culture) as an element that permanently and progressively evolves. Since it is a social construction (...) there is no fixed culture, everyday it moves, it transforms.”

This excerpt from the researchers’ journal adds to the compilation of evidence about the mutable nature of culture. By using markers such as “evolves”, “progressively” and “transforms”, it is confirmed that editors of the PostScript are open to different interpretations of social realities submitted to the magazine and that the exercise of editing texts and contents has built up an open-minded competence which characterizes their views of culture.

## PostScript Magazine Shapes Cultural Identity as a Result of the Constant Reflection on Multiculturality

As an informational and media product, the decisions and conceptions of the editorial board of the PostScript Magazine established a pattern of cultural identity that has consolidated an image of the higher education language program where it operates. The following data reveals the emphasis placed in the handling of the information in order to represent the perception of world that the people who publishes in the magazine has. Hence, these multiple representations give the magazine the attribute of a platform that promotes cultural diversity.

Sample (3):

P.D.M: (...) if I read a magazine that tells me or that represents through images what the program where I study is like, I become aware of those patterns that culture has, that maybe I don't see them because I am submerged in it (...) when I see this portrayed in a magazine, I start to have identity (...) we are somehow like that because we are seen like that, because we write like that, and this develops concepts and ideas of culture.

The data yielded in this sample 3 provides convincing evidence that the PostScript has a mirroring function for the editing board. In other words, the perception that editors have about cultural aspects are reflected in the contents of the magazine and these representations become symbols that identify the virtual image of the program LBI that the common audience has. PostScript then, has the power to create an identity to the public by showing the behavior, the academic production, and the opinions of the students who study in it.

The construction of such identity emerges from the planning and design sessions that allow constant reflection over multicultural aspects from the country and the region; for example, discussing about a range of themes that vary from racism and discrimination to academic trends in language teaching. The multicultural topics characterize the nature of the magazine and develop an “incipient” intercultural competence in the editing board as they criticize their own culture and, at the same time, contrast it with other cultural themes from national and international affairs.

In Castañeda (2012), learning materials for language teaching, including mass media, contributed to develop participants’ sense of cultural identity, similar to this study, participants were able to compare themselves in relation to other cultures gaining understanding of the differences that separate them to the various social constructions. Thus, contributing to the awareness of self and the social group they coexist with, in fact, building a notion of their own identity.

### **Otherness as a Characteristic of the Intercultural Awareness of the Members of PostScript**

The triangulation of data allowed to establish that the participants involved in the project remark the importance of identifying the cultural knowledge (declarative), the behaviors (procedimental knowledge), and the ways to communicate (linguistic knowledge) other cultures in the process of developing intercultural competence. Participants defined interculturality as the capacity to assume the interaction between cultures and the personal consciousness. To



achieve such capacity, it is required to know in depth a collection of aspects concerning the target's language culture.

Sample (4):

R.J.4.J: By reading articles and studies related to the field of interculturality, I have widened my notions about it, this way I realize that when two people are interacting, they are not only exchanging information but also they are 'seeing' the interlocutor as someone that belongs to a determined social group that is different to mine, and because of this, I must be aware of the way I say things, as well as the interpretation of what others say, which I consider is an important aspect of intercultural awareness since I just don't think about me but about the other.

A closer look at sample 4 indicates that interculturality involves more than interaction among speakers; in fact, the participant states that intercultural awareness is more than an informational exchange but the mutual understanding, especially mediated by the acknowledgement of the otherness. Then, intercultural awareness involves the development of empathy as the capacity to 'see' others as part of a diverse social group. The ability to assimilate such otherness, as highlighted in Gómez (2011), promotes the use of effective communicative acts in the target language, as well as using declarative and procedural knowledge to accommodate the interaction where tolerance and agreement meet the cultural needs of both interlocutors. Even so, as it is also manifested in Yassine (2006), this result is still catalogued as feature of an incipient intercultural awareness since the data only allows exploring the views of

the participant from what has been drawn from theory and not the implementation of intercultural awareness to undergo a real-life interaction.

### **The creative, Planning and Editing Sessions of the Magazine Contribute to the Development of Intercultural Awareness**

The nature under which PostScript operates entails different types of activities that transcend the exercise of publishing the information in the magazine. Other than that, editors are presented at academic events and in social networks, developing classroom tasks and developing hall campaigns where the experience of the project is shared with the academic community. Therefore, the PostScript Magazine is not limited to a single product process; instead, it is an interactive platform for the members of the LBI. The success of the project lies on the planning and backstage work that editors develop prior to the presentations or the publication of contents. These sessions provide insightful moments concerning intercultural awareness as it is revealed in sample 5.

Sample (5):

R.J.7.H: From what has been evidenced in the majority of the sessions, especially in those where there is planning and discussion of content, I consider that the magazine, one way or another, it's a space that has allowed interculturality to play an important role, because in these (sessions) the cultural baggages that each editor has, (...) influences in a direct manner at the moment of approaching, working and presenting possible thematics [sic] that guide every edition.

From this extract of the researcher's journal, it is conceded to the PostScript the attribute of "space" which is close related to the idea that the magazine is a cultural platform; subsequently, the role of interculturality is delimited by the creative, planning and editing sessions in which the editors contribute to the holistic construction of interculturality by appealing to their background cultural notions. When these views are conjured up, they lead the publications to intercultural matters that address the readers' interests and in this interactional transaction; they aim to trigger readers' intercultural awareness of specified matters divulged through the magazine.

## Conclusion

The diagnosis of the state of intercultural awareness in the members of the PostScript Magazine revealed that the project is a potential source of multicultural exchange which seeks the promotion of awareness of cultural diversity internally and externally. That is, the external promotion is carried out by developing campaigns and exercises that highlight cultural differences and inform the student community, as well as the publication of sections in the magazine that stimulates readers' reflection about multiculturalism in the Colombian society. As a result, PostScript is conceived as a literacy platform that uses the written form as a communication media to present the social realities that surround the language teaching career.

On the other hand, the internal promotion of intercultural awareness is provoked in the publication process of the magazine. It was identified that tasks

such as editing or designing the visual layout cannot be executed satisfactorily unless the editorial board negotiates a collective notion of culture. This mediation of views and conceptions encouraged a set of discussions over social realities in which the magazine is embedded. In this way, the editorial board of PostScript is a cluster of critical reflection for the promotion of intercultural competences that contributes to the development of the profile of these pre-service language teachers.

With respect to the literacy process, the PostScript has shifted its referential nature from a magazine to a platform, an attribute granted by its multi-dimensional interaction with its audience. Editors have earned competences regarding the access, evaluation, and the ethical use of information; in a like manner, they have gained deeper understanding of how to evaluate the efficacy of mass media, how it functions, and how to use media rationally as means of self-expression. Hence, the editor board of PostScript has performed a process of informational and media literacy (Wilson, Grizzle, Tuazon, Akyempong & Cheung, 2011) which contributed to the development of their intercultural competence.

This study has curricular implications related to the increase and promotion of dialogues related to interculturality at all educational levels. These scenarios of discussions should not be limited to what is presented across the different subjects, but there should be an extracurricular medium of expression for students of languages where cultural aspects can be discussed without the academic pressure of a class. Additionally, the implications derived from this research process should be considered to consolidate curricular adaptations in

higher education programs which align with the transitions suggested in the national policies of bilingualism. The need to pursue bilingual development requires at all senses the inclusion of accurate proposals of how students interact with the construct of culture in their academic formation: in one way, as to how they become members of a pluricultural country and as to how they perceive such to promote it in their teach-ability (Turizo & Gómez, 2006).

Finally, what has been presented so far entails the views of the PostScript team; thereby, it is important to collect further the views of its readers. These views will shed some light concerning the effectiveness of intercultural processes in the formation of a language teacher.

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