

# ‘It’s not my intercultural competence, it’s me.’ The intercultural identity of prospective foreign language teachers\*

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## Abstract

This article examines the intercultural identity of pre-service foreign language teachers to determine whether they are aware of their intercultural stance and that of others, and whether they portray an identifiable emergent professional persona in relation to interculturality. The ultimate goal of this study is to identify common traits on which to focus future teacher training. The results show that these prospective teachers display an incipient intercultural identity characterised by a tendency to avoid agency and a certain shortage of intercultural knowledge, yet they are notably concerned about their professional image and their responsibility in work environments.

**Keywords:** intercultural identity; intercultural competence; intercultural awareness; teacher education; pre-service teaching

**Resum.** *‘No és la meua competència intercultural, soc jo.’ La identitat intercultural del professorat de llengües estrangeres en formació*

Aquest article indaga en la identitat intercultural del professorat de llengües estrangeres en formació per esbrinar si és conscient de la seva postura intercultural i de la dels altres, i si presenta una imatge professional emergent reconegible en relació amb la interculturalitat. L’objectiu final d’aquest estudi és identificar trets comuns en els quals es podria centrar la formació del professorat. Els resultats demostren que aquest futur professorat té una identitat intercultural incipient caracteritzada per la seva tendència a evitar la intervenció i per una certa falta de coneixement intercultural, encara que està notablement preocupat per la seva imatge professional i la seva responsabilitat en els contextos laborals.

**Paraules clau:** identitat intercultural; competència intercultural; consciència intercultural; formació del professorat; formació inicial

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**Resumen.** *‘No es mi competencia intercultural, soy yo.’ La identidad intercultural del profesorado de lenguas extranjeras en formación*

Este artículo indaga en la identidad intercultural del profesorado de lenguas extranjeras en formación para averiguar si es consciente de su postura intercultural y de la de otros, y si presenta una imagen profesional emergente reconocible en relación con la interculturalidad. El objetivo final de este estudio es identificar rasgos comunes en los que podría centrarse la formación del profesorado. Los resultados demuestran que este futuro profesorado muestra una identidad intercultural incipiente caracterizada por su tendencia a evitar la intervención y por una cierta falta de conocimiento intercultural, aunque está notablemente preocupado por su imagen profesional y su responsabilidad en contextos laborales.

**Palabras clave:** identidad intercultural; competencia intercultural; conciencia intercultural; formación del profesorado; formación inicial

### Summary

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## 1. Introduction

How do pre-service teachers make sense of interculturality? What do they think of themselves as intercultural individuals? This paper is framed within the study of emerging teacher identity development in relation to interculturality and intercultural competence (IC). The shaping of this identity is considered a complex, ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation consisting of a number of ‘sub-identities that result from the how teachers made sense of themselves as teachers as they develop professionally’ (Chong, Ling Low & Chuan Goh, 2011, p. 51). In this context, prospective teachers’ intercultural identity (IntI henceforth) emerges ‘through extensive, intensive and cumulative experiences of intercultural communication’ (Kim, 2007, p. 243) even within their home culture; for example, through Internet-based means of communication (Kim, 2015).

Having a robust professional identity seems to be a necessary condition for being a good teacher (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011) and there appears to be a tight link between teachers’ IC and teaching effectiveness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Research suggests, however, that many pre-service teachers are ill equipped to respond to diversity (Cho & De Castro-Ambrosetti, 2005-2006). Moreover, our own previous research on IC among pre-service teachers has yielded a series of contradictions in the subjects’ discourse—particularly in relation to their behaviour in professional and personal domains—that point to the need to define the intercultural sensitivity of

teaching trainees (Alonso-Belmonte, Fernández-Agüero, Garrote-Salazar & Morcillo, 2014; Garrote-Salazar & Fernández-Agüero, 2016).

Thus, this paper examines the IntI of Spanish pre-service foreign language (FL) teachers<sup>1</sup> at the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid through their speech in oral discourse, in particular the teachers' discernment of their own IC. To achieve this aim, we analysed the discourse of 63 future teachers of English as a FL who participated in 20 focus groups to explore their feelings, attitudes and value judgements on interculturality, and more specifically their reactions towards hypothetical but common intercultural controversial encounters. With this inquiry we intend to examine whether pre-service teachers are aware of their own intercultural stance and that of others, and whether they portray an identifiable nascent professional persona in relation to interculturality.

We consider IntI an adaptable, flexible construct that evolves with time through identity management skills in intercultural communication, in line with theories that interpret identity negotiation, such as Kim's integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1988, 2001a) and Cupach and Imahori's Identity Management Theory (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). In our view, individuals construct their IntI and elaborate their IC through language in social encounters in a lengthy lifelong process during which they may experience regression or even blockage as they negotiate their different identities or 'faces' (Tracy, 1990). In this process, gaining self-awareness of one's own interculturality is fundamental to continue progressing (Byram, 2008). Our study aims to identify instances of self-awareness as expressed by the participants in casual conversation. We hypothesise that the analysis of the data will bring to light common patterns and inconsistencies in these prospective teachers' discourse, and this will help address these issues pedagogically and academically to eventually train effective teachers who thrive in their profession.

### *1.1. Intercultural identity and communication*

People frequently engage in interpersonal communication within and outside their cultural group. Through these exchanges, they develop their cultural identity,<sup>2</sup> or their 'identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct' (Collier & Thomas, 1988, p. 113). It is believed that culture is subjectively experienced and represents 'an interpersonal process of meaning construction' (Kramsch, 2003, p. 21), so that through conversations and our interactions with others, culture is understood and meaning is made. That is, cultural identity evolves progressively through interaction.

1. By 'foreign language teachers' we refer to professionals who teach a non-native language to native speakers with whom they generally share the same racial, ethnic and national background.
2. The term 'cultural identity' is related to concepts such as national, ethnolinguistic, ethnic and racial identity.

Cultural identity may lead to misunderstanding or even breakdowns in communication. For communication to be successful, participants need to be able 'to successfully negotiate mutually acceptable identities in interaction' (Cupach & Imahori, 1993, p. 118), identities which are socially situated and frequently referred to as 'faces' (Tracy, 1990). Individuals normally cooperate in supporting their interlocutor's face to ensure that he/she supports their own (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). However, our face or identity needs are an important source of intercultural conflicts (Ting-Toomey, 2005). If individuals experience threats to their face they behave in ways to avoid these threats, restoring face when it has been lost or damaged and trying to subdue possible threats. These face-threatening acts are potential causes of communication breakdown, unless they are somehow mitigated (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

When communication occurs outside the individuals' cultural group (e.g. in sojourns, migrations, e-mails, casual conversations with strangers, etc.), cultural identity may lose its rigidity and significance and 'lead to greater tolerance, acceptance and willingness to accommodate out-groups' (Hebrok, 2011, p. 55). In this case, IntI goes beyond the boundaries of any cultural identity, and becomes 'an intellectual template for a constructive and creative way of seeing and relating to oneself and others' (Kim, 2015, p. 10). That is, in the context of intercultural communication,<sup>3</sup> participants negotiate their perspectives and identities within conversation to perform various conversational actions within the discourse and construct interculturality collaboratively (Brandt & Jenks, 2011), looking for intercultural ties. This identity negotiation requires 'a coordinated process of mutual informing, mutual learning and mutual compromising in which negotiators endeavor to reach intercultural agreements' (Dai, 2009, p. 3) on equal footing; a complex process that is influenced by many factors such as value orientation, ethnic background, educational experiences and socio-political status.

Unsurprisingly, participants in intercultural communication 'are particularly vulnerable to committing and receiving face threats to their cultural identities' (Imahori & Cupach, 2005, p. 199) to the extent that they may feel uncertainty, frustration, anxiety and conflict (Barnett & Lee, 2002). In this case, as in any interpersonal exchange, people use strategies to soften or prevent potential face loss and to repair discredited or lost face. For example, they may ask their interlocutor to suspend premature judgment, or deprecate themselves to lower expectations to prevent face loss. To restore face, people may try to give excuses or use humour and passive aggressiveness, such as sarcasm (Chang, 2011). These and other strategies characterise individuals' discourse in intercultural communication when constructing their cultural and intercultural identities.

3. Intercultural communication is frequently used to refer to interethnic, interracial and intergroup communication, or communication 'between people from different national cultures' (Gudykunst, 2002, p. 179). We understand intercultural communication as a broad term encompassing a variety of situations in daily life involving interpersonal communication where cultural identities are salient and distinct.

The ultimate aim of this identity negotiation is that individuals become 'intercultural speakers' (Kramsch, 1993) who are able to behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters, thus demonstrating IC, or 'the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own' (Byram, 2000, p. 297). IC is based on cultural knowledge of the self, the others and effective relationships (Byram, 1997a) so that its development is part of one's personal socialisation and experiences. This competence is therefore culture-general and culture-specific, but also culture-synergistic, reflecting synergies between the participants in the intercultural encounter or 'relational partners' (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989). Additionally, it is 'situated', that is, dependent on individuals' cultural identifications (Collier, 1989). In the literature, IC is normally characterised as a blend of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (see, for example, the models of Byram, 1997a, 2009; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Kim, 2001b; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) composed of a series of parameters, some of which are summarised in Spitzberg (2000, p. 381) as 'empirically derived factors of IC', including awareness of self and culture, cautiousness, non-ethnocentrism and self-consciousness. In any case, IC is never fully achieved (Deardorff, 2006) and individuals may be both interculturally competent and not competent depending on the situation (Martin, 2015).

According to Kim (1988, 2001a), IntI unfolds through a continuum from unconsciousness to creativity on the basis of a stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. Banks (2004) also proposed a series of steps ending in globalism and global competency. In a similar vein, Bennet (1993) developed a framework composed of six stages of sensitivity towards cultural difference, ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativity. In this process, a person who demonstrates IntI is someone who has internalised different cultural elements and, as a result, his/her identity is broader and open to change (Kim, 2001a): he/she interacts actively with cultural strangers and tries to enrich his/her cultural inventory.

### *1.2. Intercultural teacher identity in pre-service teaching*

The teacher's professional identity 'is continually informed, formed and reformed over time and with experience' (Alonso-Belmonte, 2012, p. 14) in relation to a series of salient cultural, social, institutional and environmental factors, such that it has been referred to as 'identification' rather than 'identity' to address its never-ending nature (Bauman, 2001). As a consequence, it is made up of a number of sub-identities or dimensions that result from teachers making sense of themselves as teachers, namely (a) a professional identity, (b) a situated identity within a school or classroom and (c) a personal identity located outside the school and linked to family and social roles (Day & Kington, 2008).

In pre-service teacher training, student teachers' first steps into the profession will vary greatly depending on the school setting, and so will their emer-

gent professional persona, which is ‘socially constructed’ (de Ruyter & Conroy, 2002, p. 11). Teachers-in-training receive a combination of formal instruction and placements at school, which determine their professional socialisation and places them in a situation of transition between being a teacher and a student (Boudjaoui, Clénet & Kaddouri, 2015). It seems that, in shaping this identity, teachers experience a high degree of agency. The individual is ‘an active participant in the fashioning or at least manipulation of both her identity and the social structures within which she finds herself’ (Baum, 2014, p. 409). Through participation, student-teacher’s early experiences combined with beliefs and prior experiences greatly inform present practices and influence decisions and behavioural choices.

Research on these pre-service teachers’ identities tends to describe them as unstable (see, for example, Lamote & Engels, 2010; Schepens, Aelterman & Vlerick, 2009) and outlines potential tensions between the personal and the professional spheres (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Indeed, finding a balance between personal views and experiences and the professional expectations of what it means to be a teacher are important aspects for developing a professional identity as a teacher (Pillen, Beijaard & den Brok, 2013).

Concerning interculturality, many prospective teachers are unable to acknowledge, articulate or address issues related to culture in the classroom. There is a plethora of studies that report on student-teachers’ difficulties to tackle culture and the intercultural: a case in point are accounts of teachers who are unaware of their own cultural identities, nor do they see racial, ethnic and cultural differences between themselves and their students (Finney & Orr, 1995; Mahon, 2006). These studies tend to depict the standards of a monolithic, white, western stance on interculturality, which is often at odds with other points of view. It has also been reported in the research how many novice teachers do not know how to work effectively with students from different cultural backgrounds (Barquín, 2015; Cho & De Castro-Ambrosetti, 2005-2006; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004), recounting feelings of confusion, excitement, anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed (Guo, Lund & Arthur, 2009). What is more, student teachers feel a disconnection between the theory received in their training and the practice of their placements (Guo, Lund & Arthur, 2009).

In this scenario, FL teachers tend to stand out as ‘interculturally savvy’ (Sparrow, 2000, p. 750), especially non-native FL teachers, because they can incorporate their own (inter)cultural journeys as bilingual speakers into their teaching (Menard-Warwick, 2008). For instance, in the case of English as a FL, being a non native teacher tends to be seen as an advantage for cultural and linguistic issues (Bayyurt, 2007). Indeed, these professionals’ double profile as learners and teachers of their subject matter makes a difference, as they must have engaged in experiences that might have an impact on their Intl when developing their FL competence. But research shows that FL teachers are also unprepared to deal with interculturality in their classes (Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2018; Sercu, 2006) and that they benefit

from specific intercultural intervention in their training (McGowan & Kern, 2014). Moreover, beginning FL teachers normally have an increased likelihood of intercultural stress (Hooker, 2003). That is why it seems wise to look into these teachers' IntI in particular, as their contributions may help inform other teachers' identity.

Through self-reflection, professional identity may unfold and teachers may advance in their IC. Evolving in IntI implies increasing consciousness of one's own intercultural membership and that of others. Intercultural meta-cognitive awareness, an ability to monitor and be conscious of ourselves, has been pointed out as important for IC development (Byram, 1997b, 2008). For example, Dai (2009, p. 4) contends that individuals' 'critical integration', the action of thinking reflexively upon one's strength and weakness of one's own and others' cultures, 'paves the way for mutual growth'. For this reason, self-examination and reflective practice are ideal techniques for IntI development in teacher preparation and intercultural inquiry.

## 2. Research questions

As stated above, intercultural self-awareness should be a substantial component in the teachers' identity development process. Hence, this study examines Spanish pre-service FL teachers' IntI with the aims of elucidating its character, looking into the degree of IntI awareness, and revealing possible singularities which may facilitate or impede good IC. Consequently, the research questions we address are:

- 1) Are pre-service teachers aware of their own IntI and that of others?  
We foresee that they are aware of their identity as members of a cultural group. Taking into account the current convergence of cultures in Spain, we expect that the subjects have had the chance to reflect on it.
- 2) Do pre-service teachers portray an identifiable professional persona in relation to interculturality? If so, what is it like?  
We predict that there will be traceable features that identify these teachers as intercultural speakers. These features may be contradictory, as they will reflect an identity 'in-progress', and may be related to their efforts to restore face and to prevent possible face loss.
- 3) What is these teachers' IntI like in professional and personal environments? Do they exhibit significant identity traits concerning professional and personal intercultural feelings, attitudes and value judgements?  
We expect a different stance in both domains, as previous research depicts divergence in pre-service teachers' conceptualisation of their reality within and outside the workplace (Garrote-Salazar & Fernández-Agüero, 2016) and tensions between the professional and the personal milieus (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, we anticipate that the subjects will cope with interculturality differently in professional situations due to work demands regarding image.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Focus groups and corpus data

The study was based on data from 20 focus groups with  $n = 63$  primary and secondary education pre-service teachers (33 and 30 subjects, respectively).<sup>4</sup> Focus groups are a kind of discourse community practice aimed at, among other objectives, encouraging self-reflection and critical thinking that work well with homogeneous groups of people dealing with a specific issue (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In addition, debate in focus groups provides a favourable environment for reflective practice in teacher training, as 'pre-service teachers' conceptions of teacher identity are constructed and reconstructed through the discursive practices of participants in teacher preparation discourse communities' (Chong et al., 2011, p. 52). The mean age of the participants was 22 years = 22.7,  $s = 3.2$ ) and the sex distribution was 20.4% males and 79.6% females. The participants were studying at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid to become primary or secondary teachers of English as a foreign language and in their last year. They were all Spanish citizens raised in central, monolingual Spain and who, nevertheless, had had contact with foreign communities in the development of their language competence (67.8% had been abroad for a mean time of 4.6 months each). Today, cultural diversity in central Spain is relatively rich, the situation having changed drastically since the beginning of the twenty-first century (with an increase of 1% to 13% in the non-Spanish population) so the subjects' teaching contexts are generally intercultural milieus, where English is frequently taught along with French and sometimes German. In any case, a large number of the subjects' future students share racial, ethnic and national backgrounds with them.

Most participants had previously taken part in a larger quantitative study in which the IC profile of pre-service teachers from several European countries was assessed through a multiple-choice questionnaire depicting interculturally relevant situations to take a stand on (Garrote-Salazar & Fernández-Agüero, 2016). Taking these intercultural situations as critical incidents, this time we carried out a qualitative study of the Spanish sample by inviting them to delve into their answers through focus groups. The subjects were randomly arranged in small groups with a researcher guiding the discussion. The researcher was their teacher too, which helped to establish rapport so that they felt comfortable disclosing their thoughts, at the risk of influencing tagging and interpretation of the data, which was minimised by following the coding process that will be explained in the next section. Prior to the discussion, the subjects had time to think about the hypothetical situations meant to serve as prompts for discussion and the interviewer kept a guide to stay on topic.

4. We treat primary and secondary teachers separately because in Spain they receive very different training. Primary teachers are experts in teaching and methodology who specialise as foreign language teachers at the end of their degree and secondary teachers are experts in the language who specialise in teaching by doing a one-year postgraduate degree. We expect that this could make a difference in the shaping of their intercultural identity.



**Table 1.** Corpus data

Subcorpus	CORPUS			
	Files	Participants	Words	Tagged words
Primary Education	10	33	19,788	5,213
Secondary Education	10	30	15,343	2,769
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>35,131</b>	<b>7,982</b>

Source: Authors based on the results.

The conversations were recorded and transcribed. Twenty files made up of 35,131 words were compiled, and the corpus was divided into two subcorpora: a primary education subcorpus (19,788 words) and a secondary education subcorpus (15,343 words). Table 1 summarises the data, including the number of words tagged as relevant for this research.

The participants gave informed consent to participate in the research and their anonymity was ensured through the removal of identifying data from the texts before publication. The relatively small and manageable size of the corpus allowed us to carry out a detailed qualitative analysis to complement the results of the questionnaires.

### 3.2. Taxonomy

The texts were analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) and the coding methodological strategy was bottom-up, starting from data to identify recurrent ideas and ending up with a list of codes or categories following the grounded theory.

The procedure consisted of searching the subjects' discourse for fragments which reflected their views on their own IC and skills to manage intercultural communication in order to identify traits of their Intl in their self-reflections. Pieces of discourse considered relevant for the aim of the study were annotated using tags which stand for different categories following an interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Jarman & Osborne, 1999). The goal was to look for significant fragments of speech where the speaker stood by or contradicted his/her responses in the questionnaire. Although most of them had been classified as interculturally competent in the questionnaire (Garrote-Salazar & Fernández-Agüero, 2016), their comments during the group discussions tended to be inconsistent with that classification. Details are given in the discussion.

Regarding tags, it was occasionally difficult to differentiate between some of them, due to linguistic nuances. Therefore, the tagging was carried out in three stages to avoid researcher bias: (1) tagging was done by the first researcher on raw text, (2) the second researcher took over from that tagging and, (3) finally, both researchers checked the corpus to reach an agreement on definitive tags.

**Table 2.** Taxonomy

TAGS		Definition
Positive tags	Consciousness	The subject is conscious of interculturality as an issue.
	Obligation	The subject acts because he/she feels an obligation.
	Professional image	The subject is aware of his/her professional image.
	Responsibility	The subject accepts his/her responsibility.
Negative tags	Avoidance	The subject admits avoiding the situation.
	Doubt	The subject is not sure about his/her opinion or how he/she would behave.
	Ethnocentrism	The subject holds an ethnocentric point of view.
	Excuse	The subject makes an excuse to avoid responsibility.
	Ignorance	The subject admits lacking the knowledge to manage the situation.
	Patronising attitude	The subject shows a patronising attitude towards people from a different culture.
	Political correctness	The subject admits saying what he/she thinks should be said.
	Responsibility disclaim	The subject avoids responsibility and puts it on someone/something else.
	Stereotype	The subject has adopted a prejudiced stance on a certain culture which may not reflect reality.

Source: Authors based on the results.

The final set comprises 13 tags, four of which were identified as positive and the rest as negative. Positive tags indicated intercultural knowledge<sup>5</sup> and a will to act, or agency, while negative tags denoted a low intercultural profile characterised by a shortage of intercultural knowledge and involvement. Table 2 shows the final list of categories, and examples of the tags will be shown in the discussion.

#### 4. Results

The analysis of the focus groups' discourse revealed contradictions regarding the students' intercultural profile as established by the previous questionnaire. Table 3 shows the occurrence of the categories tagged in the corpus, itemised by subcorpora (primary and secondary pre-service teachers). Regarding absolute figures, it is cumbersome to establish a reliable measurement method, as tagged pieces of discourse do not correspond to a unique linguistic unit: tagged fragments are made up of phrases, utterances or even whole paragraphs. Consequently, the only plausible linguistic unit to determine the quantity of dis-

5. Intercultural knowledge refers to 'knowledge of social processes, and knowledge of illustrations of those processes and products; the latter includes knowledge about how other people are likely to perceive you, as well as some knowledge about other people' (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, p. 12).

**Table 3.** Tagged categories

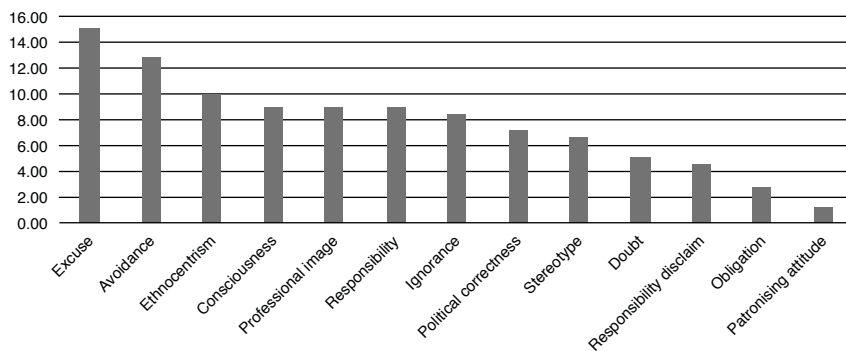
	Primary	Secondary	Total
Avoidance	14.29	9.84	12.78
Consciousness	12.61	1.64	8.89
Doubt	6.72	1.64	5.00
Ethnocentrism	7.56	14.75	10.00
Excuse	11.76	21.31	15.00
Ignorance	9.24	6.56	8.33
Obligation	2.52	3.28	2.78
Patronising attitude	0.84	1.64	1.11
Political correctness	5.04	11.48	7.22
Professional image	4.20	18.03	8.89
Responsibility	9.24	8.20	8.89
Responsibility disclaim	5.88	1.64	4.44
Stereotype	10.08	0.00	6.67
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors based on the results.

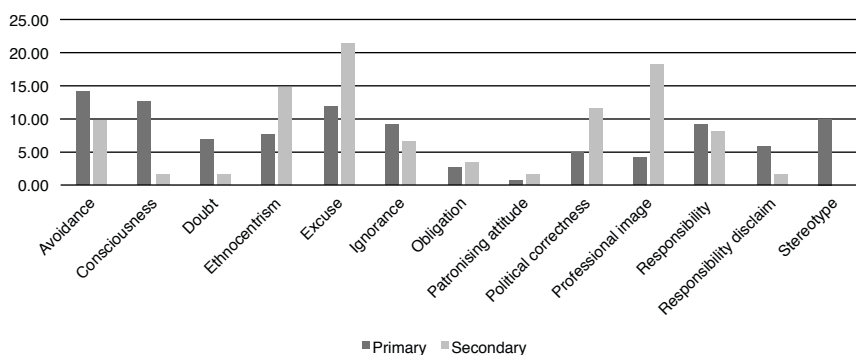
course out of the whole corpus identified as relevant for this study was words (see Table 1). In Table 3 it can be clearly observed that *avoidance* and *excuse* are the most common negative tags. In spite of subjects having been classified as interculturally competent before, they commonly acknowledged using these strategies to evade their responsibility when confronted with interculturally conflicting issues.

Tags ordered by frequency (Figure 1) show that the three most frequent tags are negative: together with the poor agentive attitude expressed in *avoidance* and *excuse*, participants’ discourse reflects a strong presence of *ethnocentrism*. Nevertheless, the next three most frequent tags—*consciousness*, *professional image* and *responsibility*—are positive. The occurrence of these tags, as we will show below, is generally related to work environments. These tags are followed by *ignorance*. The likewise high ratio of this tag can be straightforwardly related to the absence of agency, as not knowing may lead to not acting. This will also be thoroughly discussed below. The rest of the categories display a low percentage of occurrence in the corpus as a whole.

When looking at the two subcorpora separately (Figure 2), it can be seen that primary pre-service teachers tend to resort to *avoidance*, *consciousness* and *stereotype* more extensively. In contrast, secondary pre-service teachers tend towards *ethnocentrism*, *excuse*, *political correctness* and *professional image*. These tendencies may not be that different, and there could be a correlation between the types of strategies preferred by both groups: *avoidance* is related to *excuse*,

**Figure 1.** Tagged categories

Source: Authors based on the results.

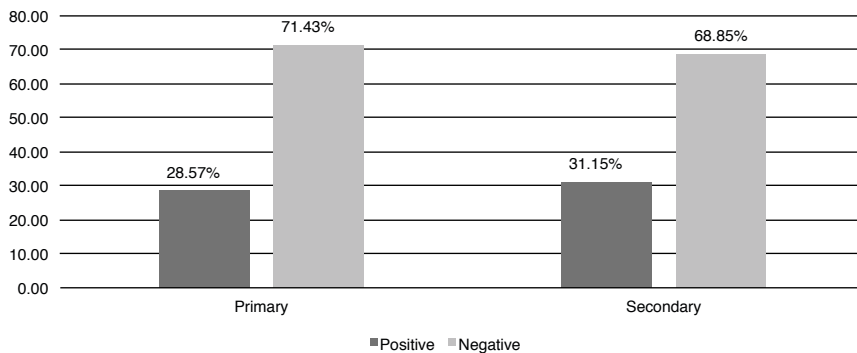
**Figure 2.** Primary vs. secondary pre-service teachers

Source: Authors based on the results.

as both entail evading responsibility either with or without making an excuse; *consciousness* to *professional image*, as subjects express an awareness of their agentive role when facing intercultural encounters in the two cases, the latter being restricted to professional contexts; and *stereotype* to *ethnocentrism*, as both involve a judgement on another culture based on one's own.

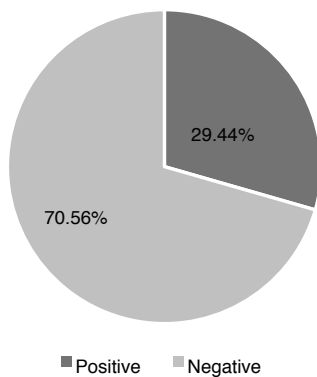
As regards positive and negative tags (Figure 3), the results show that the discourse of primary pre-service teachers displays a slightly higher frequency of negative tags. The ratio of positive tags increases in secondary pre-service teachers due to the common occurrence of *professional image* tags, which suggests that this group gives greater importance to the acceptance of others in their professional context.

**Figure 3.** Positive vs. negative tags



Source: Authors based on the results.

**Figure 4.** Total positive vs. negative tags



Source: Authors based on the results.

In fact, when looking at the results for positive and negative tags as a whole, putting the two subcorpora together (Figure 4) negative tags account for 71% of the total. This does not come as a surprise, as the three most frequent tags (as expressed in Figure 1) which significantly contribute to this high percentage are negative.

In the discussion, we examine in greater depth the relevance of these results in relation to the realisation of teachers' identity and IC, illustrated by examples of the tags.

## 5. Discussion

From our data, we can say that these pre-service teachers are somewhat aware of their own intercultural identity and that of others, as they acknowledge differences between cultural groups and express feelings, judgement and values towards other cultures and patterns of behaviour, as evidenced by the number of tagged fragments. And by being aware of others' cultural patterns, they demonstrate a certain consciousness of interculturality as an issue. As we have seen, *consciousness* is the fourth most frequent tag considering both groups (8.89%) and the second in the case of primary pre-service teachers (12.61%). Examples (1.a) and (1.b) are fragments tagged as *consciousness* from both subcorpora:

1.a. *Tendríamos que hacer actividades para que nuestros alumnos viesan las similitudes y diferencias entre ellos y para que se den cuenta.*

[We should do activities for our students so that they can see the similarities and differences between each other and be aware of them.]

(Consciousness; PRI\_8)

1.b. *Hemos estudiado la cultura asociada a ese idioma y conocemos, por tanto, que hay culturas diferentes a la nuestra, y entonces somos el perfil más intercultural dentro de los profesores.*

[We have studied the culture associated to that language and we know, therefore, that there are cultures different than ours, and so we (FL teachers) have the most intercultural profile among teachers.]

(Consciousness; SEC\_1)

Nevertheless, as presented in the results section, the first two most frequent tags in the corpus were *avoidance* and *excuse*, which implies that despite acknowledging the significance of interculturality, these student teachers tend to avoid agency. By using excuses and justifications they probably try to restore face (Chang, 2011). Moreover, if the tag *responsibility disclaim* is added to the count, the presence of agency-avoiding tagged fragments increase to more than 32%. As we see it, these three tags make up a 'scale of avoidance', as *avoidance* involves admitting that the situation is evaded, *excuse* means evading by making an excuse and *responsibility disclaim* entails placing responsibility on something/someone else. Examples 2.a to 2.c show this progression:

2.a. *Tú sabes que el problema existe, pero realmente no entras para mediar.*

[You know there's a problem, but you don't actually get involved in it to mediate.]

(Avoidance; PRI\_5)

2.b. *Se resuelve sola la situación sin que yo provoque algo que pueda ser peor.*  
[The situation resolves itself without me causing something that could be worse.]

(Excuse; SEC\_1)

2.c. *Yo sí estoy interesada, pero el resto del departamento no.*  
[I am interested, but not the rest of the people in the department.]

(Responsibility disclaim; SEC\_7)

Therefore, we can presume that, though being aware of interculturality as an issue, the participants in the study tend to avoid situations that require their involvement or commitment and have a general non-agentive attitude, which indicates that they do not seem to be actively participating in building their IntI, as would be desirable (Baum, 2014).

Another characteristic of these teachers' intercultural profile is a certain sense of obligation. Through their discourse, the subjects stated that they knew the importance of *responsibility* and *obligation* in their future teaching environment, as shown in fragments 3.a and 3.b, respectively:

3.a. *Tenemos que romper esa barrera en el aula para que luego no haya conflictos también fuera.*

[We must break that barrier in the classroom to avoid conflicts outside too.]

(Responsibility; PRI\_5)

3.b. *Pero cuando tú estás con alumnos, si tienes que arreglar un problema lo tienes que hacer tú, porque entre ellos no lo van a arreglar.*

[But when you are with the students, if you have to fix the problem you have to do it yourself, because they are not going to fix it.]

(Obligation; PRI\_8)

However, *responsibility* and *obligation* were low-frequency tags with respect to the total sample (8.89% and 2.78%, respectively). These are infrequent probably because these teachers-to-be need more contact with actual teaching environments for their 'situated sub-identity' (Day & Kington, 2008) to unfold; and when these features do occur, they seem attempts to prevent face loss. In any case, the pre-service teachers in our study are still marching down the path towards full assumption of duty and responsibility, which is the basis for building professional identity (Cattley, 2007).

Lack of intercultural knowledge appears to be another unifying thread of these trainees' discourse. As seen in section 4, *ignorance* and *doubt* account for 13.33% of the tagged fragments: during group discussion, the participants frequently admitted hesitating before acting or not knowing how to act or what to say when facing a context where individuals did not share their own language or culture (examples 4.a and 4.b):

4.a. *A veces, en algunas situaciones, no sé qué competencias utilizar para manejar o resolver situaciones que surjan.*

[Sometimes, in some situations, I don't know what competences to use to handle or solve the situations that may arise.]

(Ignorance; PRI\_1)

4.b. *Tendría que estar en el contexto para ver qué haría.*

[I would have to be in that context to see what I would do.]

(Doubt; SEC\_3)

In short, the absence of obligation, which probably results from scarce exposure to professional practice, together with hesitation and a shortage of intercultural knowledge can explain the non-agentive attitude seen in these student-teachers' intercultural persona as expressed in their speech: arguably, these factors lead to insecurity and detachment, which turn into inaction. This seem to be these student-teachers' response to intercultural encounters, characterised by increased likelihood of suffering from stress (Hooker, 2003). In any case, stress is an opportunity for growth (Kim, 2001a), so this state of affairs is likely to change with experience.

On the other hand, insecurity can lead to a certain degree of *political correctness* in discourse (7.22% of occurrences in the corpora). These student teachers have self-doubts, but they want to demonstrate that they are intercultural: they say what they think should be said despite admitting not knowing how to handle the situation or not having been sincere when answering the previous questionnaire, as in example 5:

5. *Realmente puse 'le respondo en inglés, creo que eligió entre comunicarse y ser educada', pero, sinceramente, a mí me sienta mal que se dirijan a mí en inglés sin preguntarte antes '¿hablas inglés?'.*

[In fact I said 'I'd answer in English, I think she chose between communicating and being polite' but, truly, it doesn't go down well with me that they talk to me in English without asking first 'Do you speak English?']

(Political correctness; SEC\_7)

Finally, stances of *ethnocentrism*, *stereotype* and a *patronising attitude* characterise, to a certain extent, our subjects' discourse. As was presented in section 4, the overall figures indicate that the global frequency of *ethnocentrism* accounts for 10.00%, with secondary student-teachers expressing it more frequently than their primary counterparts (14.75% versus 7.56%). On the contrary, the occurrence of *stereotype* is 10.08% among the latter, while the former do not exhibit these prejudiced stances. Also, secondary subjects exhibit a certain *patronising attitude* (1.64%), while this attitude is infrequent among future primary teachers (0.84%).



6.a. *Era polaco o de . . . yo qué sé, del norte.*  
[He was Polish or . . . who knows, from up north.]  
(Ethnocentrism; SEC\_9)

6.b. *Porque bien es cierto que los que tienen la lengua inglesa como habla materna muchas veces se acostumbran a no intentar ampliar su conocimiento.*  
[Because it's true that those whose mother tongue is English often get used to not trying to broaden their knowledge]  
(Stereotype; PRI\_7)

6.c. *Una señora que me pidió en español y yo le dije que entendía inglés y se sentía como . . . me dijo 'Mi español es perfecto. O no perfecto pero que sí que se me entiende'.*  
[There was a woman who asked me in Spanish and I told her that I understood English and she felt like . . . she said 'My Spanish is perfect. Well, not perfect but I can be understood'.]  
(Patronising attitude; SEC\_2)

Examples such as 6.a illustrate an ethnocentric conception of the world in which the speakers centralise their position, belittling other cultures by shamelessly evidencing a lack of intercultural knowledge, which indicates they are in Bennet's (1993) initial stages towards sensitivity to cultural difference. This narrow view of the world is in line with some clichéd beliefs manifested by utterances of the sort shown in example 6.b. Both ethnocentrism and stereotyping are related to a patronising attitude as in example 6.c, which displays a condescending viewpoint from which other cultures are looked upon.

To sum up, these pre-service teachers describe their own professional persona as one which lacks agency and avoids engagement in intercultural situations, and where excuses are sometimes made or responsibility is placed on someone/something else to protect their face, which may be due to the absence of knowledge or expertise in their professional and situated sub-identities. The discourse of primary student teachers is distinguished by *avoidance*, *consciousness* and *stereotype*, whereas the discourse of secondary student teachers denotes *ethnocentrism*, *excuse*, *political correctness* and concern about their *professional image*. Finally, it is noteworthy that the discourse of both primary and secondary student teachers is fraught with 'negative tags' or statements that imply attitudes, feelings and value judgements contrary to IC (71%). The message is clear for teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and education stakeholders: these trainees would benefit from tools to view intercultural encounters as empowering acts, not as threats. This coincides with other studies which have argued that teachers could take advantage from specific intercultural training (McGowan & Kern, 2014).

Concerning IntI in professional and personal environments, our data confirms findings from previous studies on the existence of a certain tension between personal and professional identities in pre-service teaching (Beauchamp

& Thomas, 2009): we found a distinct concern for projecting a certain professional image that indicates an attempt at political correctness or ‘intercultural imposture’, probably to seek self-affirmation and social sanction or approval to prevent face loss in professional environments. This can be seen in several instances of *professional image*, *political correctness* and, especially, in the fact that the highest percentage of positive tags corresponds to pieces of discourse related to the professional domain, as shown in examples 1.a-b and 3.a-b.

More specifically, *professional image* is important in these trainees’ discourse (8.89% of the tags), especially for secondary student teachers, as they reflect much more frequently on their professional image (18.03%) than their primary counterparts (4.20%). A possible explanation may be their strategy of assuring interlocutors that they know who they are to protect their positive face, or the desire that their self-image be appreciated and approved of (Brown & Levinson, 1987), as demonstrated in examples 7.a and 7.b below:

7.a. *En un contexto profesional hay que tener más cuidado y ser más correctos.*  
[In a professional context we have to be more careful and be more correct.]  
(Professional image; SEC\_1)

7.b. *Estoy segura de que como profesional voy a tener mucho más cuidado.*  
[I’m sure that I’ll be more careful as a professional.]  
(Professional image; SEC\_2)

As mentioned, instances of political correctness may be a result of uncertainty, which sometimes clashes with the desire to protect one’s professional image. For instance, in example 8 the subject acknowledges having chosen an answer in the questionnaire that she considered socially acceptable, although she admits thinking differently:

8. *Es algo que a mí particularmente me sienta a veces un poco mal, pero bueno, yo respondí otra cosa.*  
[It is something that does not particularly go down well with me but, well, I responded differently.]  
(Political correctness; SEC\_7)

As seen in the results, political correctness is also more frequent in secondary (11.48%) than in primary student teachers (5.04%). More thorough research could establish whether this may be due to the different training that primary and secondary teachers receive in Spain. For instance, primary teachers receive more teaching practice at schools than secondary teachers, and this must surely have an influence on their emerging identity, as it seems that teaching practice more quickly shapes one’s professional identity (Coiduras Rodríguez, Isus Barado & Del Arco Bravo, 2015, p. 281).

Moreover, for both the primary and secondary student teachers, instances of *responsibility disclaim* (4.44% of occurrence in our corpus) are mentioned

when discussing intercultural encounters taking place *outside* the school. That is, as the projection of a professional image is important mainly at work, subjects seem to feel free of responsibility in their personal sub-identity, as shown in example 9.

9. *En la calle puedes actuar diferente que delante de los alumnos.*

[Outside school you can act differently than when you are with the students.]

(Responsibility disclaim; PRI\_8)

Finally, it is interesting that the speakers' personality is sometimes used as an *excuse* for not acting appropriately in the personal environment, rather than in the professional one, as in 10.a and 10.b.

10.a. *Abi ya no es entonces mi competencia intercultural, sino que soy yo, yo soy así.*

[In that case it is not my intercultural competence, it's me, I'm like that.]

(Excuse; PRI\_1)

10.b. *Yo creo que por personalidad no me metería dentro de esa situación.*

[I think that, because of my personality, I wouldn't get into that situation.]

(Excuse; PRI\_5)

This indicates that we should focus on professional and situated sub-identities in teacher training. Also, it proves that intercultural competence varies across contexts within the same person (Martin, 2015).

All things considered, these student teachers exhibit an incipient IntI similar to Kim's unconsciousness (2001a) and Bennet's ethnocentric stage (1993), which is characterised by limited intercultural knowledge and lack of agency. Yet, they do reflect on their IC and try to project a certain image especially in connection with their professional sub-identity. As reflected in the literature, pre-service teachers' identities are likely to be unstable (Lamote & Engels, 2010; Schepens, Aelterman & Vlerick, 2009) and their professional expectations and personal experiences tend to be in conflict (Pillen et al., 2013). Besides, teachers are not prepared to deal with interculturality (Mahon, 2006), not even FL teachers (Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2018; Sercu, 2006). The results of our study coincide with these findings and call for enhancing teacher training programmes rich in intercultural knowledge and self-reflection. By reflecting on their IntI, student teachers can become agents of social change and create inclusive learning environments, they can 'take the initial steps to begin integrating advocacy and social action in their professional roles' (Guo et al., 2009, p. 15). Experiential learning such as international placements, for instance, can help recognise the connection between culture and professional practice, as teachers with significant international experience become less ethnocentric (Deardorff, 2006).

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study show that the Intl of student teachers in our context is insufficient in some respects, and point to the need for providing quality training in interculturality. In any case, we believe in the 'long-term transformative effect of intercultural contact' (Kim, 2015, p. 4). That is why the relationship between the results of this study and these students' intercultural experiences will be the focus of further research. Another area of interest for us is the impact of interculturality on these students' identity as FL teachers who are speakers of another language. These two subtopics, which are beyond the scope of this particular study, will contribute to completing the characterisation of these subjects' intercultural identity.

We are aware that a limitation of this study is that the participants were asked to self-report on their own behavioural choices in hypothetical situations, thus expressing their discursively constructed identities or 'narrated identities' rather than their 'enacted identities' (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 240). There is empirical evidence to suggest that people are capable of reflecting on their behaviour to provide accurate and reliable information through self-reports (Riggio & Riggio, 2001). Yet, we believe that this matter deserves further scrutiny and plan to contrast our data with performance-based data collected during placements.

To close this discussion, we find the paradox put forward by Cattley (2007) especially pertinent: on the one hand, teachers are expected to engage in continuous self-questioning and display the disposition of a life-long learner, building their identity through a never-ending process and always open to change; on the other, they should be skilled, proficient and knowledgeable to be entrusted with the education of future generations. Undoubtedly, this is a daunting task that we are obliged to recognise and facilitate.

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