UDC 811.111`243-057.875(497.11)
378.091.3:811.111`243(497.11)
159.955.6-028.431
https://doi.org/10.18485/bells.2024.16.5

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PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING IN A UNIVERSITY EFL CONTEXT – ENGLISH MAJORS AS CRITICAL THINKERS

Abstract
This paper focuses on the importance of developing and fostering critical thinking in higher education, and in particular, in university-level EFL classrooms. The paper will present the design of the course taught to English majors at the English Department of the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. The course is aimed at enhancing the productive language skills of speaking and writing and is part of the core course Contemporary English. In addition to writing and speaking skills, the underlying goal of the tasks and materials in this course is to engage students in critical reflection about the topics covered, their language use, English as a global language, and their subject positions as English majors in the contemporary world. The aim of this paper is to propose a method for developing and encouraging critical thinking in a university-level EFL classroom: critical perspectivization.

Key words: Critical thinking development in higher education, Critical Pedagogy, critical perspectivization

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1. Defining Critical Thinking

Today critical thinking (CT) has become one of the most coveted skills in university level education; a buzzword, a *sine qua non*. Universities boast the commitment to developing CT in their graduates in their mission statements; reputable scholars and professors pledge their allegiance to the imperative of equipping graduates with this type of thinking; the phrase critical thinking has become the staple of any student application for such disparate gains ranging from exchange programs to student loans. The peculiarity of such popularity of critical thinking in the field of education is only rivaled by the peculiarity of the quest to define what it actually is. Despite this CT enthusiasm, we are not sure what CT precisely is, and neither are scholars in the field of CT research. The term critical thinking has remained insufficiently defined since the beginning of the 1980s – when a heightened academic interest for the role of critical thinking in education began and has persisted until now (Pešić 2008).

Critical thinking is not easy to define as it represents an abstract concept that implies the ability and inclination toward rational reasoning and a commitment to a deeper understanding of the reality around us. The field of critical thinking research is exceptionally fertile and heterogeneous, with numerous theorists offering precise descriptive and taxonomic definitions that overlap in many aspects while simultaneously differing in others. What is common to many theorists is the belief that the ability for reflexive and critical thinking is the most important goal of education (Dewey 1910, 1916; Freire 1996; Ennis 1996; Siegel 1980, 1988; Paul 1984, 1987, 1999; Paul & Elder 2013; Facione 1990; Lipman 2003; Hamby 2015, etc.). The essential skills, abilities, and dispositions for critical thinking include logical reasoning, analysis, evaluation and selection of arguments and information, openness to respecting different perspectives, willingness to reconsider one's own positions, intellectual curiosity, and the willingness to use these dispositions in contemplating situations and phenomena in both professional and everyday life (Ennis 1996; Paul 1984, 1987, 2019; Facione 1990; Siegel 1988; McPeck 1981).

The beginning of the 1980s saw a spike in academic interest in critical thinking after companies began exerting pressure on legislative bodies in the US to support educational reforms aimed at developing critical thinking skills in students. The National Commission for Excellence in Education published a report titled *A Nation at Risk* claiming that "many 17-year-olds

did not possess the 'higher-order' intellectual skills" this country needed" (Willingham 2007: 8).

The Delphi report followed in 1990, written by a Delphi consensus panel that included leading experts in the field of philosophy of education, convened by the American Philosophical Association, which defined critical thinking as:

> purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good thinking, CT is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon. The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. Thus, educating good critical thinkers means working toward this ideal. It combines developing CT skills with nurturing those dispositions which consistently yield useful insights and which are the basis of a rational and democratic society. (Facione 1990: 2)

This is a long list of aspirational characteristics of critical thinking, and possibly the idea of the consensus was eponymous – to create a consensual definition that unites all the relevant voices in the discipline up to 1990, given that this group of thinkers had been divided along several fault lines. One prominent division is paradigmatic, between the logical-rational and epistemological approaches (Pešić, 2007, 2008). Ennis considers critical thinking to be close to informal logic, consisting of procedures in thinking that need to be followed to reach a valid conclusion (Ennis 1996). On the other hand, Paul advocates for an epistemological approach that deals with the nature of knowledge in critical thinking, stating that the true form of critical thinking is when an individual examines their egocentric

and sociocentric frames of reference in a dialogical-dialectical manner (Paul 1982, 1984, 1987, 1994; Paul & Elder 2013, 2019). This definition simultaneously encompasses cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of the thinking process because, according to it, an individual must be exposed to different opinions in a social environment where they form and model their position.

2. Critical thinking in context

However, questions surrounding critical thinking are surely not new, nor did they start only recently in the US through a mismatch between educational objectives and labour market needs. Ancient philosophers said a lot about the need to doubt and question reality. Skepticism, the pillar of modern epistemology and philosophy can be traced back to Socrates' "epistemic modesty" (Audi & Audi 2015: 987). Similarly, critical thinking is traceable to Socrates, who used insightful questioning to reveal that people often couldn't logically defend their beliefs (Paul 1997: 8). Socrates emphasized the importance of looking for proof, examining arguments and assumptions, and understanding the consequences of both words and actions.

However, there is a striking difference in context between us and ancient societies: universal mass education. The condition of education becoming universal, obligatory and mass prompted various thinkers to imagine the most effective educational strategies, but also to consider the meaning and value of education in the landscape of a fast-changing world.

What did begin in the US is a new set of concerns about the nature of education posed by the philosophy of pragmatism. John Dewey is one such thinker, a leading American philosopher of the turn of the century and father of modern critical thinking (Hashemi & Ghanizadeh 2012). He was a leader of progressive education who thought that the classroom was to be "a democracy in microcosm" (Hitchcock 2018). A founding figure of the school of American Pragmatism, he valued democracy as the optimal political system that best guarantees the intellectual openness necessary for the advancement of knowledge (Brookfield 1997). What we now consider CT, Dewey in his works called reflective thinking, and defined it as: "active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the

further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey 1933: 9). Dewey believed education's primary intellectual aim should be to cultivate thoughtful, inquisitive students. He also felt that fostering a sense of community and cooperation among students was crucial to their moral development.

"With respect then to curiosity, the teacher has usually more to learn than to teach. Rarely can he aspire to the office of kindling or even increasing it. His task is rather to keep alive the sacred spark of wonder and to fan the flame that already glows" (Dewey 1910: 34). According to Dewey, encouraging critical thinking in adults is "integral to the democratic project" (Brookfield 1997: 17) because at the heart of a strong, participatory democracy is citizens' capacity to question the actions, justifications, and decisions of political leaders, and the capacity to imagine alternatives that are fairer and more compassionate than current structures and moralities (1997: 17).

So, from the beginning of universal education systems, the idea of critical thinking has been inextricably linked to the political and moral imperatives of a democratic society, to keep the minds of young people open and alert to the reality around them and for young people to be the agents of social change towards a better and more equitable society.

The evolution of these considerations can be further traced through neo-Marxist approaches to education, primarily through Freire's seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's educational theories derive from his experience of teaching the impoverished classes of Brazilian society. His educational philosophy proposes that the most valuable goal of education is developing critical thinking in students by fostering awareness about their own problematic realities, developing autonomous consciousness in the world they inhabit with its injustices and power regimes, so that they can become agents of change in that world. Dialogue between teachers and students in which they "unveil that reality" in which both are subjects is essential, so that they can "know it critically" (Freire 1996: 51).

Similarly, Giroux advocates for a critical pedagogy that involves engaging students in dialogue that challenges dominant narratives and **considers alternative perspectives**. Critical pedagogy sees teachers not as mere facilitators of knowledge transmission, but as intellectuals who should strive to direct the education process toward challenging dominant ideologies and power structures. Giroux writes about "the role that teachers and administrators might play as transformative intellectuals who develop counterhegemonic pedagogies that not only empower students by

giving them the knowledge and social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action" (Giroux, 1988: xxxiii).

Considering alternative perspectives seems to be an important element of critical thinking from a number of approaches. And not surprisingly so – it can be very helpful in locating ideologies, hegemonies and discourses around us, the power of which, as numerous thinkers from Gramsci to Althusser to Foucault have taught us, lies in their invisibility (Đorđević 2009). Ideologies tend to normalize practices that all too often work against us and tend to present them as a given that cannot be changed. So, if we agree with Dewey and other scholars from Critical Pedagogy that education is both a moral and political endeavour aimed at encouraging young generations to have an open mind and imagine different worlds, thereby questioning their own subject positions, having the audacity to change the current circumstances for the better, then as teachers we must make sure *we* understand what *our* subject position is. Perhaps we need to be able to imagine alternative scenarios and different worlds first, and primarily one in which knowledge is not primarily in the service of capital.

Critics of the neoliberal vision of (higher) education contend that educational institutions have succumbed to the pressure of private companies and the labour market they create. In the neoliberal arena, educational ideals have increasingly moved away from emphasizing education as 'Bildung' or the development of individual potential to focusing on marketable 'skills.' The key concepts have become flexibility, adaptability, and lifelong learning as key traits of the modern employable person (Bacevic 2014: 281). Education systems are thus expected to produce "employment-ready," "corporate-friendly" graduates (Holborow 2012: 96). In the neoliberal landscape the idea of human capital – coined in the 1960s when it was used cautiously due to its debasing connotations – has been elevated as one of the driving forces of economic growth (Holborow 2012: 101). One of the most prized skills that make human capital valuable, the logic goes, is critical thinking. But indeed, how does flexible human capital demonstrate its critical thinking skills to the prospective employer and how does it beat the fierce competition in the labour market? Neoliberal outcome-based education seeks to present the desirable skills in human capital in measurable and easily quantifiable ways so that corporations don't waste time and money looking for a perfect candidate.

An approach to CT that by chance or design underpins these ideological assumptions is a set of psychometric methodologies that have

yielded numerous instruments for measuring CT as a set of subskills including "making inferences, recognizing assumptions and detecting fallacies" (Bean & Melzer 2021: 20). In this approach CT is disaggregated into a variety of subskills that are subsequently tested on machine gradable multiple-choice tests. The most famous tests include the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test, and the Cornell Critical Thinking Test, which are widely used both in academic research aimed at proving the validity of CT teaching methods and in the business world where employers seek the right candidate with adequate problem-solving skills.

However, the psychometric approach does not align well with the understanding of Critical Thinking in the tradition of Freire and Critical Pedagogy, nor is it fully compatible with some of the representatives of the Critical Thinking movement. It is reasonable to doubt the possibility of quantifying such abstract dispositions as students' readiness to interrogate their egocentric and sociocentric frames of reference on the path to becoming fair-minded critical thinkers in the vision of Richard Paul described above. Nor does it seem straightforward to measure "the relationship between critical thinking to writing" (Bean & Melzer 2021: 21) which Melzer thinks occupies a privileged position because the very process of writing entails CT.

It is for these reasons that the present research eschews the psychometric lens on critical thinking, given that my focus is on a Speaking and Writing Course where the course requirements are written tasks aimed at developing critical thinking. Another reason is that this research views critical thinking as a form of understanding the world around us, with critical curiosity at its foundation. It is also seen as a form of dialogic and dialectical thinking that presupposes a disposition to think with an open mind and is wedded to the "willingness to inquire" (Hamby 2015). This inquiry does not happen in a vacuum but is always already social and directed at unmasking the underlying ideologies that shape our subject position – our frame of reference – and thus our perception (Mezirow 1997). This is why the central method of this research for engaging critical thinking in a post-method world (Kumaravidelu 2003) is *critical perspectivization*. **Critical perspectivization** stands for a method of interlacing subject-specific goals and outcomes with a commitment to encouraging and stimulating critical thinking in the classroom. It is an approach that entails selecting topics and formulating teaching activities in

a way that enables and stimulates intellectual curiosity regarding relevant social issues and the cognitive skill of actively and carefully considering observed phenomena from different perspectives.

My approach to critical thinking draws on the two conflicting traditions described above (the Critical Thinking Movement and Critical Pedagogy), with the latter serving as its driving force and raison d'etre. The Critical Thinking Movement sees CT in the positivist spirit of analytic philosophy, defining discrete and measurable subskills. Critical Pedagogy is more grounded in continental philosophy than in positivism, viewing critical thinking as organic, unquantifiable, and simultaneously constituting and emanating from Freirean *consciensado* and praxis to promote an ideal of working together in solidarity towards a more equitable world. Highlighting the difference in the level of intellectual autonomy granted by the Critical Thinking Movement and CT Pedagogy, Kaplan says that the former aims to prepare students to exercise their right to vote, emphasizing the importance of rationality and the ability to evaluate reasons behind political actions. In contrast, the Critical Pedagogy Movement seeks to enable students to access a broader range of political rights and freedoms, encouraging them to create alternatives and share leadership roles, not just choose between prepackaged options (Kaplan 1994: 363).

Instead of automatically opposing these two approaches, this research aims to serve as a bridge between them by understanding critical thinking as dispositions and habits of the mind that need to be cultivated according to specific methodologies that emphasize a range of different perspectives on course topics. The driving force behind this method is not only or even primarily the cultivation of critical thinkers that become versatile and employable problem-solvers, but the development of students who are curious about the logic of their lives, both personal and academic.

3. Critical Thinking in the EFL context

Equally important in this research is the conviction that it is necessary to stimulate critical thinking capacities among students of English as a form of reflective engagement in their broader social contexts. Such an approach aims to highlight the social significance and position of young people who will professionally engage with the English language in a world where this language has undoubtedly become one of the most

valuable forms of Bordieuan social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1991), without which it is almost impossible to communicate at work, find employment, and more. Having emerged from clear and well-analyzed historical, economic, and geopolitical circumstances (Crystal 2003), this reality is far from devoid of ideological underpinnings. Students must learn to question the fact of English as a lingua franca, because this reality implies and depends on inequalities inherent in the ways the hegemony of the English language shapes the everyday lives of people around the world (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Blommaert, 2010; Kubota, 1998, 2016; Macedo & Gounari, 2015; Park & Wee, 2013). Pennycook says that "No knowledge, no language and no pedagogy is ever neutral or apolitical. To teach critically, therefore, is to acknowledge the political nature of all education; it is not to take up some 'political' stance that stands in contradistinction to a 'neutral' position" (Pennycook 1994: 301).

In line with this, it is arguable that ignoring the hegemonic position of the English language and accompanying global inequalities and injustices is also an ideological stance in English language teaching. I argue that neglecting these issues is a systemic or unconscious attempt to depoliticize a context that is essentially political, and that this issue represents one of the key challenges for developing critical thinking in English language teaching at the university level. Also, if future English language teachers do not acquire the skill and habit of critically observing the many social phenomena and inequities that stem from the global dominance of the English language, we can expect further uncritical perpetuation of English-language hegemony. Therefore, the development of critical thinking among students of English is necessary for their exposure to and understanding of the broader sociopolitical reality around English and their individual positions in it, as well as their positions in teaching as such.

4. Critical Perspectivization

Based on the theoretical concerns and positions explored above, the method I propose for developing critical thinking in EFL is critical perspectivization – an approach that drives the selection of topics and formulation of teaching activities in a way that enables and requires intellectual curiosity about relevant social issues as well as both cognitive and metacognitive skills of actively and carefully examining a given phenomenon from different

perspectives. This method has been applied in the course taught to second-year English majors at the Department of English of the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Philology. The course focuses on practicing and enhancing students' productive language skills of speaking and writing. The students are all advanced users of English, falling into the upper C1 tier of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Critical perspectivization methodologically corresponds to an understanding of critical thinking as the ability, skill, and disposition to consider different perspectives to achieve a broader and deeper understanding of relevant observed phenomena. Couched in the tradition of Critical Pedagogy and related disciplines such as Critical Literacy and critical text analysis (Luke 2012), in this research critical thinking is seen as inseparable from the kinds of critical consciousness and critical curiosity that need to be engaged with the real conditions of students' lives. The choice of topics in teaching aims to stimulate intellectual curiosity and autonomous critical reasoning, as well as an awareness of the importance of applying this type of thinking beyond the classroom. The selection of topics and activities in Speaking and Writing G4 also seeks to promote critical awareness of the nature of the knowledge students acquire, foreign language instruction, the purpose of their own learning, and their role in society. These goals undoubtedly sound idealistic and aspirational; however, these goals have usefully shaped my theoretical understanding of what critical thinking might be in the EFL context as well as the specifics of my course design.

The one-semester course Speaking and Writing G4 was organized in accordance with the proposed methodology of critical perspectivization. The method consisted of 4 incremental stages of increasing complexity in perspective-taking, achieved through oral and written tasks during the course of the term.

Stage 1: Detecting and Interpreting Perspectives

Here the students were engaged in identifying different coexisting narratives or perspectives on the same event. The event in question was the broadcast of the radio drama "War of the Worlds" in 1938 and the mass panic that (never) broke out in the US during the broadcast. Students are presented with two texts: one claiming that the radio drama caused widespread panic in the United States, and another that critically examines the actual extent

of the alleged panic. Developing the concept of critical literacy in the EFL context, Catherine Wallace (1992) explains the transformative potential of language learning when students are guided to question and analyse texts critically. Building on her work, and the fact that the "learner's exposure to texts containing ideological assumptions contributes to their development of critical thinking skills," Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2012) demonstrated that students' introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in language classrooms enhances CT skills "by its impact on learners' abilities of interpretation and recognizing unstated assumptions" (44).

This first stage of the method of critical perspectivization includes a class discussion involving critical discourse analysis of two texts. These elements are aimed at detecting language devices and strategies employed in both texts to enhance their respective positions vis-à-vis the event in question. Detecting persuasive strategies, manipulations and inconsistencies in the two texts with opposing positions helps to identify the opposing perspectives and the texts' intentions – to convince the readers that the fictitious event took place and perpetuate the myth of the mass panic, or debunk the myth with evidence. Next, students deliver group oral presentations on their vision of what truly happened between the two opposed realities presented by the texts. This topic provided for an interesting case of meta-perspective: while discussing how radio listeners might have been hoaxed to think that a Martian invasion was underway in 1938, we also consider the fact that the myth of the mass panic took hold precisely because global audiences believed an exaggerated story issued by the newspapers of the time. Some of the ideas often mentioned in class by students are "fake news" and how the power of the media has grown and changed compared to the time of radio's heyday.

As one student wrote, "the texts were written from two different perspectives: one, that the broadcast caused quite a stir, and the other that there was no proof of panic. This reminds me of the "fake news" expression we use today. Unfortunately, the spread of fake news is nothing new. The first example that springs to mind was the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. That was the justification of America's invasion of Iraq. There were no sanctions or consequences for America [when no WMD were found], so I guess in this world you can get away with anything you want if you are powerful enough. It's quite sad to think about, really."

Stage 2: Dual Perspective Creation

In this stage, students create two different perspectives on the same event. For this purpose, we focused on identifying perspectives in the genre of newspaper reports. The main task was to write two different newspaper articles on the same event – a factual description of the event and a sensationalist one, modelled on the conventions of broadsheet articles and tabloids. The event the articles were to cover was a feminist protest in Belgrade that featured activists covering monuments of men with aprons. This was an actual event taking place in Belgrade in 2019, but it was not remembered widely, so it yielded itself well to class interpretation. Issues of political struggle and activism are relevant for all members of a community who exercise their rights and freedoms relative to governance. A common occurrence among students of the Faculty of Philology is refraining from discussions that have even the slightest "political" overtones with a cautionary and somewhat dismissive attitude – "I am not interested in politics." Since the position that has framed this course design and my research is that all discourse is inherently political and that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1978: 93), it seemed worthwhile to engage students in thinking about a provocative incident, coupled with an introduction to critically reading "the news." For Wallace (1992), a key strategy for enhancing critical thinking in EFL learners involves analyzing media texts and popular culture. These texts are often imbued with underlying ideological assumptions, which is why understanding them requires considering broader contexts along with sociocultural and political factors.Top of FormBottom of Form

The writing task of creating two different articles on the same event was challenging in practical terms and involved practicing a new writing skill. Hitherto the students had been mostly developing scholarly writing skills, so exposure to a different genre whose conventions are quite the reverse from academic writing—placing the most important information in the lead, answering the 5 W's, and building the inverted pyramid structure (Keeble & Reeves 2015) without argument development—was a fresh perspective for the students. Special attention was devoted to discussing the power of quotes in news pieces. Quotes can be seen as "the life force of the news story. They bring direct human impact into what otherwise runs the risk of becoming a dry series of factual statements" (Keeble & Reeves 2015: 121). But quotes also have the power to transport

us imaginatively to the scene of the event, intensifying "(the illusion of) a physical environment as well as the social relation between the interviewer and the quoted person" (Haapanen & Perrin 2017: 427). We explore how journalists, by choosing whose quotes to include in a story, select whose voices they want to be heard, and whose perspectives on the event they see as most salient.

The power of quotes is the aspect of this task that students singled out as particularly intriguing and challenging, inviting them to question whether there is such a thing as objective journalism. Indeed, in a poll conducted at the end of the course, the majority of students declared the newspaper article exercise to have been one of their favourite tasks, one in which they were "forced to take a completely different perspective" from their own. Asked to assume the typical Serbian "objective" and tabloid media stance regarding the feminist protest, the majority of students wrote tabloid articles that used emotionally charged language condemning the feminist political action that is not aligned with "Serbian values." This resonates well with Wallace's idea that "we read as a community of readers as much as individuals" (Wallace 1992: 63). The greatest challenge the students reported came from the requirement to develop a typical tabloid position on a feminist protest that most students would not identify with.

Stage 3: Multiple Perspectives Combination

This stage is supposed to engage students in exploring and including multiple perspectives on a given phenomenon related to the issues that are seen as relevant to the student population. The topic chosen for this stage was brain drain in Serbia, as this phenomenon has been affecting the life choices of students and young professionals in Serbia acutely in the past decades. Their task was to compose a feature story focusing on brain drain in Serbia following the conventions of feature writing, which include quotes from multiple people and perspectives, expert opinion, relevant facts, etc. (Keeble & Reeves, 2015). At the practical level, the task included doing research on the issue of brain drain in Serbia and conducting interviews with at least 10 fellow students from the Faculty of Philology. The composition of the feature story required the students to develop their voice and their own particular stance on the issue that would in turn frame the organization of their story. In the early stages of introducing the genre and topic, the students seemed anxious at the

scope of the assignment. The task is relatively more complex than the one in stage 2, and it entails a more complicated process of juggling multiple quotes and multiple perspectives in a narrative that is supposed to be well structured and truthful. In this case, there were no comments to the effect that they are not interested in politics, and interestingly so, since this topic belongs to the domain of politics proper. However, since the issue of brain drain and the questions of where they will pursue their careers and further education and if they see their future in Serbia weigh on them acutely, the dismissive apolitical stance evaporated – this issue was understood as something relevant to their lives, unlike "political stuff." One student reported that they were surprised to find their own perspective changing during the research as they interviewed their friends and colleagues.

Stage 4: Multiple Perspective Synthesis

Having explored some of the possibilities of incrementally engaging with different perspectives in news pieces and feature writing, the fourth stage presents students with the most complex task thus far. The topic of this stage is English as a Global Language. The accompanying assignment deals with different perspectives on the complex issue of English's global hegemony. We read and discuss in class three texts written by non-native speakers of English who became reputable professional writers in English. The three texts share a view of the hegemonic power of English from the perspective of non-native English speakers, but the particular experiences of the three writers are different and bound to their particular contexts: one of life in the US as a child of Chinese immigrants, the other of a Polish native who was brought to the US as a nine-year old, and the last one of a Nigerian whose parents spoke only English to their children living in an Igbo community. The selection of these three texts was aimed at capturing the multiplicity of lived experiences at the complicated nexus of the pressures to speak English correctly and the privileges that come with this ability worldwide. The storylines stem from the authors' minority subject positions subsequently projecting in three different directions: the intimate space of shame and pride vis-à-vis personal achievements relative to the power effects of English; a global perspective that highlights the importance of preserving the richness of the world's languages, and proposes strategies of structural resistance to the hegemony of English; and a regional African perspective that elucidates the multiple guises of English as it demarcates

social classes, but whose adoption as an official language or the medium of instruction positively affects some African states torn by ethnic conflicts between citizens speaking mutually unintelligible languages.

Another difference between the texts is their genre – one is a short story and the two others are pieces of long-form journalism. The latter form was also new to the majority of students who struggled with the length of the articles and the complex arguments that they made. Long-form journalism boasts exhaustive coverage, comprehensive analysis and multiple perspectives, (Kramer & Call 2007) which in tandem with the length made the reading assignment harder. In class we tried to understand the main points of the articles together and focus on questions such as: What is the main difference between the texts with respect to how they treat the global spread of English? (positive vs threatening phenomenon) How do all three texts understand English as a uniting factor or a divisive agent among peoples, classes, etc.? What are the similarities all 3 authors share regarding (the English) language? (overcoming language barriers, being ridiculed at school, all 3 became writers against the odds) How do the three texts understand the concept of a "language of intimacy?"

The students' task is to write a paper about the power of language. The task includes giving a title to the paper that corresponds with their particular angle. The essay needs to contain paraphrases or summaries of chunks of all three texts, and by doing so, the students must get into a dialogue with the offered perspectives and synthesize them in their essay by means of creating a coherent narrative. This task proved to be the most challenging, but also a positive learning curve for the students. The topics we covered in our class discussions ranged from the role of the British Council in Serbia before the Second World War and the adoption of English as an obligatory school course in Serbia to the phenomena of native speakerism and foreign language anxiety.

Student responses also covered a wide range. Many of them reported never having thought of the power of the English language before as well as feeling relieved to share their grammar accuracy and fluency anxiety:

> "I believe that looking at language through a social lens is something that is necessary in order to fully grasp it. No two people who speak the same language will speak it in the same way, and I really do wish to do a more extensive type of research into this social aspect of language as I find it both fascinating and beautiful."

But there were also responses that were largely unexpected:

> I couldn't care less about other people's experiences caused by the spreading and learning of English and I believe discussing this topic is as futile and useless as pouring water from a short and wide glass to a tall and narrow one to gain the illusion of having more water. I didn't colonize half of the world, and neither did my ancestors. I am not at fault for the rapid spreading of the English language, and neither are my friends, family, and ancestors. This entire topic about people struggling and facing difficulties because of THEIR lives and the circumstances they found themselves in drives me to distraction and completely kills every last bit of my will to even engage in class because discussing it is futile.

This response came from a student during class discussion and was repeated in their written response to the class. The students had been assigned another task to simultaneously comment on their thinking and hand in those reflections at the end of the semester. The above student's response was unexpected in terms of its forceful rejection of the idea of English being the language of both power and disempowerment. However, such reactions point at a sense of cognitive dissonance, which might prove a useful experience for unlocking fixed worldviews, rendering them more flexible and open to alternatives. Building on findings in neuroscience and Meyer's idea that students cannot adopt critical ways of thinking unless they are able to suspend their "own visions of truth and reflect on alternatives" (Meyers 1986, as cited in Bean & Melzer 2021: 28), Bean and Melzer single out cognitive dissonance as a useful method to shake up students' "confidence in their own settled beliefs or assumptions" (Bean & Melzer 2021: 28).

5. Conclusion

In the course Speaking and Writing G4, oral and written tasks as well as class discussions incrementally raised the complexity of perspective-taking through the four-stage model of critical perspectivization proposed in this research. The gradual exposure and engagement with alternative perspectives began with the stage of detecting and interpreting conflicting

yet coexisting narratives, followed by the second and third stages: Dual Perspective Creation and Multiple Perspective Combination. The last stage is Multiple Perspective Synthesis, which aims to engage the highest form of critical thinking during the course. The inclusion of the topic of the English language as a form cultural capital and a force both empowering and disempowering its (native and non-native) speakers worldwide can be as challenging as it is necessary for English majors, as has been discussed above. However, the fact that this topic is challenging serves as a vehicle to promoting critical thinking on at least two levels: it introduces a sense of cognitive dissonance, which is helpful in the process of disturbing students' fixed visions of reality; and it exposes them to questions of their subject position as English majors and future English teachers in a world where this language holds unprecedented power.

The choice of the topics and the genres of writing the students have been required to interpret and produce fell mainly in the journalistic sphere – news pieces, feature stories and long-form journalism. Such choices were made because it is assumed these texts are imbued with a fiber of ideologic assumptions whose detection, interpretation and decomposition is part and parcel of the process of critical reading and critical thinking (Wallace 1992).

Finally, I argue that the course described here is arguably the most conducive to systematically introducing this kind of thought in university-level EFL contexts. Bearing in mind that the course focuses on the productive skills of speaking and writing, it is assumed that not only does it yield itself to supplementation by CT-promoting exercises, but that this course and such courses are incomplete without them. For, if Bean and Melzer are correct in saying that writing assignments are arguably the most effective way to engage students in critical thinking because "the writing process itself entails complex critical thinking" (Bean & Melzer 2021: 5), and if they are correct in saying that "The best teaching strategies for accelerating students' growth are tasks that ask students to consider multiple points of view; to confront clashing values; and to imagine, analyze, and evaluate alternative solutions to problems," (Bean & Melzer 2021: 27) we have enough justification to design our English language courses following this and similar models.

This specific model of introducing critical thinking in an EFL classroom is particularly suited to the university level with the breadth of the topics discussed and the provocations calculated to spike the students' interest in their reality, which they often claim is apolitical. Arguably, the same

model with topics better adjusted for younger students would be practical in senior high school English classes. Considering further investigation of the successfulness of this method, e.g. longitudinal research that (dis) proves its efficiency would be of great significance. However, evaluating the design of this method of introducing and cultivating critical thinking to EFL lends itself more to a qualitative type of research, rather than quantitative. Attempting to join elements of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, this method does not see critical thinking as a set of discernable discrete procedural skills that can be measured on multiple choice or other machine-gradable tests. Rather, it understands CT to be both thinking and doing, a sort of Freirean praxis – a dialogic and dialectical state of mind driven by critical curiosity, and willingness to imagine and create alternative, better worlds.

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Received: 31 May 2024
Accepted for publication: 15 October 2024