

# THE EMERGENCE OF CULTURAL CONTENT IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF IN-SERVICE TEACHERS OF SPANISH

**Juliana Patricia LLANES SANCHEZ**

Language Pedagogy PhD Program  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest  
julianallanes@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** The use of literature to teach culture has been widely accepted in the field of foreign language teaching. As a result, literature continues to appear in language teacher training syllabi and theoretical proposals regularly refer to literature as a language laboratory where intercultural skills can be developed (Cuq & Gruca, 2003). The current case study explores a world literature PhD course at a university in Budapest, belonging to the professional development of in-service teachers of Spanish as a foreign language. The study attempts to identify what type of cultural content arises in this PhD course. Participant observations, audio recordings, interviews and the researcher's journal were used as instruments for data collection. The outcomes suggest that the emerging cultural content refers to cultural products, cultural practices and cultural competence. The findings also show that cultural content is linked to multidimensional views of culture and to the consideration of classroom culture as a resource to meet different cultural practices and to develop course participants' cultural competence. Limitations and pedagogical implications are also outlined at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** cultural content, professional development, classroom culture, Spanish teachers.

## 1 Introduction

The current study is situated in a world literature course of a PhD programme at a university in Budapest belonging to the professional development of in-service teachers of Spanish as a foreign language (FL). The paper is intended to identify what kind of cultural content emerges in this PhD course. The rationale behind this research is fuelled by the possibility of examining the place given to cultural content within professional development settings focusing on world literature. In addition, the study proposes to provide in-depth descriptions of classroom practices and participants following an insider's perspective<sup>1</sup> with a qualitative focus.

The use of literature to teach culture has been widely accepted in the field of FL teaching (Brumfit & Carter, 1997; Cuq & Gruca, 2003; Lazar, 1993). As a result, literature continues to appear in the syllabus as a tool to access the culture of the people speaking the target language and various theoretical proposals regularly refer to literature as a language laboratory where intercultural skills can be developed (Cuq & Gruca, 2003). However, the inclusion of literature in FL classrooms is also viewed as a "cliché" (Valdes, 1986) which is actually treated rather superficially in teaching materials and in instructional approaches. The

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<sup>1</sup> I, as the researcher, also adopted the position of a participant observer in this course.

present paper seeks to identify types of cultural content arising in a PhD course for in-service teachers of Spanish with the purpose of addressing this shortcoming.

## 2 Theoretical background

Even if the teaching of culture is not a central curricular objective in FL classes, because of time constraints and instructional priorities (Sercu, 2006); “the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice versa. The wherewithal to function in another culture requires both progress in the language and knowledge of the culture” (Seelye, 1993, p.23). In other words, when communicating and interacting in a FL, speakers are not only using linguistic skills but are also bringing into play their cultural knowledge about the target language and the communities where it is used.

Thus, language and culture become paramount constructs for FL learning and teaching. First, because teachers and learners are viewed as active participants and co-interpreters of the FL; they work together through the lens of their individual horizons (Scarino, 2014). Secondly, the learner and the teacher are reflective interactants, users of the target language and above all they are persons. Their participation or non-participation in classroom practices is informed by their whole history, background and experiences with others.

For the purposes of the paper and summarizing Scarino’s (2014) views, the concept of *culture* is not restricted to codes bounded by national borders and represented in facts and information. An extended view of the term refers to culture, condensing Cuche’s (2002) definition, as a social construction in constant renovation; highlighting the social norms and practices created by individuals. Accordingly, it may be possible to consider *literature* as another product and representation of language (Sitman & Lerner, 1999). Like culture, which is a condition and a product of language, literary works are the result of a given culture, using a given language in a specific period of time and place (Sitman & Lerner, 1999). Thus the three entities, i.e., language, culture and literature, are inseparable (Sitman & Lerner, 1999).

In the field of FL learning and teaching, literature is widely used to promote classroom discussions and to stimulate language activities where awareness of language use can be developed (McKay, 1997). Besides, culturally oriented approaches call attention to the need to use literature to make students experience foreign ways of “ordering, classifying, and organizing the world through language” (Kramersch & Lam, 1999, p.58). As a response to this need, the current study intends to identify cultural content emerging in a professional development PhD course that includes literature as a tool for raising participants’ awareness of different values, beliefs and socio-cultural structures.

### 2.1 Literature and FL teachers’ professional development

The fact that literature remains important for the field of language study (Kramersch & Kramersch, 2000) derives from new approaches in the definition of the literary text and of what it means to teach a FL. The wider understanding moves away from grammar-translation and communicative approaches characterized as language-based pedagogies to more integrated, content-oriented and task-based instructional sequences (Byrnes, 2001). The central aim of

this richer understanding of literature is that the entire enterprise of FL learning and teaching should offer intellectual and personally challenging content.

Among the advantages of literature for professional development in the area of culture learning, there is the ability of literature to act as a mirror of the culture and lifestyle of people who speak the language (Sánchez-Lobato, 1996) as well as the availability of literature for introducing a creative world composed of its own reality and cultural spheres (Gadjusek, 1988). In one sense, literature may enable FL teachers to approximate various mentalities that can be considered approaches to cultures. Thus, literature may play three roles: as input, as vehicle and as tool (Sitman & Lerner, 1999). That is to say that developing professionally with literary works encourages teachers to use the target language to understand and interpret the content and the aesthetic structures of the texts; and at the same time literary productions immerse the teacher in a foreign culture. This is the reason why literary texts both stimulate communication and linguistic performance and arouse interest in cultural worlds linked to the target language and the experience of readers (Sitman & Lerner, 1999).

Previous studies addressing the question of using world literature to promote culture learning (Landt, 2006; Nault, 2006; Qureshi, 2006; Schultz, 2002; Sitman & Lerner, 1999) report valuable findings that deserve attention. For instance, there is a consensus around the potential of literature for broadening the visions of self and the world (Landt, 2006; Qureshi 2006). However, cultural content in literature courses is “conventionally explored ad hoc and anecdotally with the purpose of understanding a specific work” (Schulz & Ganz, 2010, p.189). Additionally, it is noted by Alvstad and Castro (2009) that the use of literature in FL classrooms tends to concentrate on cultural knowledge and on the historical perspectives of the text; reproducing the view of texts and culture as static elements. The study plans to describe cultural content arising in a PhD course in order to identify meaningful approaches towards culture learning.

## **2.2 Cultural content in FL teaching**

Cultural knowledge acquisition continues to be kept apart from language acquisition, even if the symbiotic relationship between culture and language is widely accepted (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994; Byrnes, 2001; Schulz 2007; Seelye, 1993). For example, cultural content in FL textbooks is mostly presented in a fragmented, simplistic and unconnected way (Sobkowiak, 2015); involving topics related to entertainment, tourist attractions, food, and literature (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Lázár, 2003). Such a tourist-inspired perspective of cultural content has been proposed by textbook writers’ and followed by practicing teachers on the basis of the “assumption that such popular topics are more appealing to the target audience and can stimulate more interest in them than abstract ones inviting students to analyze diverse beliefs and attitudes” (Sobkowiak, 2015, p.804) about the target culture.

Moreover, the teaching of culture as a component of language teaching has traditionally struggled between two views of culture. The first one supports universality and the second one promotes the maintenance of cultural particularity (Kramsch, 1995). This traditional dichotomy does not help FL teachers to decide what kind of cultural content to deal with in their classes. Consequently, cultural content continues to be that selected for inclusion by textbook authors or by individual teachers in a somewhat haphazard scheme (Schulz, 2007).

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that culture in FL settings is “no longer confined to the paradigm of the target culture, but to a variety of cultural content in the world” (Nguyen, 2013, p.1). As a result, cultural content as well as the notion of culture has been divided into parts. Among the theoretical constructs that are commonly used in FL teaching and learning, we find the 3Ps (Products, Practices and Perspectives) proposed in the Standards for foreign language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (1999). According to this model, the tangible (e.g., a piece of literature) and intangible (e.g., an oral tale) creations of a particular culture can be catalogued as *products*. The patterns of social interactions (e.g., ordering), behaviours (e.g., gestures) the use of products (e.g., table manners) as well as the knowledge of “what to do when and where” (p.50) within a particular culture can be named *practices*. The meanings, attitudes, values, beliefs and ideas that represent the culture’s view of the world (e.g., the importance of family or the value of ownership) and underlie the cultural practices and products of a society can be labelled *perspectives*.

Cultural content has not only been framed through the 3Ps model. Another complex framework referring to cultural content in terms of competence has also appeared. Puren (2013) suggests that if we wish to become culturally competent speakers when learning a FL, we need to think about cultural content in terms of cultural competence. He proposes a complex model of cultural competence, comprising various components that are related to one another by definition (Puren, 2011). Hence in FL settings, it is essential to build a collective culture for action within the classroom. This he labels the *co-cultural component*. It is also important to agree on attitudes and behaviours accepted by members of specific communities, which constitute the *multi-cultural component*. In addition, it is crucial to distance oneself from one’s own culture and to pay attention to different interpretations and misunderstandings between people, termed the *intercultural component*. Furthermore, it is also necessary to know about cultural aspects of other populations, which means developing the *meta-cultural component*, and finally it is also important to share universal values beyond the particular patterns of a common milieu referred to by Puren (2013) as the *cross-cultural component*. In this complex model, the co-cultural, multi-cultural, intercultural, meta-cultural and cross-cultural components are part of the whole overarching notion of cultural competence. This is why cultural competence is supposed to constitute a key feature of a competent FL speaker.

To sum up, previous research on the study of cultural content and the use of literature in FL and teacher training courses shows that cultural content can be dissected into several parts: products, practices, perspectives and competence. This thematic focus of cultural content motivates the current undertaking to be able to identify a wider range of attitudes, skills, knowledge, understandings and actions emerging in a PhD course that may extend existing practices. Therefore this case study sets out to answer the following main research question: What type of cultural content arises in a professional development course for in-service teachers of Spanish as a foreign language?

### 3 Methods

This study intends to identify cultural content arising in a professional development PhD course focusing on literature. In order to achieve this purpose, the research takes place in the participants’ natural setting because this makes it possible to capture a deep level of detail of their views and context in which the events occur (Dörnyei, 2007). In fact the naturalistic,

descriptive and interpretive nature of qualitative approaches makes it possible to collect specific processes and situations in a more “accessible, concrete, immediate and personal manner” (Duff, 2012, p.96). A case study research design is thus followed because it “seeks depth rather than breadth in its scope and analysis” (Duff, 2012, p.96). The main goal is not to produce generalizable outcomes but to conduct a close examination of the research participants’ understandings through prolonged engagement in the classroom setting.

### 3.1 Participants and settings

The study was carried out in 2015 in a well-known university in Budapest at the Spanish philology department. The tutor, Ms. Szabó (pseudonym) and three female students: Réka, Margit and Lucia (pseudonyms) took part in a PhD course, focusing on world literature, as part of their professional development. The fortnightly 90-minute seminars took the form of literary discussions. At the beginning of the semester, the tutor proposed a list of possible authors and books to be studied. After some negotiation, the course participants selected literary texts deliberately in view of professional improvement and according to the topics of their final dissertation.

Since the study group consisted of the four research participants, the whole course was regarded as a promising and useful case (Cresswell, 1998) that enabled me to show different perspectives on the issue under investigation. All the course participants were second-year PhD students. Table 1 summarizes the research participants’ educational and professional characteristics.

	<b>Ms. Szabó</b>	<b>Réka</b>	<b>Margit</b>	<b>Lucia</b>
<b>Age</b>	45	27	36	35
<b>Nationality</b>	Hungarian	Hungarian and Argentinean	Hungarian and Bulgarian	Colombian and French
<b>Languages spoken</b>	4	5	4	3
<b>Teaching experience</b>	23 years	8 years	7 years	13 years
<b>Type of setting currently teaching</b>	University	Language institute and university	University	University

Table 1. Information about the participants’ educational and professional characteristics

A small number of participants was chosen deliberately because this investigation is concerned with providing nuanced pictures of individuals’ performances and perspectives rather than with issues of universality. I was allowed to develop the research project and attend the course at the same time as a PhD student. Accordingly, I was involved in the study under the pseudonym ‘Lucia’ as a participant-researcher. Therefore, I saw the participants in the research study as collaborators (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) in the process of shaping and determining discoveries about themselves and their situations. Indeed, “it is only the actual participants themselves who can reveal the meanings and interpretations of their experiences and actions” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.37). As a corollary, of course, it must be admitted that my background may influence the analysis, the findings and the interpretations suggested here.

### 3.2 Methods of data collection

The data collection process was carried out over 5 months, from September 2015 to January 2016. Data were not gathered only at the end of the study or exclusively during classroom sessions, rather, the collection of data was cyclical (Friedman, 2012) and ongoing; consequently, participant observations enabled me to produce initial notes that were analyzed. These preliminary examinations informed subsequent observations and enriched field notes. The aim was to enable initial discoveries to guide equally the focus of observations, the whole research process and the interviews with the participants. Four instruments were used in the study to collect data: unstructured observations, audio recordings of the sessions, semi-structured interviews with participants and the researcher's journal.

#### 3.2.1 Unstructured observations recorded in field notes

Observation was selected among several techniques of qualitative research to facilitate full participation and the achievement of the insider's view (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). This is also why pre-established categories or checklists were not suitable for the observation procedure. Besides, I adopted a participant-as-observer role because of the need to produce thick description of settings, participants and interactions, and also because of the significance of being able to understand participants' own investments. Table 2 presents the number of observations and the length of audio recordings.

Session	Date of observation	Length of audio recording hrs:mins
1	10 <sup>th</sup> September 2015	1:20
2	24 <sup>th</sup> September 2015	1:34
3	8 <sup>th</sup> October 2015	1:37
4	22 <sup>th</sup> October 2015	1:32
5	12 <sup>th</sup> November 2015	1:34
6	26 <sup>th</sup> November 2015	1:23
7	10 <sup>th</sup> December 2015	1:40
8	7 <sup>th</sup> January 2016	1:45

Table 2. Number of observations and the length of audio recordings.

The flexibility of the qualitative approach allowed me to begin with truly open observation and then move towards a more structured kind of observation using a template for field notes once certain key themes had been identified. Thus, information coming from observation, such as portraits of the participants, descriptions of the physical setting and accounts of events, activities or dialogues were entered in the field notes in an objective and neutral way, although it is acknowledged that "the presence of an observer changes the behaviour of those being observed" (Friedman, 2012, p.187).

#### 3.2.2 Audio recordings of the sessions

Audio recording was chosen because it is less intrusive (Friedman, 2012) than video recording and permits relatively objective recall of events to enrich the produced description.

Additionally, by capturing participants' exact words, the report of the researcher's understandings can be drawn up using the participants' own terms. As I was participant-researcher in the project, I transcribed the audio-recordings myself. The transcription process took several weeks and involved listening to and writing down the exact words used by research participants. All the quotations presented in this paper are the English versions of the original Spanish transcripts translated by myself.

### 3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews with research participants

This instrument was chosen in order to find out "what is important to the interviewees, within the broad boundaries of the interview topics and questions" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p.83). Following broad open-ended questions devised on the basis of the preliminary findings of observation, the interview took on the features of a purposeful conversation that let the interviewer and the interviewee deviate from the guidelines to elaborate on topics arising during the course of the interview (Friedman, 2012).

After deciding the focus of enquiry and the type of interview, the procedure of developing the interview questions concentrated on brainstorming possible words, phrases and wordings in order to create a pool of questions based in the initial analysis of the audio recordings. The interview guide was submitted to critical analysis through peer reviewing with a research expert and a practitioner<sup>2</sup> and then translated into Spanish. Afterwards, the Spanish version was back-translated into English in order to identify problematic terms. Finally, a think-aloud protocol with an experienced Spanish teacher was carried out and further changes and clarifications of some questions were incorporated for the final version (see Appendix A for the participants' interview guide). Prior to the participants' interviews, a self-interview was conducted as a preparatory step because "question-asking [...] is improved through practice and persistence" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p.88). Each research participant was interviewed once at the end of the data gathering period. I then transcribed the audio-taped interviews. Excerpts from the original Spanish data are presented in my translation (see Appendix B for the transcription conventions applied).

### 3.2.4 The researcher's journal

My own voice as a participant-researcher was included in these narratives, which form an integral part of the research process (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The journal was a record of notes, phrases, words, ideas, questions and concerns that do not appear in the field notes and that reflect my observations and personal remarks about the issue being studied. Additionally, the aim of the journal was to record my perceptions about the participants and their practices, the topics and the issues emerging from my personal thoughts and preliminary interpretations with the objective of drawing possible comparisons and future interconnections during the analysis phase. The journal was equally valuable for building an audit trail (Dörnyei, 2007) that summarizes the progression of decisions made during the whole research process.

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful for the insightful comments of Dr. Dorottya Holló and Boglárka Mokos on the interview guide and the critical analysis of the refined categories in the analysis phase.

### 3.3 Methods of data analysis

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the how cultural content emerges in the researched case, this study relies on qualitative data and thus the analysis is fundamentally interpretive, which means that it is “the product of the researcher’s subjective interpretation of data” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.38). Although the researcher is the main measurement device in the study (Dörnyei, 2007); it is not an intellectual fabrication but an understanding and an analysis of a phenomenon situated in professional development settings.

The four data sources detailed in the previous section were analyzed using the following methods of data analysis. Table 3 presents the data sources and the methods of data analysis.

Research question	Data sources	Methods of data analysis
What type of cultural content arises in a professional development course for in-service teachers of Spanish as a foreign language?	Participant observation and field notes	Looking for patterns and categories and coding Peer-reviewing
	Researcher’s journal	Interpretive analysis
	Audio recordings of the sessions	Content and interpretive analysis Peer-reviewing
	Semi-structured interviews	Member checking Content and interpretive analysis Peer-reviewing

Table 3. The research questions, data sources and research methods

Prior to the coding and analysis phase, the number of turns taken by research participants per class was quantified. Then, the transcriptions of participants’ interviews were submitted to respondent feedback (Dörnyei, 2007). The respondents were asked to read and express any comments about their experiences or circumstances reflected in the interview in such a way that their checking contributed to the uncovering of their perspectives. Transcripts of audio recordings of the sessions and the participants’ interviews were analyzed through content analysis.

Altogether two rounds of content and interpretive analysis were conducted with the collected data. In the first round I identified comments, events and actions expressing ideas about cultural content; then, I organized the comments into repeated views and these views were categorized into themes. I also explored recurrent behaviours and remarks related to the participants’ practices within the sessions. In the second round of analysis, I concentrated on the particular instances that influence the research participants’ visions of cultural content. Therefore, I examined the participants’ utterances for evidence of how their views of cultural content emerging in the course were shaped by their personal experience.



The themes emerging from the two rounds of content analysis were assigned labels which were compared with the codes proposed by another fellow researcher<sup>3</sup>. The co-coder and I worked separately and came together to negotiate the categories. Then the categories were compared within and across participants and classroom sessions in order to find patterns and possible relationships between larger categories and subcategories. The refined themes relate to different accounts of the same incident given by different participants at different points of time. These categories were submitted to peer-checking (Dörnyei, 2007) with an expert who reviewed and made judgments and interpretations independently. At the end, a process of sorting and grouping led to the development of a system of three categories: cultural products, cultural practices and cultural competence, according to which the results are presented in the following section.

## 4 Outcomes

The type of cultural content that is presented in this section emerged in a PhD course situated in professional development settings. Thus the outcomes are the accounts of the participants' experience in the studied PhD course focusing on literature. This is why rather lengthy excerpts dealing with literary works are quoted and also try to illustrate the participants' investment and engagement in the course. Additionally, the outcomes appear in the following order: cultural products, cultural practices and cultural competence. The italics in the extracts of the data are my emphases and are intended to highlight important points related to the issues of each section.

### 4.1 Cultural products

Since the course studied here dealt exclusively with literature it is quite evident that literary works, themselves, won unanimous support from the research participants as the main cultural product examined in the course. Margit's words represent the notion of literary texts as elements of culture: "everything was associated with culture since we were talking about literary works [...] even *the novel was culture* [...] or part of culture. *Every single book was different but each had a tight relationship with culture*; each provided considerable contributions to the current culture" (Post course interview (Int.)).

Another example of the idea of literature as a component of culture is shown in the transcript of the class in which course participants shared their impressions about Joyce's *Ulysses*:

**Margit:** *Joyce's book has very realistic representations* but it is more than reality...in other words if you want to read real issues...you can read... I don't know...you can read documents [...].

**Ms. Szabó:** Sure! [...] *Ulysses is more than reality* [...] Joyce is playing with everything... He surpasses the limits everywhere...this book breaks down what we know, what we have already seen and what we think about reality and taboos. [...]. *It's part of a specific way of writing...* [...] *that changed the direction of literature and society* [...] modern times aren't shocking anymore [...].

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Nicolas Combe for his invaluable assistance as a co-coder.

**Lucia:** For me this book is the flow of thinking [...] it's like letting be the being during one day [...] this work is totally chaotic...there were many things all over the place... too many styles but it particularly drew my attention towards music and cultural memory. (Audio recording (AR) of class 6, 26th November 2015).

According to the research participants' views, Ulysses possesses *realistic representations* and is also *a specific way of writing* that had surpassed reality and *changed the direction of literature and society*. In other words it seems to be both a product of a given cultural reality and a source of change.

In classroom discussions, texts were not only observed as objects that exist in a given society; the research participants also underline that texts are snapshots of specific socio-cultural contexts framed by particular times. In the extract below, participants consider Proust's *In search of lost time* as a text that conveys cultural information about a particular family at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

**Réka:** Here it seems that we dealt with the point of view of *the narrator's family* [...] they have this obsession with maintaining social classes [...] they look down on poor and rich people or even on those who tried to change their social status [...] they are constantly criticizing people around them [...] However, if we analyze people from a higher status, we realize that they do accept others [...] *It's only a middle class group that tries to keep distance*, because it's correct to maintain the social class in which one was born.

**Margit:** But I think that the aristocracy of that period of time was very judgmental and they looked down on others too... Think about princess Guermante... she looked down on others simply because they had an ugly name or because they behaved in an improper way [...]. The difference with Swan's family is that they did not take into account social classes but they made judgments based on people's moral behavior. [...] That's why I don't agree with your idea that middle class was the only one who criticized. I believe that they respond to a different morality ... a steady morality... and they did not accept the deviations of the aristocracy [...].

**Lucia:** [...] I'd rather think that social classes at *the beginning of the 20th century* did not mix together easily [...] and that is precisely what Proust wants to show... a breakdown in social classes [...] a different amorality [...].

**Margit:** But still in my point of view he is presenting his family as the only positive part of this society because he doesn't criticize it at all...

**Réka:** Let's see... he doesn't criticize his family overtly but if you concentrate on the comments [...] you can see that *the women of this family* are feigning all the time... they pretend to be other women and to talk in different ways [...].

**Margit:** For me that's *a typical feature of people at that century*, I can imagine that it was *the way of expressing oneself* at that time... you know... polite manners [...].

**Lucia:** [...] But he made fun of his aunts Flora and Celine... he made fun of *their language*... he made fun of how they talked [...].

**Margit:** But he did not make fun of his mother or father [...] I think he tries to present them positively [...] of course; his family did not mix with the rest of the world...but... [...] he sees them critically... as we could do with ours... [...]. In this part of the book, money and sex were not important [...] it seems that *this family did not care about money and sex* which dominated everything at that time. (AR of class 3, 8th October 2015).

In the quotation presented above the text was not only considered as the production of the author but also as a product embedded in a given time and context. This allowed research participants to make links between the story of the book and the context in which it was written. For instance, cultural aspects like *their language* or the *way of expressing oneself*

were associated both to periods of time, in this case *the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*, and to particular groups of people such as *the narrator's family*, the *middle class* or the group of *women of this family*. Likewise, in her interview Réka also observed that during the course “we went deep into social and political eras; we concentrated on what people look like at given times informed by social criticism and critical thinking” (Int.).

## 4.2 Cultural practices

Research participants pointed out that cultural practices refer to ways of behaving and that they are typically linked to the literary characters' way of living. The following extract of a session on *Ulysses* illustrates research participants' idea of the connection between cultural practices and characters:

**Margit:** The second part of the book [...] is a little bit... disappointing for me...the reality they face everyday... How they live... (hesitation)... all this dirty underwear... next to the woman's bed...oh... then how he goes to the toilet and ---[...]

**Réka:** I also think that for the first time we've got an image of Leopold that remains the same along the chapter...an image of somebody who isn't important... that is... he has-- let's see...we are in *Dublin in 1916*...can you imagine *a man who gets up to cook breakfast for his woman who is just lying on the bed with dirty underwear all over the place?*... I don't think it's a-- well, *I don't know the society of past times but I don't think it was the normal behaviour*...therefore *Leopold is somebody who let other people manipulates him*... in this case his wife... he is at her service. (AR of class 4, 22th October 2015).

Cultural practices like *a man who gets up to cook breakfast for his woman* are associated to the character *Leopold* and are connected to specific places and times, for example *Dublin in 1916*. This corresponds to the use of background information inserted in the story as well as the investment of research participants' personal interpretations, knowledge and experience evidenced in comments such as “*I don't know the society of past times but I don't think it was the normal behaviour*” or “*Leopold is somebody who let other people manipulate him.*” Réka not only situates Leopold's practices in *Dublin 1916* but also gives her impressions about him guided by her own knowledge and opinions about the subject in question.

In addition to the characters' cultural practices, the analysis of audio-taped sessions revealed other types of practices that are affiliated to the culture enacted in the classroom. These classroom practices are articulated in a common framework to participate and learn collaboratively through classroom conversations. Three main patterns of the participation framework are identified: Freedom of expression and non-limited comments; tolerance of inquiry and nonthreatening disagreement, and a multifocal perspective. Each feature is outlined below.

### 4.2.1 Freedom of expression and non-limited comments

I have called the first pattern of the classroom practices freedom of expression and non-limited comments. This refers to the contributions made during the classroom sessions. The number of the students' contributions per class shows that, on average, Margit participates 24 times, Réka 18 times, Lucia 15 times and Ms. Szabó 10 times. The differences

in the number of participations among the research participants may be explained by the length of those contributions. Réka and Lucia tended to participate less but their comments were much longer than Margit's remarks. Ms. Szabó contributed relatively little to the discussions because of the spirit of the course, as is stated by Margit and Réka:

It was a course where students had to talk. It was required [...] to provide personal opinions. The teacher only guided us but we, the students, did most of the talking (Int.).

We presented our thoughts without bibliographic references, only our own thoughts were expected [...] and one way to foster them was the fact that we dominated the talking and not the teacher (Int.).

Research participants also observed that the relaxed atmosphere of the course allowed them to join the discussions freely. Réka felt like *meeting a group of friends*:

*It's like meeting a group of friends...there's no stress. The group accepts everything [...] I can say whatever I want. I'm not afraid of my thoughts even if my ideas are not those of the teacher or even if they aren't correct [...] all the new ideas, whether they're valid or not, can be expressed (Int.).*

Another important aspect is that in this course, the tutor, Ms. Szabó, gave no limits to her students' comments and so each of them was able to express herself at length. Ms. Szabó herself summarizes the course approach in the following manner:

In the course we not only comment on the content of the book but also reflect on narrative procedures and techniques [...]. I don't want merely to summarize the book [...] it would be too boring to come to class to discuss simply the content of the book [...]. I don't give guiding questions any more because I don't want to influence the students' reading [...]. I'm interested first in the students' observations (Int.).

This freedom of expression also enhanced the quality of students' thoughts and responses about the texts since research participants were encouraged to verbalize their thinking:

**Margit:** Just a final comment before leaving... I read an article that presents the last chapter as the light at the end of the tunnel... after reading 1000 pages ... these serious and monotonous pages...

**Ms. Szabó:** I wouldn't say monotonous...

**Réka:** Better chaotic and difficult to digest...

**Margit:** Yes... depressing pages... there may be something superior... a clearer feeling that cannot be easily described ...that might be called hope... the hope that perhaps a woman could save us...

**Ms. Szabó:** I don't know... *Why do you think there is hope here in Ulysses?* [...]

**Réka:** I'm not sure...sure of-- Is it necessary to ask if there's hope here?

**Ms. Szabó:** Do you mean... it is the right question to ask?

**Réka:** Let's see...the author only narrates one day... there were no adventures, no drama or anything... [...] basically nothing happened... so after the description of a routine day, *what's the point of saying if there's hope or not?* (AR of class 6, 26th November 2015).

In the previous quotation, Ms. Szabó's broad question *Why do you think there is hope here in Ulysses?* encourages explanation from Réka whose argumentation represents her genuine opinion about the formulated question: *what's the point of saying if there's hope or not?*

#### 4.2.2 Tolerance of inquiry and non-threatening disagreement

I have called the second pattern of the classroom practices in this professional development PhD course tolerance of inquiry and non-threatening disagreement. Research participants constantly challenge and comment on one another's ideas. The subsequent excerpt exhibits the progressive process of inquiry and disagreement about Molly one of the characters of Joyce's *Ulysses*:

**Margit:** [...] To me the obscenity of this chapter is shocking... we are at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and we have an image of women [...] even nowadays the description given here is too--- [meaning that it's too obscene] ... I mean a woman thinking in such a rude way that is almost bawdy [...] there are no pure feelings here, [...] *everything is physical*...

**Ms. Szabó:** *Do you think Molly is entirely like that? ...Is Molly a very simple or a relatively complex character?*

**Margit:** *I don't know for sure but for me--...judging by her words here... she is not feminine... she is the opposite of a woman...the anti-woman...*

**Réka:** *Really? I don't think so...for me she is a lost woman* [...] although there's a corporal description her [...] it seems that she isn't in the right place [...] she had distorted herself to being able to escape her reality [...]

**Lucia:** You called her the anti-woman... [...] *but in fact*, Molly is just showing us her real face ... her true nature [...]

**Margit:** [...] *But for me* the physical point of view of Molly is the only one that is shown as if there wasn't any other one... she has no feelings [...]. *If you pay attention to* the way she talks about her daughter for example... it seems that she isn't a conventional mother [...] everything is presented from a sexual point of view [...]

**Lucia:** *I disagree* because there are also some other sides of her face... when she remembers her childhood and when she met Boylan for the first time [...] we discover her emotions and feelings [...] *Don't you think so?*

**Margit:** She doesn't talk about feelings but about-- who makes love in that way or the other way ...

**Réka:** *But if you remember* the first time Boylan took her hand... that's not sex yet... the narration is romantic [...]

**Margit:** Well, yes, yes [...] *but anyway that's superficial* [...]

**Ms. Szabó:** *For me it's more a reaction... a kind of self-defence*... against the world because the book is a continuous criticism of the world around us [...] it seems that everybody is losing moral values and Molly is also reacting to that [...] she is trying to construct herself [...]

**Margit:** She is constructing herself in a particular area, in the area of sex... where she knows that she can succeed... [...]. She earns her own money [...].that's not a common practice....a woman who works [...]

**Ms Szabó:** [...] *But it doesn't mean* that she isn't a woman with emotions [...]

**Lucia:** It can also be viewed as a complaint about society because Joyce is dealing with forbidden topics... in fact in one of the articles I've read, the authors named it as the fascination for sin, for those topics that we cannot talk about [...] such as body, sex, nakedness... so taboos are also questioned with the purpose of [...] giving free rein to topics that were previously categorized as sins...

**Margit:** Besides, Molly takes up several roles here, she is a wife, a mother, a famous singer... a prima donna [...] and when we know that she sleeps in her dirty clothes it is like a contradiction

[...] we have the image of a sophisticated prima donna and we are disappointed because she is the opposite, Joyce shows us her gloomy side... definitely a contradiction...

**Ms Szabó:** Well a contradiction in one sense *but on the other hand*--

**Margit:** I know it's her real life but it doesn't fit with a prima donna [...] who has to be the synonym of elegance and brightness...

**Ms Szabó:** Sure but *that's what the book is giving us*...

**Margit:** There is no charm here [...]

**Lucia:** Because we are seen her real life and even ours... all of us are human beings... we all go to the toilet [...] and die [...] without any brightness [...] (AR of class 6, 26th November 2015).

The above passage starts with a personal remark *everything is physical* that leads to direct questions "*Do you think Molly is entirely like that? ...Is Molly a very simple or a relatively complex character?*". These questions not only challenge previous comments but foster subsequent disagreement from other participants. Disagreement is expressed through the formulation of personal interpretations supported by description of the story or by individual opinions such as *I don't think so...for me she is a lost woman* or *for me it's more a reaction... a kind of self-defence*. Thus the process of elaboration of arguments promoted collaboration in the construction of meaning rather than a quarrel, as it is expressed in Margit words:

In the course one can have a very different opinion; we can even contradict the teacher and debate. [...] Sometimes we persuade each other and sometimes we disagree ...There aren't unique or valid solutions but several ways of thinking... Each of us has her opinions and feels free to accept or not others' perspectives (Int.).

#### 4.2.3 Multifocal perspective

The third pattern of classroom practices is the multifocal perspective. This refers to the different ways in which a text can be interpreted and how this information can contribute to the whole understanding of the text with the view of discarding any attempts to transmit knowledge from erudite transmitters to empty receivers. Margit explains this view: "My classmates let me see many aspects of the text that I had never seen before [...] everybody had something to contribute to the other one. Besides reading the book alone is not the same as discussing it together" (Int.).

Course dialogues provided opportunities for self reflection and critical thinking in which each participant shared her way of analyzing text, as it is illustrated in the following passage of a discussion about Flaubert's *Mme Bovary*:

**Margit:** L'heureux is like a third lover for Emma [...] he exploits her... she suffers from her mixed need of being rich and be loved ... this is very puzzling for her [...] maybe because of the novels she read [...] She always buys presents, her lovers never buy anything for her [...]

**Réka:** *Another recurrent literary topic that we can find here is [...] Mme Bovary as a man...* she is the one who buys presents, the one who takes the initiatives... In her marriage she is in charge of everything [...] she becomes the man and Charles becomes the woman [...] they pretend to keep their roles but in reality their roles are totally reversed.

**Margit:** She is not a feminist [...] she doesn't fight for values but for her own financial freedom [...]

**Lucia:** She lets go of contrary desires [...] *she grew up in a farm, then she was educated with nuns but now lives as a rich person* [...] now while being a man she lets conflicting desires emerge [...]

**Réka:** *It's also interesting to analyze the parallelism with other women in the book, for example Charles' mother is also taking on a male role but not for the same reasons [...] but out of necessity. She doesn't revoke her husband's authority but she complements him from behind [...] whereas Mme Bovary is not only trying to gain power but also trying to get the possibility of doing whatever she wants...*

**Margit:** Or it may be the tragedy of her life... *she reads about rich women in those novels and in order to be one of them she has to take the male role and to do this, she has to destroy her husband and paradoxically if she destroys him she would never be the happy women with a strong man.*

**Réka:** Sure, because in the romantic novels those who take initiatives are always men so if you desire as a women it doesn't fit. (AR of class 2, 24th September 2015)

In the previous quote, the particular focus of analysis and styles for making comments are exemplified. For instance, Lucia emphasizes descriptive statements like *she grew up in a farm, then she was educated with nuns but now lives as a rich person*. Réka concentrates on narrative and literary accounts as in: *Another recurrent literary topic that we can find here [...] Mme Bovary as a man or it's also interesting to analyze the parallelism with other women*. Margit focuses on analytical-interpretive points when she states that *Mme Bovary reads about rich women in those novels and in order to be one of them she has to take the male role and to do this, she has to destroy her husband and paradoxically if she destroys him she would never be the happy women with a strong man*. The various ways of understanding the same text shape a complex network of multiple interpretations that becomes a distinctive practice of the classroom culture.

### 4.3 Cultural competence development

The so-called *multifocal perspective* or the confluence of the participants' understandings also made possible the emergence of cultural competence development (see 2.2) as another cultural content of the course. Firstly, the fact of tacitly agreeing on practices within the discussions calls for the co-cultural component because a particular classroom culture in terms of participation and performance is created and implicitly shared. Margit observes that she is "the one who works on the meaning of the text and not on the technique... Réka always has her own analysis and Lucia usually makes comments about the author and literary studies." The extract below allows the illustration of this point:

**Lucia:** [...] *the studies I read make reference to the third chapter to identify the topic of religion and creation [...] represented in Stephen's mother's role [...] she is dead but she is still present...*

**Réka:** I would add that *concerning the writing technique [...] there are some comments with verbs conjugated in the first person that can be linked to the thoughts of Stephen [...] but here there are also some ideas in the imperative in the second person that are associated with the voice of the mind... in other words, those are the subconscious ideas that tell him how he has to behave [...] Another comment that I found really interesting is the rhetorical questions we read at the end of this chapter, like: You find my words dark. Darkness is in our souls do you not think? [...] I'm sure the author is making us feel lost intentionally [...]*

**Margit:** Besides, *darkness here is also poverty and dirt...* [...] in this chapter, it's represented in a ragged couple [...] however, what is dirty and poor may also be erotic [...] (AR of class 4, 22th October 2015).

Interaction with each other not only lets research participants learn about specific ways of approaching literary texts but also enables them to develop various components of the cultural competence. For instance, the involvement of previous knowledge and background information like *the studies I read* or *there are some comments with verbs conjugated in the first person* brings in the meta-cultural component as participants ascribe individual meanings to the dialogues as well as previously acquired knowledge. Moreover, while taking distance from their own understandings to pay attention to their peers' interpretations, the course participants develop the intercultural component since they access alternative ways of appreciating literary works. Finally, in the course of classroom discussions, it is understood that although there are divergent interpretations, individual views can be shared and so the multi-cultural and cross-cultural components are put into practice because some experiences and views may be valued or accepted in spite of personal opinions.

## 5 Discussion

This section of the paper examines the outcomes of the study and answers the research question about the type of cultural content that arises in a PhD course for in-service teachers of Spanish as a FL. The analysis of classroom interactions let three types of cultural content emerge. The first one is related to cultural products, and refers to the elements or objects of culture that exist in a given society. For the participants literary texts were the main cultural product studied in the course. With this in mind, literature enables readers to discover other perceptions, values and ways of classifying reality different from that of the texts of information. As a result, literary texts viewed as cultural products go beyond the simple representation of facts about civilisation and become frames to encounter and understand other people's ways of living.

Literary texts were also linked to specific socio-cultural contexts enclosed in precise historical frames. Therefore viewing cultural content in literary texts allowed the participants to explore cultural issues in a multidimensional way because they associate culture with different eras and diverse groups of people. This finding is in line with Dubois' (2000) conception of the literary text that emphasizes its power to explore reality, to illustrate history and to analyse society.

The second kind of cultural content that emerged in the course was cultural practices. According to the participants' understandings, these practices concern principally the ways in which literary characters behave and involve the use of previous knowledge and background information presented in the text. This encounter with the characters' cultural practices, though artificial and fictitious, presupposes the same problems of expression, interpretation and negotiation as any intercultural encounter since practices linked to the author, the narrator or the characters are confronted with the practices of readers. Consequently, this wider range of practices come together to form a complex collection of cultural practices that may extend readers' cultural capital.



In addition, a deep analysis of classroom conversations revealed a second set of practices connected to the culture enacted in the classroom. These practices encompass a common framework of participation and collaborative learning inside the classroom. They constitute the mutual engagement of students in a participatory experience of building a deep meaning of a given text with the help of other members. These classroom practices are established and enacted during the sessions and consist of three main patterns: freedom of expression and non-limited comments; tolerance of inquiry and non-threatening disagreement, and the multifocal perspective. These outcomes echo Kramsch's (1993) claims that in the classroom participants "create their own cultural context by shaping the conditions of enunciation/communication and the conditions of reception /interpretation" (p.48).

The third cultural content studied in the course corresponds to cultural competence development. Kiyitsioglou-Vlachou (2009) asserted that literary works constitute ideal places to meet culture and invaluable resources to reinforce cultural competence; likewise in the studied PhD course various components of cultural competence were engaged. At the outset, it was the co-cultural component that was apparent since classroom practices are shared and enacted inside the classroom. Then the meta-cultural component emerged since previously acquired knowledge was invested. Besides, the inter-cultural component was put into practice because different practices in analysing literary texts were confronted with each other within the course. In the end the multicultural component was involved since a variety of meanings were accepted and agreed within the classroom community. In this sense, "the great value of [a literature] course lay in establishing what might be called a 'reading community': a group with varying experience of life and literature" (Brumfit, 1997, p.260) to develop cultural competence.

To sum up, the study of cultural content through literature has the potential to meet cultural products and practices as well as the possibility to use the culture of the classroom as a resource to encourage students to express their own unique views, to invest their cultural, historical and linguistic capital in generating interesting and original contributions. Additionally, classroom culture driven by dialogue with peers may also facilitate the collective construction of meaning and may provide students with opportunities to personalize topics, look for explanations, infer information and make associations. This approach is supported by Kramsch's (1993) concept of dialogue as a tool that reveals culture between students and between teacher and students since it is understood that classroom interaction with peers fosters the development of participants' cultural competence.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper investigated the kind of cultural content that emerges in a PhD course for teachers of Spanish as a FL. The outcomes of this study support the idea that cultural content is divided into parts such as cultural products, cultural practices and cultural competence. The findings also show that cultural content in the examined course is linked to multidimensional views of culture and to the view of classroom culture as a resource to meet different cultural practices and develop course participants' cultural competence. These outcomes underline "the incredible resources, both affective and cognitive, of the 'popular culture' of the language classroom." (Kramsch, 1993, p.237)

Even though the aim of this study was not to establish a complete taxonomy of the sorts of cultural content emerging in PhD courses, some of the findings give an indication of key qualities that may inform culturally oriented practices within FL classrooms. To start with, it is understood that cultural content emerges from cultural products such as literature, from the participants' own understandings and also from their practices enacted in the classroom culture. Therefore, FL teachers should capitalize on the potentials of classroom culture and should provide students with opportunities to jointly construct culture inside the classroom with the purpose of learning collaboratively, rather than persist in fabricating artificial contexts for language use.

Additionally, in the present study cultural content is not only related to knowledge acquisition but also to cultural competence development. This is why FL teacher training should encourage classroom instructional approaches that serve both as vehicles for self expression and reflection on others' understandings, and as tools for cultural development. Therefore, training objectives should promote a clearer and more solid place for the whole process of learning and competence development rather than encourage exclusively the acquisition of knowledge of the target language as the final product. Moreover, the consideration of the classroom as a confluence of a wide range of meanings implies that FL classrooms should foster interaction not only between course participants but also between supplementary disciplines that may help the field of FL teaching to move away from an isolated position to a more inclusive and multidisciplinary domain.

Some suggestions for further research and limitations need to be pointed out. One limitation of the study is related to the actual process of teacher training through the reading of literary texts. Although, it is widely accepted that literature allows "students to learn vocabulary, phrases, grammar, as well as things about literature, culture, and society" (Alvstand & Castro, 2009, p.181); there may be specific problems, questions or painful experiences that the reading of literary works might entail. It is beyond the scope of this study to raise these kinds of issues, however important they are; future studies ought to take into consideration participants' difficulties, non-participation and resistance in reading literary genres.

Another limitation is that this case study was conducted within a PhD course where literary text analysis was the main focus. However, this is by no means the only way in which in-service training can be conducted and besides, literary analysis is not the only available way to engage with texts. Further research should explore and report on alternative possibilities for in-service training and various approaches to accessing literary works in order to lend deeper representativeness and significance to the findings.

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## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANTS' INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### FOCUS ON THE WORLD LITERATURE COURSE

1. Could you explain the reasons for attending a world literature course? /for doing your PhD?
2. What have you gained from the course? What are you taking away from this course?
3. How would you describe the discussions that take place during the course?
4. How would you describe the atmosphere of the course?

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF READING LITERATURE

1. What processes do you follow in working with a text for this course? How do you decide what to concentrate on?
2. What difficulties have you experienced in making sense of the literary works for this course?

#### CULTURAL CONTENT IN THE WORLD LITERATURE COURSE

1. Can you mention any content or knowledge related to culture that was salient / useful for you when reading the literary works? / that was mentioned during the course?
2. What kind of cultural information was presented during the lessons that helped you to understand the texts?
3. Can you recall any cultural area / content or knowledge that made you react while reading or while participating in the course?

#### PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES WITHIN THE WORLD LITERATURE COURSE

1. How do you feel about attending this course?
2. How do you see your role in this course?
3. Have you had any difficulties concerning the course? If so, what were they?

4. What is the interaction of students like in the course? What do you think about the interaction of the students? How do you see the way you react to the others?

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

1. Can you tell me about your professional experience in language teaching?
2. Have you ever included literary works in your language teaching? / If so, why and what kind of activities have you given to the students? / If not, why not?
3. In your opinion, what kind of cultural content, skills or knowledge can be provided to students using literary works in language teaching?
4. Has this course added any ideas to your earlier views of teaching culture?

### APPENDIX B

#### Transcription conventions applied in the audio-recordings

Adapted from (Menard-Warwick, 2009)

[...]	Text omitted
[text]	Paraphrase or author's note
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(( ))	Comment on voice quality or paralinguistic features (e.g., laughter, gestures)
--	The speaker cut off the word or phrase
...	Pause