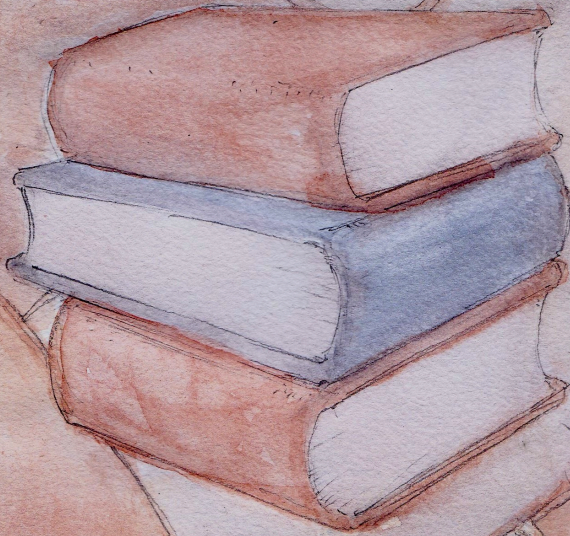


FRAGMENTS OF MEANING

Dialogues in Language,
Literature, and Culture



Montse Martínez Vázquez,
Daniel Nisa Cáceres
Sonia Casal Madinabeitia
(Editors)

Fragments of Meaning: Dialogues in Language, Literature, and Culture

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2024

Montse Martínez Vázquez, Daniel Nisa Cáceres, and Sonia Casal
Madinabeitia (Editors)

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Preface

Fragments of Meaning: Dialogues in Language, Literature, and Culture brings together a selection of peer-reviewed contributions originally presented at the 47th International Conference of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies (AEDEAN), held at Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Seville, from 6 to 8 November 2024. With the participation of over 500 scholars from Spain and abroad, the conference reaffirmed AEDEAN's role as a leading forum for scholarly dialogue in the fields of English linguistics, literature, and cultural studies.

For the first time, Universidad Pablo de Olavide had the privilege of hosting this distinguished event—an occasion of particular significance, as it marked the association's return to the city where it was founded in 1976. Organising the conference was both an honour and a considerable undertaking for our young institution.

We are deeply grateful to AEDEAN for the trust placed in us, and to the Executive Board for their guidance and steadfast support throughout the planning process. Our sincere thanks extend also to the panel coordinators for their dedication to the design and peer review of the papers that underpin this volume, and to all contributors whose work is presented herein. We are especially indebted to our colleagues in the organising committee and the student volunteers, whose commitment and professionalism were vital to the successful execution of the event. The support of the Vice-rector for Research, the Department of Philology and Translation, the Faculty of Humanities, and the contributing research groups is likewise gratefully acknowledged.

This volume reflects the intellectual vitality and interdisciplinary breadth of the conference. Its essays explore how meaning is constructed, contested, and transformed across linguistic, literary, and cultural domains. Taken together, they form a compelling academic contribution, attesting to the dynamic, plural, and fragmentary nature of meaning itself. We hope that this collection will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, educators, and students alike, and as a testimony to the ongoing relevance and vitality of English Studies within both Spanish and international contexts.

The Editors

Introduction

The volume *Fragments of Meaning: Dialogues in Language, Literature, and Culture* is divided into three sections: Language and Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies, and Roundtables.

The first section brings together contributions that address the study of language from diverse but interconnected perspectives, including historical dialectology, sociolinguistics, digital communication, and foreign language pedagogy. Uniting these papers is a shared commitment to empirical rigour and interdisciplinary inquiry. The authors explore how language is shaped by and embedded in social practices—whether through the documentation of regional dialects in literary texts, the evolution of idiomatic fragments in contemporary usage, or the metalinguistic awareness of learners navigating multilingual digital spaces. These studies address critical questions regarding identity construction, linguistic variation, and the affordances of new media, offering valuable insights into the dynamic processes by which language is learnt, used, and transformed in both historical and contemporary contexts.

The second section of this volume comprises a diverse range of contributions examining Anglophone literature, film, and cultural production through the lenses of gender, identity, postcolonialism, memory, and affect. Collectively, these essays explore how literary and visual narratives negotiate complex intersections between history and imagination, trauma and utopia, embodiment and ideology. The contributions span a wide temporal and geographical spectrum—from Victorian fiction to twenty-first-century Caribbean, African, and Indigenous voices, demonstrating how literature and cultural texts continue to function as vital spaces for contesting normative structures and reclaiming marginalised perspectives. Applying critical frameworks including feminist theory, affect studies, eco-criticism, and posthumanism, the authors examine how aesthetic form interacts with sociopolitical structures, and how representation becomes a terrain of both constraint and resistance. This section seeks to affirm the enduring role of narrative in shaping, challenging, and transforming cultural meaning across contexts.

The third and final section of this volume features roundtable discussions and collaborative inquiries that push the boundaries of disciplinary thought in literary and cultural studies. These contributions engage with evolving theoretical paradigms—assemblage theory, the network turn, environmental

humanities, and transnational media criticism—to reflect on how literary texts and cultural forms can be reconceived in light of new epistemologies. Moving beyond the analysis of individual works, these roundtables examine larger conceptual constellations that shape and reshape scholarly inquiry. Whether interrogating the philosophical implications of networks, the aesthetic functions of care, or the imaginative capacities of post-western narratives, the section provides a forum for interdisciplinary dialogue and methodological innovation.

Section I: Language and Linguistics

In “Late Modern Devonshire Speech: Exemplar Dialectal Realisations in Gwendoline Keats’ *On Trial* (1899)” René Tissens examines the literary representation of the Devonshire dialect in Keats’ novel *On Trial*, employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within the theoretical framework of enregisterment as proposed by Agha. The study uncovers how specific phonological and morphological features—such as initial fricative voicing (*vrom* for “from,” *zeed* for “seen”) and pronoun shifts (*her* for “she”)—index a stereotypical Devonshire persona, particularly the figure of the farmer. Based on historical sources and corpus analysis, Tissens demonstrates that Keats’ use of dialect reflects a broader social process of dialect recognition and stylisation, which serves to both authenticate characterisation and participate in the linguistic codification of regional speech. The paper contributes to the growing body of research on Late Modern English dialectology by highlighting underexplored southwestern varieties. “This Fragment Has Become Idiomatic, *if at all*” investigates the construction *if at all* in contemporary American English from a Construction Grammar perspective. Based on a comprehensive corpus analysis of nearly a thousand examples from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA), Yolanda Fernández-Pena and Javier Pérez-Guerra trace the construction’s syntactic behaviour, semantic function, and diachronic development between 1990 and 2019. The authors posit that *if at all* functions as a construction in its own right, inheriting properties from conditional clauses and degree modifiers. It serves to ‘disfactualise’ propositions by introducing a gradient scale of likelihood, typically in final, anaphoric, and negatively polarised environments. Their analysis reveals a shift from written to speech-related registers and an increasing fixation of *if at all* in sentence-final position, suggesting ongoing conventionalisation.

The following four chapters deal with language teaching and acquisition. In “Exploring Social Media as Tools for English Language Teaching, Learning, and Research”, Ignacio M. Palacios Martínez and Paloma Núñez Pertejo present findings from an empirical study on the pedagogical and research potential of social media platforms in English language education. Conducted with over 230 undergraduate students at the University of Santiago de Compostela, the project encouraged learners to analyse their own social media discourse across platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter/X*. The results reveal high levels of engagement, linguistic creativity, and metalinguistic awareness among participants, many of whom operated plurilingually, which underscores the viability of integrating informal digital practices into formal academic instruction and linguistic inquiry. María Deseada López Fernández offers a critical overview of linguistic mediation in “Linguistic Mediation in Adult Language Education: Past, Present and Future”, aligning her discussion with the evolving descriptors introduced in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) and its Companion Volume. The chapter traces the pedagogical trajectory of mediation—from marginal consideration to its current status as a core communicative competence—highlighting how adult learners engage with texts, meanings, and social contexts through mediatory practices. Emphasising tasks such as summarising, paraphrasing, and facilitating intercultural understanding, the author advocates for a more integrative and dialogic model of instruction. Through a historical lens and forward-looking pedagogical proposals, the paper reaffirms the centrality of mediation in fostering plurilingual and pluricultural competence in adult learners.

The contribution by Grace Westfall Talamo and Isabel Oltra-Massuet focuses on primary education. In their paper, “Using Social Stories and Coping Skills to Teach Vocabulary in Primary Education”, they explore the use of social stories—a strategy originally designed for children with autism spectrum conditions—as an innovative approach for teaching English vocabulary in primary education. Talamo and Oltra-Massuet propose that these narrative-based interventions, which are structured around socially meaningful scenarios, not only support lexical acquisition but also foster emotional regulation and contextual understanding. From the findings of a pilot study, the authors demonstrate that combining social stories with explicit coping strategies enhances learner motivation and retention, which highlights the pedagogical relevance of tailoring vocabulary instruction to developmental and affective needs, while suggesting that such hybrid methodologies can

benefit a broader spectrum of learners beyond their clinical origins. In “The Other Side of CLIL: When Fear Disrupts Collaboration”, Noelia Castro-Chao and Tamara Bouso investigate the emotional and interpersonal challenges faced by pre-service teachers participating in *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) programmes. Based on a qualitative analysis of reflective journals and interviews, the authors expose the latent tensions and anxieties that often undermine collaborative teaching in CLIL settings. Rather than celebrating only the advantages of CLIL, the study reveals that fear—of linguistic inadequacy, of peer judgement, or of institutional expectations—frequently impairs cooperation and reduces teaching efficacy. The paper advocates for greater emotional awareness and institutional support in CLIL teacher training, calling for an approach that recognises vulnerability as a crucial factor in fostering genuine pedagogical collaboration.

The use of new technologies is discussed in the following two chapters. Rosana Villares and Carmen Pérez-Llantada investigate the intersection of digital literacy and science communication in “Digital Science Communication Training: Approaching Methods, Frameworks, and Outcomes”. By examining how digital tools are used to train early-career researchers in effective public engagement and framed within the theoretical paradigms of multimodality and genre theory, the authors present a synthesis of training models that equip scientists with communicative strategies for diverse audiences across online platforms. The study reveals a shift from traditional dissemination practices to more interactive and dialogic forms, such as blogs, video abstracts, and social media outreach. This shift emphasises the need for a pedagogy that combines rhetorical competence with technological fluency. Inmaculada Pineda studies in “Glance Back: Using Transmodal and Translingual Strategies in the Construction of Digital Identity” how users construct digital identities through transmodal and translingual practices across social media platforms. Using examples from *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and personal blogs, the study demonstrates how meaning-making in online spaces involves a dynamic interplay of visual, textual, and linguistic codes. Pineda adopts a semiotic and sociolinguistic perspective to show how users strategically navigate between languages and media modes to express affiliations, emotions, and stances. The paper posits that digital identity is co-constructed through interaction and shaped by audience design, technological affordances, and socio-discursive positioning, calling for pedagogical models that acknowledge and exploit these multimodal, multilingual resources as legitimate forms of communicative capital.

In their comparative study “Easy-to-Read in the UK, Ireland and Spain: Analogies and Differences”, Ana Medina Reguera and Desirée Avilés Márquez analyse the implementation of Easy-to-Read (E2R) guidelines across the UK, Ireland, and Spain, with a focus on accessibility in public discourse. Medina Reguera and Avilés Márquez examine policy documents, institutional initiatives, and sample texts to assess how E2R principles—aimed at enhancing linguistic accessibility for individuals with cognitive or linguistic challenges—are adapted within different sociocultural and legal frameworks. The findings reveal significant variation in the degree of institutional support, terminological consistency, and design approaches. The authors argue for the urgent need to harmonise E2R practices internationally and to reconceptualise them as tools for inclusive communication rather than mere technical accommodations. Finally, in “Motion Verbs in English Narratives: Is Manner Always the Most Frequent Verb Type?” Sílvia Garriga Galobardes investigates the use and distribution of motion verbs in English narrative texts, challenging the assumption that manner-of-motion verbs (e.g., *run*, *stroll*) are consistently dominant in English, a language typologically classified as manner-salient. Based on a corpus of fictional narratives, the study quantifies and categorises motion verbs according to Talmy’s motion event framework. While manner verbs remain prominent, Garriga’s nuanced analysis reveals contextual factors—such as genre conventions, narrative perspective, and characterisation—that influence the distribution of path and deictic verbs as well. The paper contributes to cognitive and typological linguistics by illustrating how pragmatic and stylistic considerations modulate the theoretical patterns established by motion typology.

Section II: Literature and Cultural Studies

Eduardo Varela Bravo’s “Joseph Blanco White’s Spanish and Irish Identities and Love: Rose Cusiack’s Symbolic Significance in *Second Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion* (1833)” revisits the nineteenth-century religious polemic *Second Travels of an Irish Gentleman* by Joseph Blanco White, examining the character of Rose Cusiack as a symbolic site where personal, national, and religious identities converge. The analysis elucidates how Blanco White—an exiled Spanish theologian with complex ties to both Catholicism and Anglicanism—constructs Cusiack not merely as a romantic figure but as an allegory of reconciled difference. A close reading of the text and its historical context suggests that that Cusiack’s representation mediates the author’s own bifurcated cultural affiliations, offering an idealised vision of

transnational and interfaith unity at a time of deep political and sectarian division. Francisco Muñoz Peláez's "The Utopian Solution to Feminist Dystopias: Reclaiming Women's Voices in Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* and Christina Dalcher's *Vox*" contrasts two feminist dystopian novels—Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984) and Dalcher's *Vox* (2018)—to explore how speculative fiction imagines language as both a tool of subjugation and a site of resistance. The analysis examines how each narrative constructs a linguistic dystopia in which women's speech is controlled or suppressed, and how both protagonists reclaim agency through linguistic innovation and subversion. The author contends that while *Native Tongue* posits a separatist, constructed language as utopian remedy, *Vox* relies on technological allegory and bio-political critique. Despite differing visions, both texts ultimately reclaim women's voices as a counter-discursive force capable of dismantling patriarchal structures, which highlights the enduring relevance of feminist linguistic utopias in a neoliberal age. Christina Angela Howes applies affect theory, particularly Lauren Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" in "Ordinary Affects and Cruel Optimism: A Phenomenological Study of Affective Responses in Rachel Seiffert's 'Field Study'". The affective disorientation experienced by the protagonist as he confronts the aftermath of war and ethical complicity in post-conflict Bosnia is analysed. Through a phenomenological lens, Howes contends that Seiffert's prose enacts a slow temporality that resists narrative closure and accentuates affective ambivalence, contributing to the growing body of scholarship on affective ethics in contemporary literature and highlights how fiction can stage the fragility of moral perception in post-traumatic geographies.

In "Who Tightened the Umbilical Cord? A Gendered Reconstruction of Anja's Identity in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*", Gema Maíz Villalta re-examines the Holocaust graphic novel *Maus* through a feminist lens, focusing on the underexplored character of Anja, Vladek Spiegelman's wife. While much scholarship has centred on paternal trauma and testimony, Maíz Villalta highlights Anja's fragmented, silenced presence as emblematic of gendered erasure in narratives of survival. The chapter employs a psychoanalytical framework, invoking trauma theory and feminist psychoanalysis, to interpret Anja's suicide, fragility, and textual absence as symbolic of the pressures exerted by patriarchal memory structures and maternal expectation. The author challenges the text's androcentric focus, arguing for a "gendered reconstruction" that honours Anja not only as a victim, but as a subject whose erasure demands critical redress. M.^a Ángeles Toda Iglesia's chapter "Reading

Food in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks* (1871)" examines Hawthorne's European travel writings to explore the symbolic and cultural functions of food in shaping national and moral perception. Analysing descriptions of meals and food encounters in Hawthorne's *Notebooks*, Toda Iglesia shows how culinary experiences become encoded with broader anxieties about otherness, civility, and cultural distance. Italian abundance is often filtered through Protestant discomfort, while French refinement is approached with ambivalence. Food thus becomes a medium through which Hawthorne articulates both aesthetic appreciation and moral judgment. The paper highlights how everyday acts such as eating reflect deeper discursive patterns of national identity formation and cross-cultural encounter in nineteenth-century American literature. Iván de la Torre Franco's "The Monstrous Mother: An Exploration of Afro-Caribbean Motherhood in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *Halsey Street* (2018)" explores maternal representation in two Afro-Caribbean diasporic novels: Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Naima Coster's *Halsey Street*. De la Torre Franco analyses how both texts interrogate dominant narratives of idealised motherhood by presenting complex, often painful, mother-daughter relationships shaped by colonial legacies, migration, and gendered trauma. Examining theories of monstrosity and maternal ambivalence, the chapter foregrounds how these novels resist normative scripts by portraying mothers as neither purely nurturing nor villainous, but as conflicted agents shaped by structural violence. Ultimately, the paper asserts that the "monstrous mother" becomes a site of narrative and cultural re-signification in contemporary Caribbean-American literature. Paula García-Rodríguez investigates the fusion of magical realism and feminist critique in "Magical Feminism, Violence and Fairy Tales in Atkinson's *Human Croquet*", focusing on how the novel reconfigures fairy tale tropes to expose gendered violence and historical silencing. The chapter situates Atkinson's work within the tradition of "magical feminism", where fantastical elements serve not as escapism but as subversive tools for rewriting patriarchal narratives. García-Rodríguez analyses how motifs such as time travel, enchanted forests, and metamorphosis are used to interrogate domestic abuse, female madness, and genealogical trauma. Consequently, Atkinson's revisionist storytelling challenges linear historiography and restores narrative agency to female characters through imaginative reclamation.

Carmen Velasco-Montiel explores how the publication and subsequent adaptations of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* have transformed her

reception in the Spanish cultural and academic spheres in “Turning the Tide of Ambivalence: The Impact of *The Handmaid’s Tale* on Margaret Atwood’s Feminist Reception in Spain”. Through an analysis of critical essays, translations, media responses, and academic syllabi, a shift is traced from early ambivalence—characterised by reluctance to label Atwood as feminist—towards her more recent status as an iconic feminist author. The study examines how the socio-political climate in Spain, especially in the wake of the feminist mobilisations of the 2010s, contributed to this reframing. Velasco-Montiel positively argues that the novel’s dystopian resonances with contemporary gender politics catalysed a renewed engagement with Atwood’s work, reinforcing its relevance in global feminist discourse. Paula Rustarazo Garzón’s “Representing Infertility: Identity and the Body in Myriam Steinberg’s *Catalogue Baby: A Memoir of (In)Fertility*” analyses Canadian author Myriam Steinberg’s graphic memoir as a site where the affective and embodied dimensions of infertility are rendered visible and narratable. Blending visual rhetoric with autobiographical narrative, the memoir challenges dominant cultural silences around infertility by centring the female body as a space of agency, vulnerability, and perseverance. Steinberg uses the graphic form to depict bodily fragmentation, emotional cycles, and bureaucratic medical processes, thereby subverting the often-invisible experience of assisted reproduction. Ultimately, Rustarazo Garzón situates *Catalogue Baby* within a growing corpus of graphic pathographies that reclaim reproductive health as a feminist issue. In ““We Have Our Own Black Heroes’: British Black Power and the Figure of Michael X in *Who Needs a Heart?* (1991) by Black Audio Film Collective”, María Piqueras Pérez examines the political and aesthetic strategies employed to recuperate and reimagine the figure of Michael X, a controversial British Black Power activist. Rather than offering a linear biographical account, the film constructs a fragmented, polyphonic meditation on memory, militancy, and the aesthetics of resistance. Accordingly, the chapter analyses how the film resists hegemonic historiography by deploying non-narrative montage, affective soundscapes, and a refusal of moral closure. Piqueras Pérez contends that the film embodies a radical form of Black British historiography that contests invisibility and reclaims agency through experimental form. Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz interrogates the deconstruction of racial and cultural stereotypes in “Challenging and Dismantling Stereotypes in Jones’s *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* and Edwards’s *Monsters*.” Ibarrola-Armendáriz’s argument is that both American films challenge the visual and narrative conventions through which Latinx and marginalised subjects are traditionally

portrayed in Anglo-American media. By subverting genre expectations—neo-western and science fiction, respectively—these films articulate a critique of border politics, imperialism, and xenophobia. The analysis employs postcolonial and film theory to show how both works create ethical encounters between characters that unsettle viewer assumptions and promote intercultural empathy, while underlining the power of cinema as a medium for ethical imagination and sociopolitical critique.

Next, in “Cabinets of Curiosities, Labyrinthine Gardens and Kitchens Full of Spices: Victorian Spaces Through the Child’s Gaze in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*” Andrea Valeiras-Fernández examines how Lewis Carroll reconfigures quintessentially Victorian domestic and natural spaces through the imaginative perspective of a child. Based on spatial theory and childhood studies, the chapter analyses how cabinets, gardens, and kitchens become sites of both wonder and epistemological instability when filtered through Alice’s curiosity. These spaces, traditionally associated with order and domestic femininity, are subverted by scale shifts, magical transformations, and absurd logics. Therefore, Carroll’s depiction of space resists adult rationalism and Victorian hierarchies, offering instead a poetics of spatial disorder that mirrors the fluidity of childhood subjectivity. Esther Jiménez Rodríguez examines in “The Battle Between Order and Chaos and Its Reconciliation in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland*” how this novel acts as a narrative meditation on the dialectic between political chaos and personal order across generations and geographies. Set against the backdrop of the Naxalite insurgency in 1960s Calcutta and the diasporic trajectories of its characters in the United States, Lahiri’s narrative navigates the aftermath of political violence within familial and affective realms. The tension between emotional withdrawal and ideological commitment structures the protagonists’ lives, ultimately proposing reconciliation through memory, transgenerational care, and quiet endurance. Lahiri’s minimalist style is read as a deliberate aesthetic of restraint that gives voice to submerged trauma and interstitial belonging. Violeta Duce’s “The Importance of (Self-)Representation: Adunni’s Herstory in Abi Daré’s *The Girl with the Louding Voice* (2020)” focuses on the narrative of Adunni, the Nigerian teenage protagonist of Abi Daré’s debut novel, who resists patriarchal and class oppression through linguistic and narrative empowerment. Written in a stylised, non-standard English that evolves alongside Adunni’s growth, the novel foregrounds self-representation as both theme and method. Duce argues that Adunni’s “lounding voice” reclaims narrative space for marginalised girls and critiques social structures

that silence them, while she situates the novel within African feminist traditions and global narratives of girlhood, emphasising the ethical and political stakes of allowing oppressed subjects to narrate their own lives in their own terms. In “‘Got My Loud Coat and Put It On Proudly’: Colour and Clothes in Anita Heiss’ *Avoiding Mr Right* (2008)”, Catalina Ribas Segura investigates the politics of dress and racial identity in Anita Heiss’s chick lit novel *Avoiding Mr Right*, focusing on how fashion functions as a performative marker of Aboriginal urban femininity. Ribas Segura reads clothing not simply as surface detail but as a symbolic system through which the protagonist asserts pride, resistance, and cultural hybridity in predominantly white spaces. She makes use of critical race theory and material culture studies to demonstrate how sartorial choices embody acts of defiance, visibility, and self-fashioning. The text challenges stereotypical depictions of Indigenous identity, presenting fashion as a site where postcolonial subjectivities are negotiated and affirmed.

Bárbara Arizti Martín “Competition and Cooperation in Peter Carey’s *A Long Way from Home*” is an analysis of the tension between competition and cooperation in Peter Carey’s novel *A Long Way from Home*, set during a 1950s car race that spans the Australian continent. The chapter investigates how the race allegorises national narratives of progress, settler colonialism, and Indigenous erasure, while also providing a space for unexpected solidarities and ethical reappraisals. Through shifting narrative perspectives and revelations about Aboriginal histories, Carey critiques white Australian mythologies and gestures toward reconciliation. Arizti Martín proposes that the novel stages a dialectic between individual ambition and collective responsibility, ultimately proposing a model of national identity grounded in historical reckoning and relational ethics. Lastly, in his historical investigation “Rafael Viera y Ayala y el nacimiento de *La Prensa de Nueva York*”, Juan Antonio Sánchez Jiménez rescues from obscurity the figure of Rafael Viera y Ayala (1880–1972), a Canarian immigrant and founder of *La Prensa* (1913), which would eventually become *El Diario/La Prensa*, a cornerstone of Spanish-language journalism in the United States. Using newly recovered archival material, including photographs and diplomatic correspondence, Sánchez Jiménez reconstructs Viera’s trajectory from Cuba to New York, tracing his entrepreneurial efforts and sociopolitical influence. The paper highlights Viera’s foundational role in shaping a modern, illustrated Spanish-language periodical intended to serve and represent the growing Hispanic community in early twentieth-century Manhattan. Sánchez Jiménez situates Viera’s work within a broader narrative of neglected Spanish contributions to U.S. media

history, calling for further academic attention to this overlooked yet foundational legacy.

Section III: Roundtables

The first roundtable, entitled “Assemblage Theory and the Network Turn: A Conceptual Framework for Anglophone Literature and Culture”, outlines the theoretical underpinnings and applications of assemblage theory within the ongoing research project “RELY” (Re-orienting Assemblage Theory in Anglophone Literature and Culture). Rosario Arias, Carmen Lara Rallo, Ana Belén Martínez García, and Raquel García-Cuevas García offer a genealogy of the term “assemblage,” invoking the works of Deleuze and Guattari, Latour, and DeLanda, and connect it to the broader “network turn” in the humanities. The discussion emphasises the concept’s relevance across ontology, materiality, aesthetics, and care ethics. Each speaker contributes a unique perspective: Rosario Arias on assemblage and feminist care; Carmen Lara Rallo on Actor-Network Theory and Bill Brown’s re-assemblage; Ana Belén Martínez on the literary assemblage as epistemic practice; and Raquel García-Cuevas on feminism-as-assemblage following Braidotti and Grosz. Together, they advocate for assemblage thinking as a flexible, generative tool for engaging with contemporary literary and cultural crises.

In “Resisting the Capitalocene: Narrative Representations of Hope across Genres”, Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández, Leonor María Martínez Serrano, María Porras Sánchez, Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego, and Susana Nicolás Román confront the environmental and ideological crises of the Capitalocene through literary and cultural texts that foreground resistance, resilience, and speculative hope. Engaging with works across multiple genres—from eco-fiction to Indigenous storytelling—the speakers explore how narrative strategies articulate alternative futures beyond capitalist extraction. Topics include feminist reimaginings of relationality, ecological grief and repair, and posthuman entanglements. The participants collectively assert that literature serves not only to document planetary degradation but also to stage affective and political responses rooted in care, interconnection, and transformative imagination.

Alberto Lázaro, Fernando Galván, Silvia García-Hernández, and Marta Martín Amor’s roundtable “Voices from the Past: Creating and Recreating Historical Worlds” addresses the resurgence of historical fiction as a critical genre for re-examining dominant narratives through the creative reanimation of the past.

Focusing on the role of female perspectives, marginalised voices, and mythological reinterpretation, the speakers assess how contemporary novels rework classical and historical settings to expose silenced experiences. From Pat Barker's re-voicing of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* to Elodie Harper's *The Wolf Den* series on enslaved women in Pompeii, these works exemplify how fiction can interrogate and recuperate women's roles within canonical histories. The discussion affirms that historical fiction can operate as a feminist and decolonial strategy of narrative revision.

Finally, in "Other West(ern)s: Representation(s), Twists, and Transnational Visions", Amaia Soroa-Bacaicoa, Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz, and David Río Raigadas reconsider the cultural form of the Western through its postmodern, hybrid, and transnational permutations. Contributions analyse *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* as a fragmented meditation on justice and absurdity, Spanish "weird westerns" that blend gothic horror with frontier myth, and the podcast *Atlantic Express*, which revisits the American West from a Spanish perspective. The panel demonstrates how the West remains a productive symbolic terrain, capable of accommodating new media, hybrid genres, and global perspectives. By unsettling the mythic binary of savagery and civilisation, these texts reveal the elasticity and ongoing relevance of the Western in the twenty-first century.

The Other Side of CLCT: When Fear Disrupts Collaboration¹

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Abstract

The present investigation provides a preliminary account of the perceived drawbacks of *Collaborative Learning mediated by Communication Technologies* (CLCT) among higher education students. Following a multidisciplinary approach, this pilot study compares the results obtained from English instruction in the Degrees in English Language and Literature (ELL) and Chemical Engineering (CE) at the University of Santiago de Compostela. In this context, a number of *MS Office 365*-mediated collaborative activities were integrated into two ESP courses and assessed by means of a *Likert*-scale questionnaire. The results reveal that ELL students are more perceptive of the shortcomings of CLCT and also experience a significantly higher level of apprehension. Additionally, within the ELL group fear correlates with a growing dislike of working with peers and with a stronger perception of the drawbacks of CLCT. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the relevance of these results in the context of previous research.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning mediated by Communication Technologies (CLCT); drawbacks; fear; MS Office 365

1. Introduction

Collaborative Learning mediated by Communication Technologies (henceforth CLCT), also known as *Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning* (CSCL), makes reference to the instructional strategy of learning and working collaboratively with the help of a computer as a mediating element (Koschmann 2002, 20). CLCT has often been used in education (Hilliard et al. 2020, 2) as it contributes to the practice and development of teamwork competencies (Capdeferro and Romero 2012, 27). Even though CLCT tends to be well received in the context of higher education (see e.g., Cabero Almenara

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and Marín Díaz 2014, 171), previous research shows that students may also experience a range of unpleasant emotions (e.g., anxiety, fear or frustration) when engaging in collaborative activities (Capdeferro and Romero 2012, 27-28; Hilliard et al. 2020, 2-3; Järvenoja et al. 2020, 6, 8; cf. Panitz 2001, 33-34; Conrad 2002, 208-9).

As Reis et al. (2018, 30) highlight in their comprehensive overview of the converging area of emotion and CSCL (in their terminology), there is a need for investigations that explore “the impact of affective states [including emotions] to improve the potential benefits of educational collaborative environments mediated by technologies” (see also Calvo 2009, 377). Regarding fear, Jeffrey et al. (2014, 73) point out that this emotion plays a role in law students’ learning experiences and motivation. In addition, Bledsoe and Baskin (2014, 32-34) note that understanding the impact of fear is important for educators to be able to help students reach their academic goals. Reis et al.’s comprehensive overview, however, does not seem to include studies focusing on students’ experience of fear in CSCL environments and how it varies across disciplines, suggesting that this approach may not be particularly common (cf. Baker-Rush et al. 2021, 1-3). The present investigation aims to start contributing to this growing field of research by conducting a multidisciplinary pilot study on the role of fear in higher education students’ assessment of the drawbacks of CLCT (cf. Hansen 2006, 12, 18). The study compares the results obtained from the Degrees in English Language and Literature (ELL) and Chemical Engineering (CE) at the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC). Specifically, the research questions (RQs) that the present study seeks to address are the following:

- RQ₁. Are there statistically significant differences between ELL and CE students with regard to the assessment of the drawbacks of CLCT?
- RQ₂. Are there statistically significant differences between ELL and CE students with respect to the level of fear experienced while engaging in collaborative activities?
- RQ₃. Is there a correlation between students’ experience of fear and the overall evaluation of the drawbacks of CLCT within each of these two disciplines?

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a brief overview of the relevant literature. Section 3 outlines the context in which the empirical study was conducted, while Section 4 deals with the method of data

collection and analysis. Section 5 presents the results and, finally, Section 6 provides a discussion and offers some concluding remarks.

2. Literature overview

CLCT has been approached from multiple perspectives. Some studies have dealt with the perceptions of CLCT by students and/or instructors (e.g., García-Valcárcel Muñoz-Repiso et al. 2012, 165), while others explore a variety of digital tools in collaborative environments (e.g., Brodahl et al. 2011, 77-78). There are also several investigations that have adopted a multidisciplinary approach, comparing a variety of fields of study. This is the case of Mehta et al. (2021, 3), who examine undergraduate students' perceptions of *Padlet*-mediated learning in two disciplines, namely Bioscience and Dentistry.

Interestingly, for our purposes here, previous work has also focused on the range of unpleasant emotions (e.g., anxiety, fear or frustration) students may experience when engaging in collaborative activities. Capdeferro and Romero (2012, 26, 28), for example, conducted an investigation of frustration among online learners enrolled in the Master of ICT and Education program at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain). On the other hand, Hilliard et al. (2020, 4) considered students' perceptions and experiences of anxiety in an undergraduate module on Communication and Information Technologies (T215) at the Open University (UK).

Closely related to anxiety is the experience of fear, the two emotions often being mentioned together (see e.g., Conrad 2002, 208). Despite their connection, it has been suggested that anxiety and fear involve biologically different processes and correlate with different stimuli (Davis 1998, 1245). Jackson (2010, 39) points out that the study of fear has received increasing interest in various disciplines but has been the object of comparatively little *focused* attention in the education literature. More recent work, however, such as Jeffrey et al. (2014, 67) or Abu Hasan et al. (2023, 92-93), among others, suggests that the focused study of fear and its role in education seems to be gaining popularity.

3. Study context

As already noted, the present study compares students' assessment of CLCT in the Degrees in ELL and CE at the USC. A number of collaborative activities mediated by *Microsoft* (henceforth *MS*) *Office 365* tools were designed involving videoconferencing and research-based tasks. They were

implemented in two English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, namely *English Language III* (ELL) and *Technical English* (CE). Both of these courses are compulsory and integrated into the first semester of the second and first years of study of the ELL and CE degrees, respectively. While *English Language III* focuses on formal and academic texts in the field of English Studies, *Technical English* centers on topics related to CE. The sample consisted of eighty-eight learners of English enrolled in ELL (twenty-one students; academic year 2023-2024) and CE (sixty-seven students; academic years 2021-2022 and 2023-2024). The percentage of men (47.73%) and women (52.27%) for the whole sample is similar, and the overall age ranges from seventeen to thirty.

4. Data collection and analysis²

The data collection draws on an adapted version of the original questionnaire designed by Anderson et al. (2010) to investigate social software use in unpaced forms of distance education. It includes a total of ninety-one items distributed in seven blocks: 1) 'Identification'; 2) 'Learning Preferences'; 3) 'Technical Skills'; 4) 'Social Software Experience'; 5) 'Social Software for Learning'; 6) 'Confidence in Distance Education Abilities'; and 7) 'Wrap Up.' As part of a broader research project, data were gathered based on sixty-five total items. For the purposes of the present study, however, we will simply focus on a selection of five statements (henceforth SS) from block 2 ('Learning Preferences'). Such SS concern specifically the drawbacks of CLCT.³

The degree of (dis-)agreement with the different SS was measured using a five-point *Likert* scale (1 = 'Very low'; 5 = 'Very high'), and the means obtained were categorized into five levels ranging from 'Very low' (if the value is between 0-1) to 'Very high' (if the value is between 4-5). Responses were subjected to statistical analysis using *IBM SPSS Statistics* (version 28.0.1.1 (14)). We applied the Mann-Whitney U test to assess statistically significant differences between the two disciplines under analysis (RQ₁ and RQ₂). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, in turn, was used to identify significant correlations between students' reported level of fear and the overall evaluation of the CLCT drawbacks (RQ₃). The significance level was set at .05. Following Mukaka

² The data presented in this chapter are publicly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) platform and can be accessed via the following link: <https://osf.io/w35n2/>.

³ The original wording of SS was modified to align with the context and purpose of the present study. The selection of SS provides a sample of some of the issues that may be experienced, but it is not fully representative of the range of drawbacks that can arise in CLCT settings.

(2012, 71; see also Mehta et al. 2021, 5), correlations have been considered negligible if the coefficient lies between .00 and .30 (or -.00 and -.30).

5. Results

Table 1 presents the results for SS expressing the drawbacks of CLCT. As can be seen, scores are consistently higher in ELL than in CE in five out of five SS. The overall mean in ELL is ‘Moderate’ (2.50/5), while the one found in CE is ‘Low’ (1.96/5); the Mann-Whitney U test shows a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$; RQ_1). What this implies is that ELL students are comparatively more aware of the shortcomings of CLCT, and may thus be less receptive to the methodology. This finding concurs with the results expounded in Castro-Chao and Bouso (2024, 313), where the authors also conclude that ELL students tend to be less satisfied with CLCT than CE students.

No.	Item	M. ELL	M. CE
1	Working with a team leads to poor results*	2.81	1.73
2	In a team discussion, we never reach relevant conclusions	2.19	2.04
3	Working in a team scares me*	2.52	1.48
4	I do not want other students to know what I do when I am studying	2.52	2.28
5	I do not like working with other students	2.48	2.24
	Overall mean*	2.50	1.96

Table 1: Students’ assessment of the drawbacks of CLCT in the Degrees in ELL and CE

M. = Mean score

* = There are statistically significant differences between ELL and CE students

If we now focus on the individual SS, statistically significant differences have been identified in two out of five cases. Firstly, S. 1 receives a ‘Moderate’ mean score in ELL (2.81/5) and a ‘Low’ mean score in CE (1.73/5, $p < .001$). With regard to S. 3, ELL students assign a ‘Moderate’ score (2.52/5), whereas CE students assign a ‘Low’ score (1.48/5, $p < .001$). This indicates that ELL students experience a greater degree of apprehension than CE students during collaborative activities (RQ_2). Importantly, ELL students’ assessment of S. 3 is significantly and positively correlated with S. 5 ($r_s = .58$, $p = .006$) as well as with

the overall mean score given to the drawbacks ($r_s = .49, p < .023$).⁴ This suggests that ELL students' level of fear while working in teams is associated with an increased dislike of working with other students and with a less favorable overall evaluation of the CLCT drawbacks (RQ₃). In the case of CE students, quite crucially, no correlations have been found between S. 3 and any of the SS provided in Table 1.

In order to better understand the correlation between fear and students' perception of the collaborative methodology, we compared the results just discussed with those adduced in Castro-Chao and Bouso (2024, 311). As can be seen in Table 2, these report the benefits (or positive aspects) of CLCT. In this respect we observe that ELL students' evaluation of S. 3 in Table 1 is significantly and negatively correlated with S. 10 ($r_s = -.59, p = .005$) and S. 12 in Table 2 ($r_s = -.47, p = .032$). Additionally, there is a significant and negative correlation between S. 3 and the overall mean score assigned to the benefits of CLCT (i.e., 3.29/5; $r_s = -.49, p = .025$). What this suggests is that ELL students' increased feeling of fear is associated with a decreased belief that teamwork will be beneficial in future collaboration (S. 10), a reduced inclination towards using other people's ideas (S. 12) and, on the whole, a diminished confidence in the benefits of CLCT (see ELL overall mean in Table 2). In the case of CE students, as happened in Table 1 above, no correlations have been found between S. 3 and any of the SS in Table 2.

⁴ The correlation between S. 3 and the overall mean was calculated after excluding the item from the total score.

No.	Item	M. ELL	M. CE
6	An instructor can help most by working with students in teams*	2.90	3.96
7	It is helpful to put together everyone's ideas when making a decision	4.10	4.22
8	When a team needs something important done, I find it more helpful to work collaboratively rather than alone*	2.71	3.73
9	We get the work done faster if we all collaborate	4.29	4.34
10	Working in a team now will help me work with others in the future	4.00	4.33
11	I like to work in teams when taking University courses*	2.38	3.76
12	I like to be able to use other people's ideas*	2.95	3.87
13	I like to help other people integrate into a work team	3.71	3.84
14	Other students like to help me learn*	2.57	3.99
	Overall mean*	3.29	4.00

Table 2: Students' assessment of the benefits of CLCT in the Degrees in ELL and CE (adapted from Castro-Chao and Bouso 2024, 311)

6. Discussion and conclusion

The present study has addressed ELL and CE students' assessment of the drawbacks of CLCT. A number of *MS Office 365*-mediated collaborative activities were implemented in two ESP courses, and the data were collected by means of an adapted *Likert*-scale questionnaire based on Anderson et al. (2010). Regarding RQ₁, the results show that there are statistically significant differences between ELL and CE students' assessment. The fact that ELL students are comparatively more perceptive of the shortcomings of CLCT concurs with the results presented in Castro-Chao and Bouso (2024, 313), which suggest that ELL students tend to be less satisfied with CLCT than CE students.

With respect to RQ₂, the analysis reveals that ELL students experience a significantly higher level of apprehension during the performance of collaborative activities (RQ₂). In addition, their level of fear is significantly associated with an increased dislike of working with other students and with an overall stronger perception of the drawbacks of CLCT (RQ₃). In the case of CE students, by contrast, no correlation has been found between the level of fear and the perception of the drawbacks. These findings lend support to previous studies suggesting that higher education students may experience unpleasant emotions when engaging in collaborative activities (Capdeferro and Romero 2012, 27-28; Hilliard et al. 2020, 2-3; Järvenoja et al. 2020, 6, 8). At

the same time, they throw some light on the CLCT complexities clearly illustrating that the experience of fear and its correlation with students' perceptions vary across disciplines.

As possible avenues for further research, we suggest zooming in on the data and conducting a qualitative study in order to examine the sources of fear, as well as the factors that may have led ELL students to experience higher levels of apprehension than CE students. It could also be beneficial to compare a broader range of disciplines, including hard, mixed and soft sciences, to increase our understanding of the needs of learners in specific contexts. As Capdeferro and Romero (2012, 38) suggest, raising our awareness of the sources of unpleasant emotions (in their case, frustration) in different universities, degrees and disciplines can improve the quality and design of CLCT experiences and promote the well-being of learners.

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