

I Do Not Want to Learn Spanish. Critical Incidents in the Spanish as a Foreign and Second Language Classroom —————

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Abstract

This pilot study aims to identify the main Critical Incidents that emerge in Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) and Second Language Acquisition (L2) classrooms, their emotional impact, and the main coping strategies used by teachers. To do so, we applied the “survey for SFL & L2 teachers on critical incidents” (EPIC-ELE in Spanish) to a representative sample of 115 SFL & L2 teachers. After a statistical analysis of the data, results show the dimensions with greater frequency and emotional impact (educational methods and purposes, linguistic prejudices, motivation, and assessment), the most used coping strategies, and some paradoxical results such as the low incidence of indiscipline or the greater use of strategic or innovative procedures by less experienced teachers. These results are discussed in the conclusions, where some ideas that could be included in the initial training of SFL & L2 teachers are also put forward.

Keywords: Critical Incidents, Spanish as a Foreign Language, Second Language Acquisition, Teaching Strategies, Coping Strategies, Teacher Identity.

Resumen

El estudio piloto pretende identificar los principales Incidentes Críticos que se producen en las aulas de enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera (ELE) y de español como segunda lengua (L2), su impacto emocional y las principales estrategias que emplean los docentes para afrontarlos. Para ello, aplicamos la “encuesta para profesorado de ELE y L2 sobre incidentes críticos” (EPIC-ELE) a una muestra representativa de 115 profesores de ELE y L2. Tras un análisis estadístico de los datos obtenidos, los resultados muestran las dimensiones con mayor frecuencia e impacto

emocional (métodos y propósitos educativos, prejuicios lingüísticos, motivación y evaluación), las estrategias de afrontamiento más empleadas y ciertos resultados paradójicos como la baja incidencia de la indisciplina o el mayor uso de procedimientos estratégicos e innovadores por parte de los docentes menos experimentados. En las conclusiones se discuten esos resultados y se apuntan algunas ideas que podrían recogerse en la formación de los profesores que imparten su enseñanza en ELE y L2.

Palabras clave: Incidentes Críticos, Español como Lengua Extranjera, estrategias de enseñanza, estrategias de afrontamiento, Identidad Docente.

1. Introduction

An Italian student tells his Spanish teacher that he does not want to learn this language because Spanish people consider that abusing a bull in a public place is some sort of festival. His teacher is a bit taken aback and speechless; eventually, she replies that this is about learning a language rather than being like some Spanish people. Of course, this answer is not very appropriate as it neither justifies the interest in learning a new language nor refutes this student's prejudice. We could consider this to be a critical incident (henceforth CI), that is, an unexpected situation or event that emotionally destabilises the receiver, in this case a teacher. Therefore, her answer is maladjusted and creates a conflictive context that should be coped with sooner or later (Monereo, 2010; Tripp, 1993).

CIs are also becoming increasingly relevant in educational research on teacher training (Monereo, Weise & Álvarez, 2013; Nail, 2013) and on the construction of a professional teacher identity (Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013; Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkaniemi, & Maaranen, 2014). Studies on this issue agree on highlighting the significance of emotional aspects on the emergence of changes in the teachers' concepts about the meaning and sense of what they teach, the procedures and strategies that they use to achieve their goals, and their feelings during their daily task. The greater the emotional impact of an event, the better the possibilities that teachers rethink their professional role and decide to introduce drastic changes in their teaching performance; and CIs are precisely characterised by going beyond people's emotional threshold and forcing them to reassess what they think, do and feel. In short, to modify their professional identity somehow.

In any case, as can be deduced from the above, CIs are not a homogeneous group and do not always have the same nature or impact. With regard to this latter point, we should mention that the emotional intensity of the incident has a subjective character and, therefore, the same CI may affect different people in very different ways so, what

for some may be a real shock, for others may be just an unimportant eventuality. As for their nature, we can distinguish between prototypical or frequent CIs in some settings and others that are emerging or new ones resulting from new tendencies in behaviours, norms, technological advances, or research (Monereo, 2014).

Although research on CIs has developed intensely in different health areas such as medicine or nursing (Waeschle, Bauer, & Schmidt, 2015), in the educational field it started somewhat later but, at present, there is already an important set of works targeting different levels of formal education: compulsory education (Coyle, 2013; Pyhalto, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2010), vocational training (Boersma, Ten Dam, Volman, & Wardekker, 2010), and higher education (Douglas, Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2015).

With regard to teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL & L2), some publications focus on aspects concerning teachers' competences (Esteire & Fernández, 2013) or cultural differences (Roca, 2008) as causes of conflict in the classroom; however, research directly focused on CIs in the SFL & L2 classroom is still scarce (Abio, 2013; Álvarez & Hirari, 2013; Álvarez-Bernárdez & Monereo, 2016).

We know that in compulsory education, particularly in secondary education, the most frequent CIs, and those that teachers are more concerned about, are the failure to comply with discipline rules and the lack of motivation of students regarding what is being taught and the difficulties in understanding the content. The last two aspects are also present in higher education, but the one producing the highest number of CIs is assessment and its surrounding aspects.

In SFL & L2, we do not have such data but everything suggests that results may be different, as this is usually an optional subject whose content is not disciplinary but related to language, as well as to other areas/disciplines such as history, geography, art, politics, literature or social psychology. The aim of this study is to find out what CIs occur in SFL & L2 and how they are usually managed.

2. Objectives

The present research is a pilot study of CIs that occur in SFL & L2, and focuses particularly on their identification and the analysis of strategies used by teachers to cope with them. In this respect, we firstly intend to detect what CIs occur most frequently during educational practice and which could be considered as still emerging; then, we highlight those with a greater impact on teachers. Secondly, we identify and analyse the kind of response that SFL & L2 teachers usually give to these contingencies, that is, how they cope or act in the classroom when these critical situations emerge.

With this aim, we adapted and applied a questionnaire, the “Survey for SFL & L2 teachers on CIs” (EPIC-ELE in Spanish), which derives from a previously designed and validated instrument/tool to detect CIs that teachers experience in the general educational system (Badia, Meneses, & Monereo, 2014). The correlational analysis of answers to this survey allows us to establish relationships between key variables: type of incident, frequency and impact of incident, coping strategies used by teachers, as well as other variables of a socio-professional nature.

This article concludes with some suggestions about how CIs occurring in SFL & L2 classrooms should be dealt with, according to the data obtained.

3. The Study

3.1. Participants

A total amount of 126 teachers of SFL & L2 participated in this research. They were arranged/distributed in two groups, depending on the study phase they were participating in.

During the first phase, devoted to validating the questionnaire –EPIC-ELE–, we selected 11 teachers from Europe (7), Asia (1), Africa (1), and America (2) with specific training in SFL & L2 teaching. In the second phase, we sent invitation letters to 320 teachers and we received 115 complete responses from Europe (97), Asia (6), and America (12). Table 1 shows the profile of every subsample according to the phase the teachers participated in.

Table 1: Profile of sample in the validation and application of the questionnaire

STUDY PHASES	Phase 1: EPIC-ELE Validation	Phase 2: EPIC-ELE Application
Total participants	11	115
Mean Age	48 years old	40 years old
Average Years of Experience in SFL & L2 Teaching	18 years	11 years
Spanish as L1	11 (yes)	75 (yes) / 40 (no)

Educational level at which they teach	Nursery/preschool	0	1
	Primary/Basic/Elementary	0	7
	Secondary/Intermediate	4	47
	Higher/University	4	44
	Adults (EOI, Cervantes Institute, Language school, etc.)	3	59
	Others	0	9
Context in which the teachers were working	Spanish as a Foreign Language	8	98
	Spanish as L2	3	17
Level of Spanish that they teach	Beginner	6	94
	Intermediate	2	97
	Advanced	3	61

3.3 Design and Procedure

To achieve the objectives, a descriptive-interpretative study was carried out, based on the statistical analysis of EPIC-ELE responses, with the aim of checking what significant relationships emerged among variables.

The procedure was as follows: for the preliminary phase of EPIC adaptation to SFL & L2 teachers, we first asked 5 of our 11 experts to indicate what critical incidents were most frequent in the classrooms out of a list of 10, grouped into 5 thematic blocks, and to provide examples for each of them. This expert review allowed us to obtain a Kappa concordance index of 0.87 for the proposed thematic blocks. Along the same lines, based on their suggestions, we included a new thematic block into EPIC related to *Rules of behaviour in the classroom*.

After elaborating the questionnaire, we created its digital version using Google Docs, and asked our 11 experts to answer the questions and to include any suggestions for improvement, both formal and content-related, that they considered relevant. The experts highlighted the need to introduce a situation referring to being a native speaker of the L2 or not, and the beliefs and concepts involved, a suggestion which we accepted.

With the final questionnaire revised and refined, we requested two leading companies¹ in the field of SFL & L2 teacher training to provide us with their databases. We selected 150 teachers and emailed them explaining our research objective and asking for their anonymous and voluntary participation. Finally, 115 valid answers were sent back to us (which was 37% of the invitation letters that we sent; an acceptable number of responses for a pilot study). Then, we conducted a statistical data analysis, and identified and explained the co-variation relationships among significant variables.

3.3. *The EPIC-ELE Questionnaire*

The “Survey for Spanish as a Foreign Language Teachers & L2 about Critical Incidents” (EPIC-ELE) is a questionnaire aimed at identifying what main conflicts SFL & L2 teachers experience in their classrooms and how they react to them; in the study, we intend to contribute to teacher training considering the most frequent CIs and the ways to confront them. The questionnaire that was finally applied, after the aforementioned validation process, was divided into the following sections:

- Socio-professional data: in this section, respondents were asked for information about their age, mother tongue, years of teaching experience, country where they teach, academic level at which they teach, and language level at which they mainly teach.
- Analysis of proposed critical incidents: the second part of this instrument is arranged around 6 thematic blocks that are frequent sources of critical incidents for SFL & L2 teachers, namely culture, comprehension of purposes and pedagogical methods, behaviour in the classroom, lack of coherence between teaching and assessment, demotivation, and curricular management. After introducing the topic, there is a short description of content and objectives that every block aims to analyse. Table 2 shows a summary of the EPIC-ELE thematic sections, together with their description.

Table 2. EPIC-ELE thematic blocks

Thematic Block	Description
Culture-related incidents	It refers to those conflict situations where prejudices, stereotypes, contradictions, etc. concerning the representation that students have of Spanish culture emerge.
Incidents related to comprehension of purposes and methods	It refers to those conflict situations caused by the students' not properly understanding what purpose or what sense the class activity has.
Incidents related to classroom behaviour	It refers to conflict situations caused by undisciplined behaviour of one or many students that breaks or complicates the atmosphere of coexistence and/or learning in the classroom.
Incidents related to lack of coherence between teaching and assessment	It refers to those conflict situations caused by an unbalance between content taught (way of teaching, demands, examples, etc.) and content assessed, so that students consider that teaching has not prepared them to properly deal with assessment.
Demotivation-related incidents	It refers to those conflict situations caused by a lack of an enjoyable atmosphere (Demotivation1) or the students' lack of interest (Demotivation2).
Incidents related to curricular management	It refers to those conflict situations concerning aspects related to what, when and how to teach content (e.g., sequencing content, time management, space, resources, coordination with other peers, etc.).

Finally, in every thematic block, we have included two conflict situations that are representative of that topic and where respondents have to:

- Choose the coping response that is more adjusted to their usual performance in class from among four possible answers, as indicated in the literature (Frydenberg, 1993; Lazarus, 1980): reactive (there is an emotional response of self-affirmation or rejection, where teachers impose their criteria without any effective changes in their planning); conformist (teachers deny, avoid or escape from conflict and do not change their planning); strategic (teachers decide to modify their local strategy on the basis of organisational and agreed measures, but there is no deep change involving a revision of their own concepts and feelings); or innovative (teachers undergo a substantial change as they question aspects concerning their understanding of their role and their feeling as teachers, that is, their own professional identity).
- Assess the frequency of this type of incident in their educational practice (to this purpose, a 5-point Likert scale has been used with the following levels: “very high,” “high,” “significant,” “moderate” or “low”).
- Assess to what extent this incident can affect them emotionally; to do so, a Likert scale is used with five levels of intensity: “very high,” “high,” “significant,” “moderate” or “low.”

4. Results and Discussion

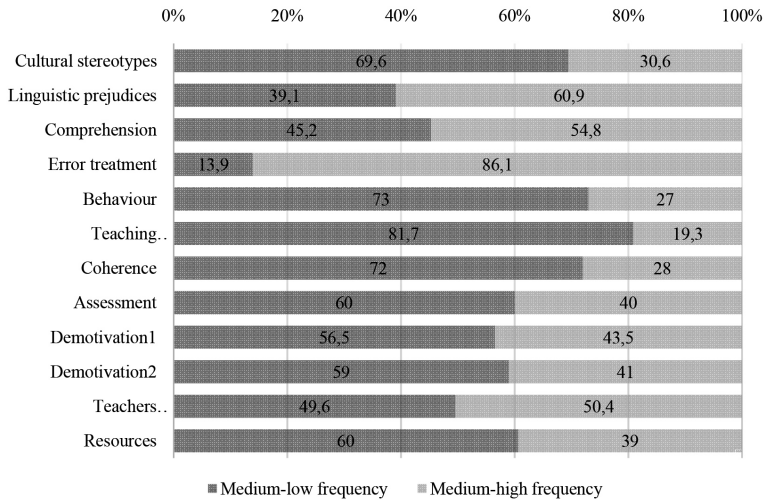
For the statistical analysis of responses, and in order to observe the level of co-variation among the quantitative variables studied, Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient (Pearson’s r) was used, together with the determination coefficient (Pearson’s r^2) and chi-squared tests (X^2) for categorical variables. The statistical package SPSS v.22 was also used.

Below are our results, following the same development as in the data collection process: analysis of variables about frequency and impact of critical incidents; examination of coping strategies used by teachers; and finally, study of the influence of general variables on CIs under analysis.

4.1. Frequency and impact of Critical Incidents under analysis

With regard to the frequency of CIs in the SFL & L2 classroom and their impact on teachers, Figure 1 shows that the most frequent incidents belong to the thematic block “Comprehension of educational methods and purposes,” with the two dimensions of this block reaching a level of frequency considered as medium-high: *Comprehension*, 54.8% and, particularly, *Error treatment*, 86.1%.

Figure 1: Frequency in CIs under analysis



As for the lack of comprehension and feedback in the error treatment, authors such as Blanco (2002), Richard and Rogers (2003) or Vázquez (2009) observed that the excessive use of very theoretical-linguistic content, the scarce opportunities for students to think about their mistake, and an indirect explanation or correction by using new tasks that prevent students to connect with their mistake may be at the core of these incidents.

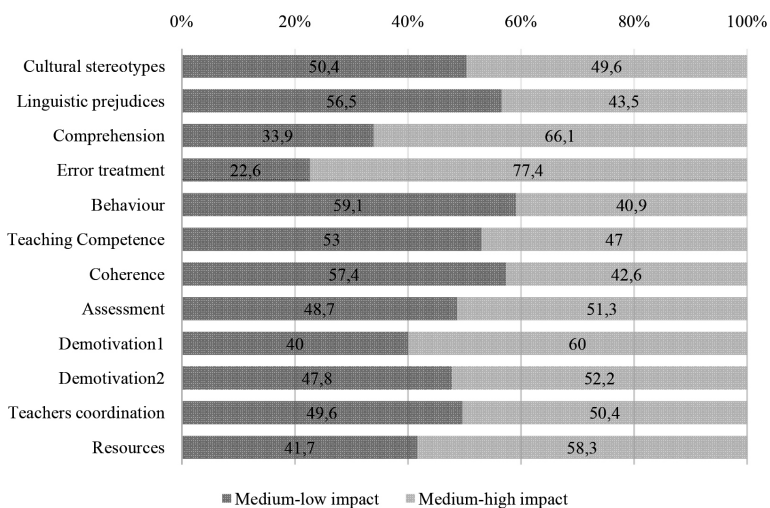
Likewise, in the thematic block “Culture,” we observe a high frequency when the situation under analysis refers to the presence of beliefs and prejudices related to the language varieties of SFL & L2 students. In this respect, the dimension *Linguistic prejudices* reached a medium-high frequency level with a percentage of 60.9%. Analysing these prejudices with real information –reports, research articles- and with collective and personal reflection is the best antidote to this kind of responses (Andión, 2013; Foster & Snyder, 2005; Zapata, 2011).

Finally, in the thematic block “Curricular management,” it can be observed that the situation concerning *Teachers’ coordination*, with 50.4%, also causes greater conflicts for SFL & L2 teachers. This is not surprising as the lack of coordination among teachers is already a classic on all educational levels (Cerdán & Grañeras, 1999) and the need for such coordination in SFL & L2 has been the object of specific proposals (Báez & Pérez, 2009; Jovanovic & Filipovic, 2013; Sánchez, 2013; Sardaña, 2013). We did not expect the incidents concerning “Rules of behaviour in the classroom” to be the ones with the lowest frequency in the SFL & L2 classroom (27% and 19.3%, respectively, in their medium-high frequency), followed by those related to *cultural*

stereotypes (30.6%). The low frequency of indiscipline behaviours in comparison to those recorded in mainstream education may lie in the dynamic and active nature of SFL & L2 classes. As previous research observed, indiscipline decreases when students are continuously involved in activities (Knapczyk, 2008; Martínez, 2005) or when they feel that what they are learning is useful and relevant for their future (Huneault, 2007; Juan & García, 2012).

Focusing on the emotional impact of these incidents on SFL & L2 teachers, Figure 2 shows that the thematic block concerning “Comprehension of methods and purposes” still has the highest values (66.1% Comprehension and 77.4% Error treatment); likewise, compared with the total, “Rules of behaviour in the classroom” still has the lowest values in the situations under analysis (40.9% and 47% in the medium-high impact level).

Figure 2: Impact of CIs under analysis



In “Curricular management,” it can be seen that *Teachers’ coordination* remains at a medium-high level in relation to Impact (50.4%), although on this occasion the adjacent dimension *Resource management* does score higher (58.3%), which means that the former is not among the dimensions with higher values. After the incidents related to the comprehension of methods and purposes, the incidents in the block “Demotivation” rank second because classes are not very enjoyable (1) or due to the students’ lack of motivation and interest (2) with 60% and 52.2%, respectively. New evidence can also be found in the block “Culture,” where dimensions have the lowest values (49.6% and 43.5% in the medium-high impact level, respectively), and in the dimension *Assessment* as well, which, despite having similar values in both analyses,

shows a medium-high impact level of 51.3% and a medium-low frequency of 40%, that is, although teachers do not identify this incident as frequent, they do consider that it has an impact.

Indeed, we were already aware that assessment is one of the main points of tension and conflict given its crucial influence on learning and teaching itself (Álvarez-Bernárdez & Monereo, 2016; Figueres & Puig, 2014; Martínez & Cantero, 2014). In this respect, some studies have pointed at the little preparation of SFL & L2 teachers concerning assessment. Based on the question “What perception do you have of your assessment skills?”, Remesal and Brown (2014), for instance, found out that, out of a sample of 500 SFL & L2 teachers, only 54% had received assessment-related training once their teaching activity had started, whereas 46% admitted not having received assessment-related training at all.

Subsequently, from these data, we developed the correlation analysis among the different dimensions under study. In this regard, as shown in Table 3, we found positive and significant correlations between the variables frequency and impact ($p < 0.001$) in all the dimensions of our questionnaire. Broadly speaking, therefore, we can argue that, as it is a positive linear relationship, those incidents that SFL & L2 teachers consider to be more frequent or typical in their job are also the ones with higher scores for their impact.

Table 3: Correlation between frequency and impact variables

	Frequency Medium-high level %	Impact Medium-high level %	Correlation coefficient (Pearson's r)	Determination coefficient (Pearson's r ²)
Culture-related				
Cultural stereotypes	30.6	49.6	0.524	0.275
Linguistic prejudices	60.9	43.5	0.492	0.242
Related to comprehension of purposes and methods				
Comprehension	54.8	66.1	0.563	0.317
Error treatment	86.1	77.4	0.48	0.231
Related to rules of behaviour in the classroom				
Behaviour	27	40.9	0.711	0.506
Teacher's competence	19.3	47	0.414	0.172

Related to lack of coherence between teaching and assessment				
Coherence	28	42.6	0.556	0.309
Assessment	40	51.3	0.702	0.492
Related to demotivation				
Demotivation1 (lack of enjoyable classes)	43.5	60	0.571	0.250
Demotivation2 (lack of interest)	41	52.2	0.677	0.326
Related to curricular management				
Teachers' coordination	50.4	50.4	0.651	0.424
Resources	39	58.3	0.639	0.409
*Correlation is significant at $p < 0.001$ (bilateral)				

Data shown in Table 3 allow us to observe that both *Behaviour* ($r=0.711$; $p < 0.001$) and *Assessment* ($r=0.711$; $p < 0.001$) are the two dimensions with a higher Pearson's coefficient. These data show what points have a higher number of coincidences between the aforementioned levels of frequency/impact. However, it is surprising that one of the dimensions concerning the thematic block *Rules of behaviour in the classroom* also has the lowest *correlation* index, that is, the dimension *Teacher's competence* ($r=0.414$; $p < 0.001$). These results may seem striking if we do not pay attention to the topic that they both reflect, whereas in *Behaviour* we can see a general case applicable to every teacher's reality –a student asks the teacher rudely for explanations about why he/she has to study Spanish. In the second case, and with regard to *Teacher's competence*, there is a situation where the main actor is a non-native teacher; despite being a frequent case, this has not always scored a high impact as, native teachers do not experience this situation.

Likewise, data analysis allowed us to verify that conflicts related to behaviour and classroom rules are more frequent in secondary education, when students usually express their impressions, doubts and replies with more assertiveness, which leads teachers to adopt more authoritarian positions with less participation from the educational community in general and from the students in particular (Martín, 2007; Sardaña, 2013).

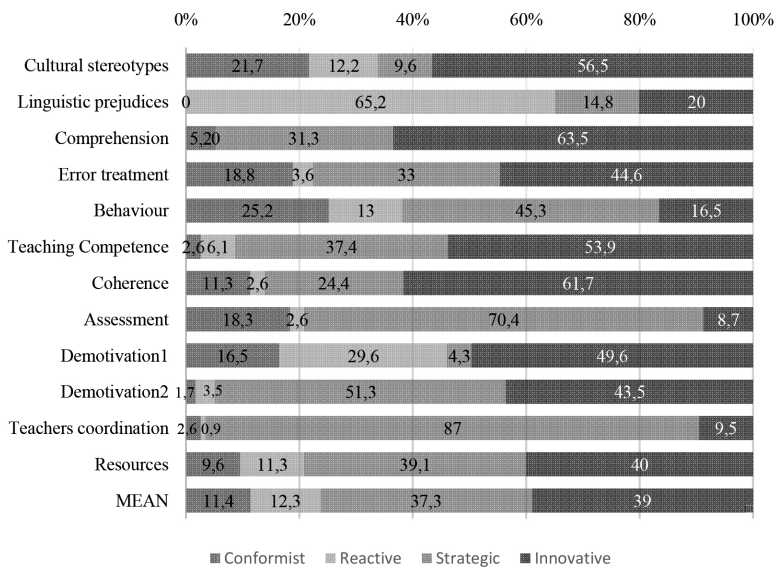
Finally, going back to values in Table 3, we can observe that error treatment ($r=0.48$; $p < 0.001$) is the second dimension with the lowest correlation value, which contrasts with its high levels in both frequency and impact. However, this reveals that the emotional intensity that SFL & L2 teachers experience with incidents related to error treatment is higher when their frequency is lower or when incidents are more

sporadic; nevertheless, when the presence of these incidents in the classroom is more frequent and constant, their impact decreases. These results would suggest that it is convenient to distinguish between error as a mistake –due to some confusion or inattention usually corrected by students themselves when told–, and error due to a lack of basic knowledge which prevents students from correcting it themselves. Logically, the latter has a greater impact among teachers, firstly, because it may be their responsibility that students do not have this knowledge and, secondly, because its resolution presents greater difficulties (Barros, 2006; Vázquez, 2009).

4.2. Coping responses used by SFL & L2 teachers

Below we present the coping responses of SFL & L2 teachers when facing the different contingencies that occur in the classroom according to the types proposed (Figure 3):

Figure 3: Coping responses according to CIs under analysis



In general, as shown in Figure 3, 39% of the teachers that analyzed the CIs proposed in the EPIC-ELE admitted having used innovative coping strategies more frequently, that is, responses where there is a more global change, not only affecting their way of performing or acting but also their way of thinking and conceiving this problem, which led them to generally or structurally reconsider it. A similar number of participants, 37.3%, recognised that, in the event of classroom contingencies, they use strategic responses, prioritizing measures jointly agreed with other teachers or students

and applying a local solution with a change in the method or way of performing but without substantially affecting their concepts, beliefs and attitudes. In the end, it implies a “symptomatic” change that, despite transitorily stemming the problem, may bring out the latent conflict and the risk of a future emergence. Conformist responses, that is, those where teachers try to calm down the situation or to avoid conflict by denying the presence of the incident or by providing a response that pleases the other party without causing a change or a deep analysis of the problem, only reach 11.4%. Finally, a slightly higher percentage of teachers, specifically 12.3%, stated that, in the light of the proposed CIs, they adopted a more reactive position, that is, they reacted aggressively, ironically or threateningly, which, apart from making it impossible to reconsider the problem, might also produce aversive answers from students.

In a detailed analysis of these data, we observed that there are seven situations where the application of a particular coping response represents a percentage higher than 50% over the other responses. This is the case of situations concerning: Cultural stereotypes (56.5% innovative response), Linguistic prejudices (65.2% reactive), Comprehension (63.5% innovative), Coherence (61.7% innovative), Assessment (70.4% strategic), Demotivation2 -disinterest- (51.3% strategic), and Teachers’ coordination (87% strategic). These data show that strategic responses emerge when teachers notice that they cannot change these topics, as they are institutional situations, particular to students, or external ones. However, when situations directly depend on the teachers, that is, when attribution is internal, the coping response changes in favour of a more innovative solution (Moreno, 2012).

Among the values that we have just mentioned, the case represented by the CIs related to Linguistic prejudices is outstanding, with the reactive response achieving the highest score (65.2%), although it has the lowest mean value (12.3%). A similar case can be observed in Demotivation1 -lack of enjoyable classes-, where the reactive response reaches 29.6%, and we cannot forget the case represented by Comprehension, where the presence of a reactive response is null (0%). In this respect, we agree with Arnold and Brown (2000) on considering that there are scarce efforts to build the SFL & L2 student identity. On the one hand, not enough attention is given to analyse beliefs and cultural pre-assumptions that students have but these explanations are reduced to more simple presentations of certain topics and stereotypes; likewise, there is no deep analysis of feelings, sensations and emotions that the language and culture can produce in them either and, in most cases, these are elements that result in learning difficulties. Again, the fact of feeling certain functions as our own or external seems to be the main reason why teachers act in a more reactive way, whereas they are more flexible when they try to make their students understand content and explanations.

Finally, those situations with a percentage lower than 25% for innovative coping responses are also worth noting, although they have the highest mean value of 39%. In this respect, assessment (8.7%), teachers' coordination (9.5%), behaviour (16.5%), and linguistic prejudices (20%) are the cases in which teachers find it more difficult to introduce innovative solutions (that is, they imply more personal involvement and may compromise their teacher identity). The fact that teachers consider that there are practices that escape their competences or falsely assume that certain changes in the educational context do not depend on them (at least as a whole) but on the action of other agents, seems to prevent them from resorting to more innovative practices (Moreno, 2012).

4.5. Socio-Professional Variables and Coping Strategies

In this section we present the analysis of coping strategies used by SFL & L2 teachers in view of the influence of socio-professional variables considered in every case.

As the evaluation of coping responses used by SFL & L2 teachers to solve CIs, according to the country where they teach, has not revealed any significant result, with similar non-significant differences in relation to age of participants, we will focus on those socio-professional variables that resulted in significant and relevant data to obtain and interpret our results.

First Language

There are significant differences with regard to the response used by teachers with Spanish as their mother tongue concerning the variable Cultural stereotypes ($X^2=10.78$; $p=0.013$). The extended analysis of data allowed us to check that those teachers with Spanish as their mother tongue used, in 43.50% of cases, more innovative responses, in comparison with 13% representing teachers who, although Spanish was not their mother tongue, also used an innovative response when trying to solve culture-related incidents in the classroom. These results lead us to conclude that native teachers, in comparison with foreign teachers, feel more confident and capable of introducing changes in their discipline when facing cultural incidents as they can consider it feasible being their own first language (Andi3n, 2013; Lakat & Ubach, 1997; Redondo 2010).

The variable Demotivation2 -students' disinterest- also shows significant differences when comparing the type of response used by teachers with Spanish as their mother tongue and by those with a foreign language ($X^2=10.74$; $p=0.015$). The Strategic

(34.8%) and Innovative (27%) categories present many more cases in proportion to the other categories when teachers have Spanish as their mother tongue. The application of innovative methods favours native over foreign teachers, who probably conceive innovation as an added difficulty to their command of language content and teaching methods (Lakat & Ubach, 1997; Redondo 2010).

The predominance of innovative over strategic responses indicated by L1 teachers may be due to the fact that the first ones represent a model of communication agent which students will face in real situations. That is, it presents the language “in action” so that students feel they are in direct contact with the new culture. In this regard, research carried out by Callahan 2006, Miranda-Barrios 2011, and Hertel and Sunderman 2009 indicates that students seem to prefer native teachers for skills related to pronunciation and understanding, as well as for exercises of oral and written communication. However, non-native teachers are noted for being the best grammar teachers (Callahan 2006; Hertel and Sunderman 2009; Ramila, 2014). In this respect, everything seems to indicate that non-native teachers opt for more strategic rather than innovative solutions because, based on their own experience, they are more sensitive to the difficulties associated with linguistic and grammatical issues, detect confusions more easily, and predict possible complications in students’ learning.

Years of Teaching Experience

If we associate the responses of SFL & L2 teachers to their years of teaching experience, we can find significant differences in the dimension Behaviour ($X^2=8.622$; $p=0.035$), as this is where teachers with less experience provide strategic responses (39.4%).

Likewise, we find major differences in the variable Demotivation2 -students’ disinterest- when relating it to years of teaching experience and to the type of response to CIs ($X^2=8.439$; $p=0.038$). Strategic and innovative responses stand out among those teachers with less experience. Percentages were 48.3% and 32.2%, respectively. It is worth noting that no case of conformist response was recorded among teachers with low experience.

In both cases, there is a clear coincidence with results from Ochoa and Cueva (2014), when considering that beginner teachers present more expectations of success in relation to those with more experience, as well as attitudes more receptive to change and innovation, as they consider that developing both aspects in practice is feasible and practicable. However, experiences and episodes lived by veteran teachers sometimes lead them to lose confidence and end up by dismissing new practices.

Educational Level

No significant differences were found in the variable Educational Level when comparing the different levels under analysis. However, there certainly are major differences in the dimension Linguistic prejudices when individually comparing SFL & L2 teachers that teach in the “Intermediate or Secondary Education” stage according to the type of coping response that they use ($X^2=7.304$; $p=0.026$). In this respect, we can see that in the category Reactive there is the same proportion in secondary as in the other educational stages; however, the values for Strategic 10.4% and Innovative 10.4% responses are clearly lower in secondary. On the basis of these results, we think that teachers teaching in secondary education, facing the need to achieve a visible change in their students and due to features that are particular and common to this educational stage such as the energy and force that students use to express their ideas and opinions, among others, tend to develop a more authoritarian profile (Juan & García, 2012; Knapczyk, 2008; Martínez, 2005).

Language Level at Which They Teach

When we previously contrasted the variables concerning the Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced levels, we found no significant differences. However, if we establish small groups between these levels –beginner/intermediate, beginner/advanced, intermediate/advanced-, we can observe differences in the cases making up the thematic block Demotivation.

In the first analysis on the variable Demotivation1 –not very enjoyable classes-, we can see that there are significant differences when relating coping responses and language level ($X^2=35.145$; $p=0.009$). After analysing the incident used in the EPIC-ELE questionnaire on the effects and consequences that the irrelevance of a proposed or developed topic may have for students in a SFL & L2 course (disinterest, lack of motivation, complaints, reprimands, etc.), and faced with a similar situation, teachers are perceived to opt for using reactive (29.6%) and innovative (49.6%) responses. However, we can see that this situation is more frequent at Beginner and Intermediate levels, where the total percentage of the pairing of both levels is 27%.

Also in Functionality, we can see a similar fact when establishing a relationship between coping responses and language level ($X^2=31.220$; $p=0.027$). On this occasion, the situation proposed has to do with demotivation due to despondency, which implies a lack of effort. Thus, in the light of such an incident, most teachers respond in a more strategic (59%) or innovative (50%) way. As in the previous case, the incident is more frequently associated to Beginner and Intermediate levels, with values being 13.9% and 13% of the total, respectively.

In both cases, the choice of every response seems to be determined by the fact that teachers assume or not that motivation is not only the students' responsibility but it also depends on how attractive classes are or their sense and functionality. Thus, focusing on the data obtained, we notice that, whereas a majority opts for strategic or innovative responses as a way of promoting and developing motivation, a minority opts for more reactive solutions, as they assume that being motivated or not completely depends on the students and their efforts to improve their learning conditions, which implies that they consider their influence on the process to be scarce (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Grünewald, 2009).

5. Conclusions

This study entails the following limitations: a) it is a pilot study, which intends to be the first approximation to the topic, whose sample is limited but sufficient for the purpose of the study; b) the interpretation of the data obtained as a result of practical research is based on the literature of other scientific fields –provided in the introduction– and our teaching experience. As a result of the considerations and objectives proposed in this study, we can conclude as follows. The most frequent and impactful dimension is comprehension of educational methods and purposes, particularly concerning error treatment in class. It seems apparent that the purpose of every activity is worth explaining, and, very especially, the one aimed at correcting errors and turning them into more important learning opportunities.

Likewise, those problems related to linguistic prejudices and difficulties of coordination among teachers are frequent. The latter point, important in any educational context, is crucial for SFL & L2 as it may have a multiplying effect when emphasising certain instructions, repeating and automating certain expressions, establishing comparisons among varieties, supplementing explanations, etc. With regard to linguistic prejudices, it is best to treat them properly, providing evidence that helps to question them.

Problems related to motivation and assessment, despite not being the most frequent ones, are certainly the most impactful. Although SFL & L2 is an ideal subject to introduce many practical activities based on communicative and active situations, suitable to carry out more authentic assessment due to their similarity with real life situations, there are still many teachers who emphasise more formal and theoretical aspects of the language.

An unexpected result is that the failure to comply with behaviour rules is neither frequent nor high-impact, not even in secondary education where its incidence logically

increases slightly. This fact, contrary to what usually occurs in the other subjects, may be explained if we consider that this is, in most cases, optional and with a didactic tradition that usually gives the main role to the students (with the aforementioned exceptions, of course).

Another paradoxical result is that the impact of error increases when its incidence is low. As mentioned, in this case we should identify if the teacher considers the error caused by the student's mistake or by their lack of competence in the language, with the latter obviously being what really affects teachers.

With regard to our second objective, among the most used coping responses, the innovative ones stand out in culture-related issues –particularly in the case of teachers with Spanish as their mother tongue-, as well as in situations related to comprehension and coherence, whereas more strategic responses affect assessment, demotivation due to students' disinterest –particularly among teachers with less experience- and lack of coordination with other colleagues; lastly, those related to linguistic prejudices and demotivation due to the lack of enjoyable classes are given reactive responses.

Finally, we would like to highlight two data. The first one was expected: native teachers feel more committed when dealing with incidents related to aspects of the Spanish culture, that is, their own culture. In any case, we are aware that the results relate mainly to teachers of ELE teaching in Europe, therefore, generalisation to other continents requires a study with a larger sample size. The second is paradoxical: teachers with less experience engage in more strategic and innovative responses when they face the students' inappropriate behaviours or disinterest in the classes, whereas teachers with more experience seem to have some sort of hopelessness, maybe due to their repetitive unsuccessful attempts to make changes, which leads them to opt for conformist responses. In this respect, it seems that SFL & L2 teaching teams may benefit from the presence of native and foreign teachers, with different degrees of experience, to take advantage of the commitment of the former and the motivation and positive expectations of the latter. This way, when a student expresses the statement in the title of this article, the teaching team will have an agreed and appropriate answer to make students understand that learning Spanish will give them communicative competence, thus enabling them to be in contact with other cultures, enriching themselves and also, in some sense, enriching other cultures.

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7. Appendix 1

EPIC - ELE

Encuesta para profesores sobre Incidentes Críticos en Español Lengua Extranjera y Adquisición de una segunda lengua

Incidentes relacionados con la cultura

Se refiere a aquellas situaciones conflictivas en las que se manifiestan prejuicios, estereotipos, contradicciones, etc. relativos a la representación que tienen los alumnos de la cultura española.

Un alumno te dice que no quiere aprender español porque lo asocia con la corrida de toros, la muerte y la barbarie, ¿cómo actúas ante esta situación?

Le dices que se trata de aprender la lengua, no de ser como ellos.

Le explicas que para los españoles la tauromaquia es un arte y que puede profundizar en ello.

Le dices que cada cultura tiene cosas de las que avergonzarse (p.e. el boxeo o las peleas de animales en algunos países), pero si no aprende su lengua no podrá viajar o trabajar allí.

Le explicas que entre los españoles los hay que han prohibido las corridas de toros y que podríamos entrevistar a unos y a otros.

Un alumno te pregunta qué diferencias existen entre las variedades del español y cuál es la más importante de todas ellas. ¿Qué le respondes?

Le explicas que aunque existen diferencias estas nunca impiden la comunicación pero que ninguna es mejor que otra y que por eso no deben preocuparse.

Muestras a los estudiantes algunos enlaces y páginas de interés para que realicen búsquedas y podáis comentar y analizar al inicio de clase siguiente las diferencias que más les hayan asombrado.

Preguntas al grupo qué variedades conocen o estarían interesados en conocer y dedicas algunas sesiones a profundizar en ellas.

Le dices que hay tantas variedades como países y comunidades hablan español pero que no deben preocuparse porque en clase solo utilizaréis la tuya (variedad del profesor).

Incidentes debidos a la falta de comprensión de tus propósitos y métodos

Se refiere a aquellas situaciones conflictivas debidas a que el alumno no entiende bien cuáles son tus propósitos o qué sentido tiene lo que se hace en clase.

Un alumno te pide que expliques más gramática y que no pierdas el tiempo en clase con tantas actividades de conversación e interacción, ¿cuál es tu respuesta?

Recurre a algunos ejemplos para que comprenda que sólo con la gramática no podría comunicarse con eficacia.

Aceptas su petición y decides incluir más sesiones de gramática en tus clases.

Le dices que quien debe decidir lo que se enseña en clase es el profesor.

Tras explicarle que la gramática solo es una parte de la competencia comunicativa, introduces un método que combine actividades de conversación y análisis gramatical.

A pesar de haberlo trabajado antes, un alumno de nivel A2 vuelve a cometer errores gramaticales durante su exposición oral que ya tenía superados y que son propios del nivel inicial, ¿qué haces?

Hablas con él al final de la clase y le dices que revise sus conocimientos lingüísticos porque ha cometido faltas graves.

Elaboras una guía de estructuras gramaticales clave que cada cierto tiempo repasarás y completarás con tus alumnos, empleando ejemplos correctos e incorrectos producidos por ellos, y que por grupos analizarán tratando de detectar dónde y porqué se han producido los errores.

Corriges los errores en el momento en que se producen para que integre la corrección de manera inmediata a su exposición

Le explicas qué errores ha cometido y días después propones otra actividad similar que grabas con la intención de que pueda identificar sus propios fallos.

Incidentes relacionados con las normas de conducta en el aula

Se refieren a aquellas situaciones conflictivas ocasionadas por el comportamiento indisciplinado de uno o varios alumnos, que rompe o dificulta el clima de convivencia y/o aprendizaje de la clase.

Una alumna te pregunta en clase y en voz alta por qué debe estudiar español si es una lengua que no le va a servir para nada en el futuro, ¿qué respondes?

Le digo que no está obligada a estudiar la lengua española y que si quiere puede elegir cualquier otra opción.

Le muestro mi comprensión diciéndole que, aunque puede que así sea, siempre es bueno conocer otras lenguas para poder comunicarse con más personas.

Argumento que es uno de los tres idiomas más hablados del planeta y que entre los hispanohablantes el porcentaje de personas que hablan inglés es bajo. Por consiguiente, poder comunicarse en español puede ser muy ventajoso en un mundo globalizado como el nuestro.

Le propongo que ella y algún otro voluntario me ayuden a realizar un estudio sobre todo lo que no podemos hacer, o podemos hacerlo de manera muy limitada, si no hablamos español. Ese trabajo contará para la evaluación.

Acabas de empezar a trabajar en un centro de idiomas y un grupo de alumnos te critica diciendo que tus clases no son buenas porque no eres nativo, ¿cómo actúas?

Les explicas que ser nativo de una lengua no garantiza enseñarla bien. Les propones una actividad. Ellos prepararán una clase en base a su L1 para un alumno extranjero y un profesor que tú conoces, no nativo pero con experiencia pedagógica, preparará la misma clase para otro alumno nativo. Luego analizaréis conjuntamente quién lo hizo mejor y qué alumno aprendió más y porqué.

Te reúnes con ellos al final de la clase y solicitas que te aclaren por qué tienen esa impresión o qué puntos son los que no les gustan de tus clases.

Les dices que eres una persona muy bien cualificada, con mucha experiencia y que no deberían cuestionarte así ante el resto.

Les pides que te den tiempo porque no es un problema de conocimientos y saberes sino de adaptación al nuevo centro.

Incidentes debidos a la falta de coherencia entre enseñanza y evaluación.

Se refiere a aquellas situaciones conflictivas producidas por un desequilibrio entre los contenidos enseñados, (el modo de enseñarlos, la exigencia, los ejemplos, etc.) y los contenidos evaluados, de manera que el alumno considera que la enseñanza recibida no les ha preparado para afrontar la evaluación requerida.

Un alumno se queja de que en clase se trabaja mucho la expresión y comprensión oral y luego el examen es por escrito y de carácter muy conceptual, ¿cómo actúas ante esta situación?

Argumentas que escribir bien es una de las competencias que deben desarrollar y añades más sesiones dedicadas a la escritura en el aula.

Le dices que tiene razón y que te gustaría hacerlo de otro modo pero que debes respetar las directrices del centro.

Revisas con ellos algún examen y tratas de equilibrar los apartados correspondientes a la oralidad y a la escritura.

Le dices que una cosa son las actividades de clase y otra muy distinta las de evaluación.

Durante las sesiones de español compruebas que uno de tus alumnos se expresa con fluidez cuando interactúa en el aula, sin embargo ese mismo alumno no logra un buen resultado en la prueba de expresión oral porque no es capaz de construir un monólogo en torno al tema que le ha tocado. El alumno descontento te pide explicaciones, ¿qué haces?

Decides aumentar el porcentaje de la prueba destinado a la parte de la interacción en relación al de expresión oral (monólogo).

Le explicas que si no es capaz de construir un monólogo es porque no tiene un buen dominio de la lengua.

Le ofreces la posibilidad de repetir esa parte y después revisáis juntos los errores para reforzar sus competencias en esta destreza.

Le dices que construir un monólogo es una de las actividades que se incluyen en las pruebas de certificación y que por eso es necesario mantenerla y esforzarse por hacerlo bien.

Incidentes debidos a la desmotivación

Se refieren a aquellas situaciones conflictivas ocasionadas por la falta de interés de los alumnos.

Varios alumnos te comentan al inicio de la clase que el tema de la siguiente unidad (Unidad 5. Mar y montaña), resulta poco relevante para ellos, ¿qué haces ante esta situación?

Aceptas su petición y decides no desarrollar ese tema en clase, pero les pides que lo preparen por su cuenta por si les cae en alguna prueba de acreditación.

Explicas que cuanto más léxico y conocimientos tengan, mejor será para ellos pues el saber no ocupa lugar.

Les dices que es necesario enseñarlo porque el temario lo incluye y forma parte de los objetivos que tienen que alcanzar.

Pides que lo revisen en casa y que anoten las dudas o preguntas que tengan al respecto ya que en clase solo trataréis los apartados que hayan apuntado y que les parezcan más útiles.

Para practicar la expresión escrita pides a tus alumnos que escriban un correo electrónico a un amigo en el que describan los principales acontecimientos políticos que están ocurriendo en la ciudad. Sin embargo, un alumno te dice que él nunca escribiría un mail a un amigo en español para contarle eso, ¿qué haces?

Le dices que no está obligado a hacerlo y que si no quiere escribir el mail no lo haga.

Le explicas que, aunque sobre todo es una tarea para mejorar la expresión escrita en español, podría llegar a ocurrir un caso similar, y además les permite manejar un vocabulario distinto al habitual.

Le dices que es uno de los temas que entrará en el examen y que por eso debe practicarlo en clase.

Propones a tus alumnos confeccionar una lista de temas adecuados para escribir a los amigos y los distribuyes entre ellos.

Incidentes debidos a la gestión curricular

Se refiere a aquellas situaciones conflictivas que tienen su origen en aspectos relacionados con el qué, cuándo y cómo enseñar los contenidos (por ejemplo, la secuenciación de los contenidos, la administración del tiempo, el espacio, los recursos; la coordinación con otros compañeros, etc.)

Tus alumnos de nivel B1 te dicen que durante el curso pasado el profesor de español no les ha enseñado a diferenciar el pretérito perfecto del indefinido, ¿cómo actúas?

Les dices que no es un problema del profesor sino de ellos que son quienes deben mostrar sus dudas y dificultades.

Hablas con tu compañero y le comentas lo sucedido, de manera empática, ofreciéndote a buscar alguna solución.

Les dices que no se preocupen y repartes unas fotocopias para que puedan repasarlo en casa.

Dedicas una de tus sesiones a reforzar esos contenidos.

Comienzas el curso de español inicial y observas que la mayor parte de tus alumnos son estudiantes chinos que nunca antes han tenido contacto con la lengua española, ¿cómo te comunicas con ellos?

En español pero dejando la opción de que puedan tener a disposición diferentes ayudas o herramientas digitales con las que poder comprender y expresar los mensajes.

En español, aunque recurres al inglés o alguna otra lengua que tengáis en común para profundizar en las explicaciones.

Prioritariamente en español pero con la ayuda en todo momento de algún manual en el que haya traducciones español-chino.

En español, cuanto antes empiecen a habituarse a la lengua mejor.