

Reconfiguring Identity through the Influence of English in Students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí

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Abstract

This research took place in Universidad Nacional (UNA), Sarapiquí Campus and it proposes to find out how students at CUNLIMON deal with daily life activities into the English classroom in order to define their identity while interacting with others. As stated by Whorf (1997) "...People act about situations in ways which are like the ways they talk about them" (p.453). Identity, in other words takes place because these people do not know who they are. People see, perceive, and make sense of them and each other based on what the society wants them to see. This is called according to Isaacs as the perception of each other (p.48). The problem emerged in this research has been derived from the perspective students have from them as individual and as part of a group in order to identify what factors intervene to direct students create their own individual and group identity. Finally, it is mandatory to figure out the ways in which communication in English contributes to reconfigure the individual and group identity of those students enrolled in the English as a Foreign Language Major offered at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí. Additionally, these learners will identify each other with the Caribbean culture. Students will realize that the Costa Ricans' English culture emerged mainly from people who use to lived and actually live in Limon.

Key words: identity, individual identity, social identity, reconfiguring, perception, interaction

Resumen

Esta investigación se llevó a cabo en la Universidad Nacional, Campus Sarapiquí y se propone descubrir cómo los estudiantes de CUNLIMON ocupan de las actividades de la vida diaria en la clase de Inglés con el fin de definir su identidad mientras que interactúan con los demás. Según lo declarado por Whorf (1997) "... La gente actúa sobre situaciones de

formas en que hablan sobre sí mismos” (p.453) . Identidad, en otras palabras, se lleva a cabo debido a que estas personas no saben lo que realmente son. La gente ve, percibe y tienen sentido de ellos mismos based en lo que la sociedad quiere que ellos vean. Esto se llama según Isaacs como la percepción de la otra (p.48). El problema surgido en esta investigación se ha derivado de las perspectivas que los estudiantes tienen de ellos mismos como individuo y como parte de un grupo con el fin de identificar los factores que intervienen para dirigir a los estudiantes a crear su propia identidad tanto individual como de grupo. Por último, es obligatorio identificar las formas en que la comunicación en inglés contribuye a configurar la identidad individual y grupal de los alumnos matriculados en el diplomado en inglés como Lengua Extranjera ofrecido en el Campus de la UNA en Sarapiquí. Además, estos alumnos se identificarán entre sí con la cultura caribeña. Estos estudiantes se darán cuenta de que la cultura limonense (en el cual se habla inglés) surgió principalmente de las personas que solían vivir y viven aún en Limón.

Palabras claves: identidad, identidad individual, identidad social, reconfiguración, percepción, interacción

Introduction

Human beings construct their individual and group identity within society. They need to know how society functions for them to start acting accordingly. Barabino, Gilda and Malone, Kareen (2008) for instance state that we as human beings “don’t want to set ourselves apart and be different from the people we’re around. There is reluctance, or at least a problem, about being set apart, outside of the group, different or isolated in relationship to the others” (p. 487).

English as a foreign language is becoming a tool that is helping people to socialize. In this case, students at UNA’s Campus in Sarapiquí are reconfiguring their individual and group identity under the influence that English as a foreign language has on them. There is a desire from students

to belong to a different cultural and social group that shares common ideas. It is not something chosen, but rather something that is determined by group interactions. All what human beings do reveals who they are.

This research intends to show how English is an important aspect for reconfiguring students’ individual and group identity by interacting in real life situations. Based on the analysis of the information gathered from the instruments, this research intends to demonstrate that English is one factor for students to reconfigure their identity. The first section of the research tells the amount of time and the places where students speak English. It also shows the motivations for them to start using English.

The second section shows the role English has on individual and social interaction, the importance of English in students’ life, and how English has

changed students' personal perception. The way students perceive themselves and how other people perceive them.

Finally, the third section shows what students think about themselves, what they think about others, and how they want to be seen. In other words, how they perceive other people and how others perceive them. The research, in fact, reveals how some of the students agree that English has reconfigured their identity. However, it is necessary to take into account that the most important aspect is to make the students understand who they really are.

The Research Problem and its Relevance to Ethnolinguistic Studies

Students at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí are in the process of reconfiguring their individual and group identity under the influence of English which molds their interactions as EFL students. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to analyze whether or not English as a foreign language contributes to mold or reconstruct those students' individual and group identity.

General Objective

The main objective of this study is to determine the impact that English has on students' individual and group identity as a major in English as a Foreign Language at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the role of English as a foreign language in the students'

individual and social interactions both inside and outside the classroom, and on and off the Río Frío Campus.

2. To determine if English as a foreign language has contributed to reconfigure students' personal and group identity.
3. To find out whether or not English as a foreign language has changed students' personal perception.

Research Questions

What is the students' attitude toward the English language?

What aspects may help students to reconfigure their identity?

What is the students' perception about themselves before being in contact with the Foreign Language?

What is the students' perception about themselves after being in contact with the Foreign Language?

Is English changing students' personal perception?

Review of the Literature

Language must survive and grow. This process happens when each new generation acquires and learns it. Conversely, a language can be virtually destroyed if it is not learnt by other people. Language allows the construction and reconstruction of the human culture through interaction. Language is the medium by which people build personal relationships, express their emotions and aspirations, and explore their interests. Language is the primary means for people's own self definition. It helps them to understand who and how they perceive themselves to be. In this case, students from UNA's

campus in Sarapiquí are in the process of reconfiguring their individual and group identity under the influence of English as a foreign language. These students are consolidating their personal and social identity by interacting in and through speech. Furthermore, language is the main source of communication through which humans transmit who they are and negotiate how they want to be seen. Furthermore, linguistic change is an inevitable part of the constant evolution that human society undergoes.

Finally, people may say that they are all characterized by the language they speak. It definitely proclaims their identity to other people, and it shapes their minds along cultural barriers. Language is also the main way people use to connect with those they love, those they serve, and those they belong to. Human beings can find that the language barrier is a more immediate obstacle than cultural differences. And it is in learning and using another language that people come closest to the understanding of the cultural universe of other human beings.

English as a foreign language is a good source to motivate all those who speak other languages and to identify them as part of society. It is according to Bron (2002), "The awareness belonging or not belonging to a certain social strata, national group or gender, and the problems one faces while dealing with one's identity is often stated and commented upon in the stories people tell." (p. 1) Further, using English as a foreign language inside and outside the classroom may help students create their own knowledge about who they are and how to interact with each other in the society in which they establish

their own rules to enter into social contact among them and other people. As stated by Whorf (1997) "...People act about situations in ways which are like the ways they talk about them" (p.453). People see, perceive, and make sense of themselves and each other based on what the society wants them to see. This is called, according to Isaacs (1989), the perception of each other (p. 48).

Individual Identity

People's identity combines several features including individual and ethnic affiliation, the groups to which they belong, and the roles that are important to them. Each of these selves helps human beings to base their group and individual identity within societies. According to Deaux, "Personal identity refers to those traits and behaviors (e.g., kind or responsible) that the person finds self descriptive, characteristics that are typically linked to one or more of the identity categories" In Moran (2009, pp. 469, 470). Moreover, Berzonsky (1991) mentions that "identity is a self – relevant configuration or structure which serves as the conceptual frame for answering questions about the meaning, coherence, and purpose of life." (p. 2). Identity is in part, not a choice but it is determined by group identity. In other words, our entire world is oriented by a social and cultural knowledge in which people develop everyday. That is why Herda cites that:

The identity of an individual does not arise from a developmental process resulting in a separate unit that when united with many others makes up a

group, society, or community. Rather, the identity of an individual is found in a moral relationship with others which, when in aggregate form, makes up more than the sum of the membership. A full and mature sense of self does not stem from a developmental process grounded in individualism but instead arises from a recognition that in one's relationship with others there resides the possibility of seeing and understanding the world, and therefore one's self, differently. When I change, the rest of the world changes. (In Butler, 2009, p. 21).

In fact, individual identity always needs to be in contact with other people to build the group identity and be accepted by them in society. For this reason Riley (2007) says that, "an individual not only has personal identity but also group identity. Group identity is the sum of all the subgroups in which a person becomes a member." (p. 88).

English as a foreign language is a good source to motivate students from UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí, and obviously all those people who speak other languages to identify themselves as part of a society. In other words, there is a place for English as the global universal language in all countries around the world.

Social Identity

In addition, Tajfel mentions that a social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that

membership." (In Sacharin, Lee, and Gonzalez, 2009, p. 275).

Considering this definition, it is central to say that human beings have a sense of belonging to a society, and that they can live in interaction with it as individuals or as part of a group. As mentioned by Sacharin, Lee, and Gonzalez (2009), "Individuals belong to multiple social groups and, thus, have many social identities. Some of these social groups can have conflicting values and practices." (p. 276) Belonging to a certain social group helps people to reconstruct not only their personal identity but also their social identity. This process of reconstruction of identity involves creating cultural development. This cultural development according to Wieviorka, is "the outcome of permanent invention, in which identities are transformed and recomposed, and in which there is no principle of definitive stability, even if the newest identities are sometimes shaped in very old moulds..." (In Resnik, 2006, p. 588).

Language and Identity

According to Isaacs (1989), "language is a critical element in the making of every individual's basic group identity." (p. 101). He also defines language as "...a speech code that is used as an instrument for communication... Language defines what a person absorbs and experiences from his/her daily way of living." (pp. 96, 101). Furthermore, language also plays an important role in defining peoples' identity. Regarding language, Lynd adds that "The very acquisition of speech is a major factor in helping a child to know who he is" (in

Isaac 1989, p. 94). In other words, people can discover themselves, their family, their kind, their culture, and their view of the world.

In fact, human beings do not live in this world alone; they live within a language use and that is why language is their main means of communication, a universal communication. The main objective of the whole process of language is to enable people to use the language for communication. In addition to language, Sapir states "Human beings do not live in the objective world or alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society." (In Whorf, 1997, p.198). It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (In Whorf, 1997, p. 198).

To sum up, the entire world is oriented by a social and cultural knowledge in which people develop everyday. In some cases this development is conscious, but, in some others, it is unconscious. However, all what human beings do will show the way they are. In addition to what has been stated above, identity is not only a set of natural characteristics (learnt, acquired, or inherited) that define individual's

personality but also constitutes a way of living and being. In other words, these characteristics to some extent determine the type of person he/she is. Nonetheless, human beings are dynamic and can change their ways of life, appreciate different values, and identify with other social groups. They will never be able to escape some aspects of their original group's identity, but they will be able to acquire some new traits that characterize them.

Methodology

Quantitative research relies mainly on the collection and analysis of numerical information. The primary aim of this type of research is to collect, count, measure, and assess the meaning behind specific variable and ultimately devise statistical explanations from what the researchers have learned. Qualitative research, in contrast, focuses on smaller samplings with a richer depth of data drawn from unstructured informal interviews, questionnaires, and surveys.

Description of the Type of Research

This study is mainly a qualitative study because the researchers follow the principles of a qualitative research to collect data on the participants' natural environment. A survey, a questionnaire, and an unstructured informal interview will be applied for the purpose of collecting the data. This may be also considered an exploratory study because as Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2006) mention, "the purpose of the investigation is to know more about the phenomenon relatively

new in this context.” (pp. 258-259). The study relies on a qualitative and quantitative method because it is based on descriptive data; however, this research also requires the use of statistical procedures. This qualitative and quantitative research allows the collection of data in real life situations while observations are done.

Data Collection Instruments

For the purpose of the study, the following data collection instruments will be used: an informal unstructured interview, a survey, and questionnaires. These instruments will be used to find out whether or not English has an influence on students of English as a foreign language at UNA Sarapiquí Campus. These instruments will guide to clarify if English as a foreign language really helps to reconfigure English students' identity.

Informal Unstructured Interviews

This informal unstructured interview allows the researcher to investigate how English communication helps to reconfigure the way students perceive themselves and the form in which other people perceive them. It also allows researchers to investigate problems that are not directly observable. LeCompte and Preissle (2003) add that “Key informants are individuals who possess special knowledge, status, or communicative skills and who are willing to share knowledge and with others.” (p. 45). Definitely, these students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí who are majoring in English as a foreign language will be key- subjects for this study.

Questionnaire and Survey

The questionnaire and the survey will guide this research to get specific information about the influence that English has on the students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí who are taking the English major as a foreign language. In addition to the questionnaire and the survey, the students will answer an instrument called opinioner, this is a really helpful instrument because it lets the students to give free opinions about the topic being studied. In other words, the students will give their personal opinion about any topic. In this case, the students will give opinions about who they think they are.

Subjects of the Study and Research Setting

There is a total population of three hundred students enrolled in five different majors from which twenty students are taking a Diplomado in Conversational English. The population that will be studied is a group whose ages go from eighteen to forty three years old. Furthermore, the majority of the students work full time and the rest of the students receive economic support from their parents. Some of these students work for tourism travel agencies, public institutions such as Acueductos y Alcantarillados (AyA), Regional Educativa del Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP), banks, spare part companies, and other institutions. Additionally, the students' English proficiency level is low intermediate and belong to a joint program sponsored by UNA and Colegio Universitario de Limón¹ (CUNLIMON) each course lasts four months (three

quarters per year). The context in which students and teachers operate exerts a very real influence on what they do and how they develop. This development may take place while interacting with other people and under the influence of English inside the classroom in which they establish their own rules to enter into social contact among them and the professors.

Discussion and Analysis of the Research Findings

All data will be analyzed and processed by a triangulation method. The main purpose is to find out if the influence of English as a foreign language may facilitate students to reconfigure their individual and group identity. The information gathered from the instruments will be described, analyzed, and interpreted. This information will also be compared and contrasted to establish linkages and relationships between the information provided from the instruments to finally triangulate results to report the conclusions. In addition, the information will be organized by coding the different questions and answers as follows below.

English as a Factor of Identity Reconfiguration

Students are consolidating an individual and social identity, and it is the language which lets them reconstruct this identity. Therefore, interactions through speech with other people such as teachers, classmates, friends, and so on let them take referents for their differentiation as a social group. This study is applied to eleven students from the English as a foreign language

major at UNA Sarapiquí Campus, and it is necessary to mention that all of them see each other as part of their life. They often organize social activities together such as parties or birthdays; they share among them not only individual and group work but also they participate actively in the classroom.

The first two questions of the survey were asked to elicit information about how often and where students from UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí speak English. The information provided by the students is the starting point to see whether or not English becomes part of their daily lives and if it reconfigures students' individual and group identity. Following are the graphs with the information provided by the students.

Figure 1
Amount of Time Students Speak English

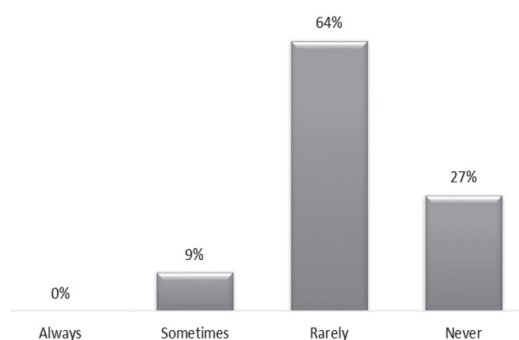
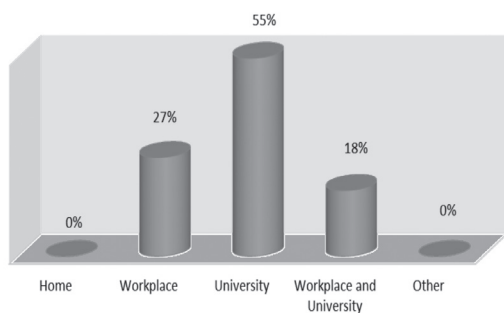


Figure 1 informs that 9% (one student) from a total population of eleven students think that they always speak English, 64% (seven students) think that they sometimes speak English, and finally, 27% (three students) of the student population think they rarely speak English. This means that English becomes a need for the students to be used in their daily activities. Taking into account the information

provided in this graph, it is necessary to find where and why these students use English. In addition, question number two arose due to the need of finding where and why students of English as a foreign language at UNA Sarapiquí Campus speak English.

Figure 2
Places where Students
Speak English Most of the Time



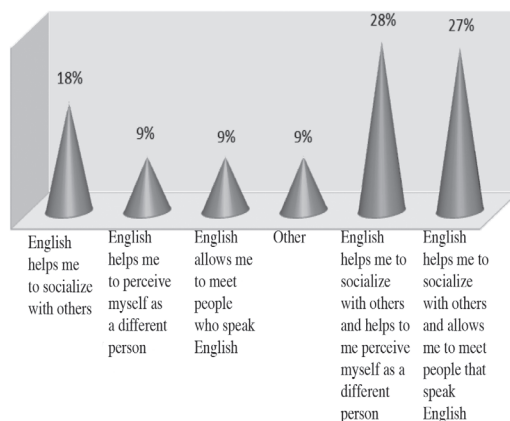
In Figure 2 it is seen that the university campus in Sarapiquí is the place where students speak English the most, which is represented by 55% (six students) of the student population, followed by 27% of the students who mentioned that they speak English at work (three students), and finally, 18% (two students) of the student population speak English in both places university and in their jobs.

This same figure shows that these students use English mainly in two different places. These two places are at the university campus sharing with the English teachers and classmates and at job, working and interacting with other people who speak English.

As it can be seen students use English as part of their daily life and it is a main factor for their students to start reconfiguring their individual and group identity. These English students

have to perform according to the environment presented at the moment. Figure 2 informs that English is part of students' daily lives. It is because they study English four days a week and use it for communication with their classmates and teachers, and some of them also use English in their jobs.

Figure 3
What Encourages Student
to Speak English



On the other hand, the information gathered from the questionnaire which is represented in Figure 3 shows that two students said that English helps them to socialize with other people, and this is represented by 18%; one student said that English helps him to be perceived as a different person, this is 9%; one more student mentioned that English allows him to meet people who speak English, which means a 9% another student said that there is another reason such as traveling abroad that motivates him to study English. Then, three students which is 28% from the total population agreed that English helps them not only to socialize with

other people but also to be perceived as different people.

On the other hand, three more students (27%) also agreed that English helps them to socialize with other people and that it allows them to meet people who speak English. In other words, English as a mean for communication is a factor of identity reconfiguration because it makes students to be perceived as different people by others. Second, English makes students to socialize with others and be part of different social group such as friends, coworkers, classmates, professors, and foreign people. English is becoming an important aspect in these English students' life, because thanks to English as a foreign language these students from UNA Sarapiquí Campus are getting into new social groups in which they are not only reconstructing their individual identity and the perception about themselves but also the group identity and the perception others might have about these English students.

In summary, it is seen that students speak English mostly when they are on Campus or in their jobs. English is part of students' daily lives not only because they study and speak a foreign language in the university campus or at job but also because English according to these students helps them to be different from other people English makes them be more sociable and allows them to meet other people who speak English. It is, in other words, that English makes students to reconstruct and adopt new types of personalities about who they are and the role they play when interacting with other people. These students adapt and mold their individual identity to a group identity in order to be

accepted or just because they have to function in society according to the rules already established.

To sum up, from the first figure it was shown that most of the students sometimes speak English. They said that it is because as shown in graph number two they have to use English not only at the university campus but also in their jobs. Due to this it is seen that English becomes a need for students to be used every day in their daily lives. Furthermore, these students use English most of the time where they work and where they study. They say they speak English sometimes because they do not handle the English language as well as they want, but they are in the process of learning English. Considering this, it is important to say that human beings have a sense of belonging into a society and that they can live in interaction with it as individuals or as part of a group. Taking into account that English is becoming part of students' daily lives, it was necessary to ask them about the reasons they find to speak English. According to the information gathered from this question in the third graph, it was evident how students from the English as a foreign language major agreed that English helps them to be more sociable with others, meet people, and one of the most important point in this research which helps a lot to prove that English influences these students to reconfigure their individual and social identity is that these foreign language makes them to perceive themselves as different people.

The Role of English in Individual and Social Interaction

English is a very important aspect in students' life for communication, and it is a significant point to take into account to find out whether or not English as a foreign language helps students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí to reconstruct their individual and group identity, it is necessary to look at the Figure 4.

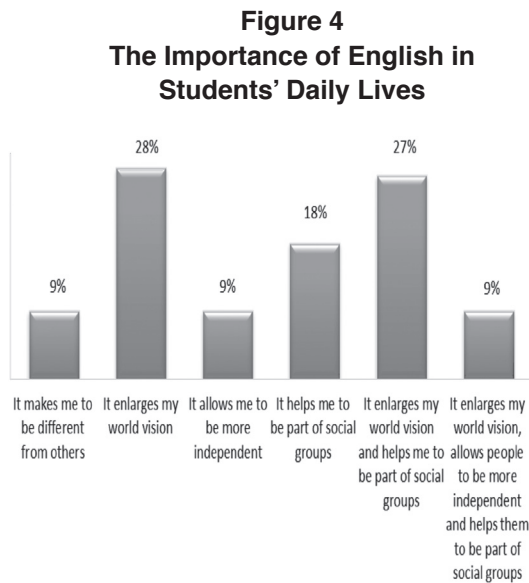


Figure 4 informs that one student thinks that English makes him to be different from other people; it is represented by 9%. Three students mentioned that English expands their worldview, and it is represented by 28%. One pupil said that English allows him to be more independent, which is represented by 9%. Then 18% of the total population, which represent two students, mentioned that English help them to be part of new social groups. In addition, three students agreed that English expands their world vision and

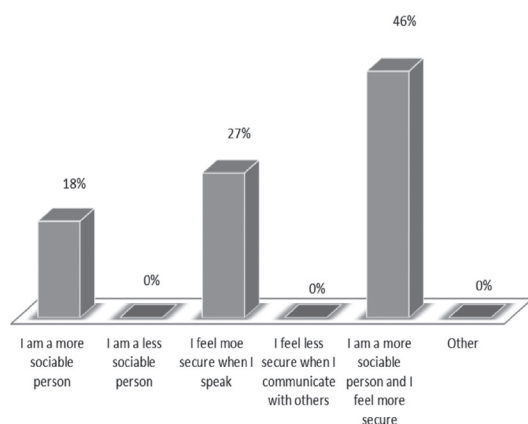
make them be part of social groups, and it is represented by a 27% of the sample population, and finally, one student said that English enlarges his/her world view, helps him to be more independent, and also helps people to be part of different social groups.

In summary, one the most important aspects regarding to the students' perception about themselves under the influence that English has on their daily lives is that through English they become part of new social groups in which they will behave according to those groups' needs. It is a social process in which individuals reconstruct what they want to be; however, this process is moulded by others and defined by society. Each identity includes a selection of social and cultural identities such as traditions, customs, religions, beliefs, language, and each of them helps individuals be defined and perceived according to the image he/she projects to society.

Concerning the question of English as a mean that changes students' personal perception, it is seen that seven students agreed that English has changed their personal perception, which means 64% of the total population, and only four of them (36%) agreed that English has not caused any change to their lives. These facts show how English has made some changes in the majority of the students' lives. This means that most of the students are in the process of reconstruction of their individual and group identity within society. According to the information, these students of English as a foreign language think their personal perception has changed. Once it was found that there were some changes in students' personal perception, it was

mandatory to look for those changes to validate that English not only plays an important role in students' individual and social interaction but also drives students to reconstruct who they are in order to define a social perception about them. That is why the students were asked about the type of changes English has made in their lives.

Figure 5
Changes English has made in students since they entered to the English major



As it is shown in Figure 5, two students think they are more sociable since they entered to study English at UNA Sarapiquí Campus it is in other words an 18% of the population sampled; moreover, three students mentioned that they feel more secure when they speak English to other people which means a 27% of the total population, and then five students agreed that they feel more sociable and secure when they speak to other people; it is represented by a 46%; and finally, one student who represents 9% of the student population mentioned that English has caused other type of changes in his life. In addition, it is seen from one way to another that English is changing students'

personal perception. This way, it can be seen how individual identity is becoming different in students' lives. Because of English, students are more sociable, and they feel more secure when interacting with other people.

To conclude, and prove that students' personal perception has changed due to English, the students were asked whether or not English has changed their perception as an individual or as a member of a group. Most of them said that English helped them to the reconstruction of an individual and group identity. Ten students from a total population of eleven agreed that English has helped them to be perceived as someone different from other people this is equal to a 91%, and only one student mentioned that English has not produced any change to his life. This is only 9% of the total percentage. Taking into consideration the result, it is necessary to mention that the majority of the student population is aware of what English is causing to them. All of them agree that English is one of the most important aspects in the reconstruction of an individual and group identity.

To sum up, English as a means for communication is a tool for students to get into new social groups. As shown in graph number four, English has a big influence in students' life. It is because English helps them to be part of new social groups. This means that English has caused a positive impact in their lives. These students become more sociable, and the way they see the world is totally different from the way they used to perceive it before. In addition and considering the information provided by the students in graph number four, the students also believe they have become more knowledgeable,

sociable, independent, and talkative. In graph number five, it is noticeable that English has changed most of the students' personal perception. This change according to graph number six is for instance that they perceive themselves as more sociable and secure when they speak with other people.

In fact, this information shows that English as a foreign language is influencing and reconfiguring students' individual and group identity. Each of them is aware of their own reconstruction of identity since the moment they entered to this English major. This means for example that 90% of the students' population agreed that English has created some changes to them.

The influence of English on Personal Perception

The way we see the world is totally different from the way other people can see it. Furthermore, it is how people perceive the world and how they interact with each other. It is evident that members from different communities do not have a clear concept or perception about who they are and what specific functions they have to develop in their inner groups. People develop according to what they perceive; this perception makes reference to signs, gestures, language, or culture; it is because they grow up within society. The way humans communicate with other people through gestures is in some cases clearer than the way they speak. In this case language becomes universal through the use of non verbal communication.

Considering the information gathered from the questionnaires, surveys,

and the opinioners these students of English as a foreign language at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí agreed that English has changed the way they perceive themselves now. English has been a door for them and for communication with other people who live in countries where English is the spoken language. Most of these students use English in their work places.

On the other hand, taking into account two different opinioners the students' information shown that some of them consider themselves as unique people, who were quiet and timid before getting into the English major; however, they think they are more sociable people due to the English language. Additionally, other students mentioned that they use English to communicate and know about others' culture and languages and meet people who speak English. Some other students said that they are influenced not only by English to change their lives, but also by society. According to an answer given by a student in one opinioner the student thinks he has his own identify due to the English language and the values his family taught to him. In addition, some students also motioned that before entering to this they were shy, but through the time their personalities changed because they had to be in contact with a lot of people and they became part of their life.

Finally, they consider themselves as talkative people, who will become good English teachers, tourist guides or just speaker of English as a foreign language. They also perceive their classmates as funny, cooperative, friendly, responsible, good, and positive. In addition to English as an important aspect for reconfiguring people's identity,

Fatini (1988) says, "The language we acquired influences the way we construct our vision of the world. And if this is so, then, most probably different languages provide different visions of that same world." (p.14) Taking into consideration this idea people may consider themselves as people who can change according situations and those changes may define who those people really are.

Conclusion

Results of the Analysis

From this study the following results aroused. By the application of the different instruments to collect the data and according to the graphs number three, five, six, and seven it was found that students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí enrolled in the English major are in the process of reconfiguring their individual and group identity. These students in fact mentioned that English has changed their personal perception about what they think they were before and what they think they are now, in other words they perceive themselves as more sociable, independent, and secure people who can share with others without being afraid of socialize and show up who they are. It is clearly shown that most of the students perceive themselves as someone different since the moment they enter to the English major at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí.

One more significant aspect is that, as part of this individual and social identity reconfiguration the majority of these students consider that they are becoming more sociable people when

speaking to other classmates. Some of them mentioned that they are more sociable due to the English language they use, not only in the university campus, but also at the places where they work.

It is also seen that English becomes part of students' daily lives because it is used not only as part of their daily communication, but also English helps them to define who they are.

The use of English when interacting with other people reinforces what Riley (2007) states about identity, he states that "...identities are the product of social interaction" (p.16). Language also plays an important role in defining peoples' identity because it contributes to the development of an individual's identity. Language is not only an instrument, but an essential element of one's knowledge and identity; English as a foreign language help these students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí to define who they are.

Findings

To this point, the analysis of data about how the individual and group identity of the students in the English Major at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí is being reconfigured under the influence of English, has revealed some important features in relation to identity formation.

- First of all, the analysis has shown that students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí think English is important because it makes them to be part of new social groups and extend their worldview.
- Second, the analysis also showed that students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí have changed their

personal perception due to the English language.

- Third, it is demonstrated that these English students have become more sociable and they feel more secure when talking to other people.
- Fourth, English makes these English students to be perceived as different people.
- Fifth, they use English to communicate and know about others' culture and languages and meet people who speak English.
- Sixth, these students added that they have been influenced by English and society to change their personal perception.
- Seven, English is an important aspect that guides students to reconfigure their individual and group identity. English is important due to the fact that these students speak English to interact with other people from different social groups and this interaction helps them to define who they want to be.

To sum up, all type of knowledge is provided by group interactions in which according to Riley (2007) "...participants establish intersubjectivity to enter into social contact with another. This process helps individuals for the formation of their inner identity."(p.33) Language contributes to the formation of the development of the individual and group identity. Fantini (1988) for instance states that "Contact with individuals of other language and culture backgrounds not only opens a door to exploring another worldview but also ultimately provokes questions about one's own values and assumptions. Intercultural exposure provides opportunities not only for learning

about others but also for gaining new perspectives on oneself." (p.16)

Identity according to Riley (2007) is "A quality which is ascribed to an individual human being by other human beings" (p.86). It is in fact, mentioned that the speaker's social interaction in the construction of identity is fundamental to all social interaction and to the construction of our society and culture.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Considering that students at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí are in the process of learning English as a foreign language it is necessary to point out that this process is an important part in defining students' individual and group identity. It is not only due to the many English classes that the students receive in the Sarapiquí Campus, but also when these students use the English language at work places as a symbol of differentiation from other people; even, students at other majors.

In addition, it was evident that the English major as a foreign language at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí has changed students' perspectives about themselves. In other words, English has positive influence on students' identity reconfiguration. These students become more sociable in the classroom, in the campus, and at work places. They use English for communication and for getting in contact with other people.

In fact, and according to the students' own perception most of them agree that they are becoming someone different, that they are perceived by classmates and people in society as different people since the moment

they enter to the English major as a foreign language at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí.

Finally and for further researches, it is recommended to ask other students from other majors their opinions about what perception they have on students of English as a foreign language at UNA's Campus in Sarapiquí. Moreover, it would be mandatory to video tape or write down through field notes students' daily lives not only in the University Campus, but also in the different places where these students work and what they do when they are not studying or working. In other words, observing these students doing many things in society.

Another aspect to take into consideration is that it would be very helpful to take students into a place where they can use their foreign language and again take notes to compare and contrast both ways of developing in two different conditions: the Spanish and then the English environment.

Finally, through the organization of some social events with the group (it could be inside the classroom or outside of it) it would be interesting to see or video tape how the English students interact with each other. In addition, more time would be appropriate to go deeper through this study because searching about individual or group identity in just one semester can cause a lack of information needed for further researches. Then, the last thing to be considered is that for getting more specific information and to make sure about the results it would be advisable to investigate at least two different groups in order to see the differences or similarities from each of them.

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Other sources

http://www.sirzee.itcr.ac.cr/modules.php?op=modload&name=PRINCIPAL_CANTONES&file=Sarapiqui.

Appendix

Research Problem

This study aims to investigate how the individual and group identities of the students in the English Major at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí are being reconfigured under the influence of English that molds their interactions as EFL students.

Objectives of the Problem

General Objective: The main objective of this study is to determine the impact that English has on students' new identity

of the English Foreign Language major at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí.

Specific Objectives:

1. To know how English reconfigures the students' new identity while they are in the university Campus.
2. To discover how students deal with English as part of their daily lives.
3. To know how English has been a means to reconfigure students' personal identity.
4. To know what perception students have about themselves as English speakers
5. To distinguish the role English plays on students' lives.

English as a Factor of Identity Reconfiguration

Objective

The purpose of this instrument is to collect data to determine whether or not English has an impact on EFL students at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí for reconfiguring their identity.

Questions to Be Answered

- Does English have an impact on students' identity?
- What motivates students to study English?
- Are there factors that encourage students to communicate in English with their classmates and teachers? If so, how these factors mold their identity?
- What is the students' attitude toward the English language?
- What aspects may help students to reconfigure their identity?

Appendix 1

Cuestionario

1. ¿Qué tipos de cambios cree usted que el inglés le ha causado como persona desde que ingresó a esta carrera?

- Soy más sociable
 Soy menos sociable
 Me siento más seguro al comunicarme con otros
 Me siento más inseguro al comunicarme con otros

Otro:

2. ¿Qué lo motiva a estudiar inglés como lengua extranjera?

- Me permite conocer personas de habla inglesa de diferentes partes del mundo
 Saber que me puedo comunicar en otro idioma
 Me ayuda a definirme más como persona
 Me brinda más oportunidades de trabajo

Otro:

3. ¿Qué lo motiva a hablar en Inglés con sus compañeros?

- Me ayuda a ser más sociable con otras personas
 Me permite percibirme como alguien diferente
 Me permite conocer gente de otros países que hablan en inglés

Otro:

4. ¿Cree usted que estudiar inglés hace que la sociedad lo vea diferente?

Sí No ¿Por qué?

5. ¿Cree usted que el Inglés le ha permitido percibirse como alguien diferente?

Sí No ¿Por qué?

The Role of English in Individual and Social Interaction

Objective

The purpose of this questionnaire is to know the students' insights regarding the use of English for reconfiguring their identity.

Specific Objectives

1. To relate students' identity to the use of English while talking to their classmates and teachers.
2. To determine the role English has on students' identity.
3. To determine if students are aware of the role English has on their daily lives.

Questions to Be Answered

- How do students deal with the English language?
- May English affect the way students talk to other classmates?
- May English change students' perception about themselves?
- What is the role English has on students' daily lives?
- Where do these students speak English?
- When do these students speak English?
- How often do these students speak English?

Appendix 2

Encuesta

¿Qué tan a menudo habla usted Inglés?
Siempre () algunas veces ()
rara vez () nunca ()

¿En qué lugar habla usted Inglés con mayor frecuencia?
Casa () trabajo ()
universidad () Otro ()

¿Por qué es importante el inglés en su diario vivir?

- () Me hace ser diferente
 - () Amplia mi visión de mundo
 - () Me permite ser más independiente
 - () Me ayuda a ser parte de nuevos grupos sociales
- Otro:

¿Cree que el inglés ha cambiado la percepción que usted tiene de si mismo como persona?

- Sí () ¿Cómo?
- No () ¿Por qué?

¿Cree usted que el inglés ha afectado su forma de hablar o dirigirse hacia otras personas?

- Sí () ¿Cómo?
- No () ¿Por qué?

¿Cómo se siente usted cuando habla inglés con sus compañeros?

- Cómodo () ¿Por qué?
- Incómodo () ¿Por qué?

¿Cómo se siente usted cuando habla inglés con sus profesores?

- Cómodo () ¿Por qué?
- Incómodo () ¿Por qué?

The influence of English on Personal Perception

General Objective:

The purpose of this instrument is to collect data regarding whether or not English students at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí reconfigure their identity under the influence of the English language.

Specific Objectives

1. To know if students are aware of English as a fundamental characteristic for adapting their new identity.

2. To find out if English has changed the students perception of themselves.

3. To find out what is the students' personal perception.

Questions to Be Answered

What is the students' attitude toward the English language?

What aspects may help students to reconfigure their identity?

What is the students' perception about themselves?

What is the perception of other students enrolled in other majors to the students majoring in English?

Appendix 3

Observation

General Objective

The purpose of this instrument is to check the aspect that may determine whether or not English is an important aspect for reconfiguring the identity of the EFL students at UNA's campus in Sarapiquí.

Specific Objectives

To check the aspects that may help students to communicate with others and at the same time help them to reconfigure their identity.

N°	Indicators	Yes	No	Sometimes
1	The teacher develops communicative activities that let students work in group or individually.			
2	Students communicate in English with the professor and other classmates freely.			
3	Students seem to be comfortable when speaking in English to others.			
4	Students communicate in Spanish with their classmates and teachers.			
5	The students participate actively into the different activities.			
6	The teacher develops activities according to the students' levels and ages.			
7	The teacher addresses in English to the students.			
8	The student's reaction is positive when the teacher corrects their mistakes.			
9	The student's reaction is negative when the teacher corrects their mistakes.			
10	The students are able to express their ideas in English.			
11	The students seem to be comfortable during the English class.			
12	The students seem to be uncomfortable during the English class.			
13	The students are able to understand teachers and classmates when talking in English.			
14	The students address in English to the teacher.			

Note: Some of the instruments were applied and written in Spanish due to the native language of the students. This helped the researchers to better elicit the information from the learners.