

Expanding the Margin for Tolerance of Linguistic Deviation: Developing Sociolinguistic Awareness through Digital Tools in a Spanish University

Ampliando la conciencia sociolingüística y tolerancia a la variación a través de herramientas digitales en una universidad española

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ABSTRACT: Over nine academic years (2016–2025), the elective module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* at the University of Zaragoza (Spain) implemented an educational intervention combining ethnographic action research with digital pedagogy. Grounded in Global Englishes pedagogy (Galloway & Rose, 2015), this study examines whether digitally scaffolded individual and collective reflection can reshape higher education students' attitudes toward linguistic diversity and shift their evaluations of non-standard geographical varieties beyond deficit views. Methodologically, the study draws on ethnographic action research (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003), combining ethnographic observation—via field notes and student reflections—with cyclical action research experimentation. Digital tools such as Moodle, Socrative, Google Workspace, and AnswerGarden were integrated to foster participation, self-regulation, and collaborative learning. Additionally, the EXPERTIA programme connected students with alumni to provide professional insights into English as a lingua franca in global trade. Findings indicate a significant attitudinal shift: students moved from perceiving non-standard varieties as deviations to appreciating them as legitimate, culturally embedded forms of English. Digital tools supported this transition by making reflection visible, immediate, and collaborative. Despite context-specific limitations, this model offers a transferable framework for higher education settings aiming to integrate sociolinguistic awareness with professional readiness.

KEYWORDS: ethnographic action research; English varieties; digital pedagogy; reflective learning; *language attitudes*.

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RESUMEN: Durante nueve cursos académicos (2016-2025), la asignatura optativa Variedades geográficas de la lengua inglesa, ofertada en el grado en Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad de Zaragoza (España), sirvió de marco para una intervención educativa que integra la investigación-acción etnográfica con la pedagogía digital. Basado en la pedagogía de los Global Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2015), este estudio examina si la reflexión individual y colectiva guiada a través de herramientas digitales puede transformar las actitudes de los estudiantes universitarios hacia la diversidad lingüística y superar la visión deficitaria de las variedades geográficas no estándar. Metodológicamente, el estudio se basa en la investigación-acción etnográfica (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003), combinando la observación etnográfica —a través de notas de campo y reflexiones de los estudiantes— con la experimentación cíclica propia de la investigación-acción. Se integraron herramientas digitales como Moodle, Socrative, Google Workspace y AnswerGarden para fomentar la participación, la autorregulación y el aprendizaje colaborativo. Además, a través del programa EXPERTIA, se conectó a los estudiantes con antiguos alumnos que ejercen en el comercio internacional para aportar una visión profesional sobre el inglés como lengua franca en el mercado global. Los resultados indican un cambio actitudinal significativo: los estudiantes pasaron de percibir las variedades no estándar como desviaciones a valorarlas como formas legítimas del inglés, con un profundo arraigo cultural. Las herramientas digitales respaldaron esta transición al hacer que la reflexión fuera visible, inmediata y colaborativa. A pesar de las limitaciones propias de aplicarse en una sola asignatura, este modelo ofrece un marco transferible para entornos de educación superior que busquen vincular la conciencia sociolingüística con la preparación profesional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: investigación-acción etnográfica; variedades del inglés; Pedagogía digital; aprendizaje reflexivo; Language attitudes.

1.- Introduction

This article reports on an educational intervention within the English Studies degree programme at the University of Zaragoza (Spain), where I have taught the elective module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* for nine academic years (2016–2017 to 2024–2025). During this period, I adopted the dual role of lecturer and researcher and compiled field notes, classroom observations, and students' reflective entries. Students' reflections—collected via the university Moodle platform and complementary open-source digital environments—form an ethnographic archive of practice. This paper documents the intervention and examines how the systematic use of digital tools to scaffold individual and collective reflection may contribute to greater tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of geographical varieties of English beyond those most commonly positioned as standard (Standard British English and General American English).

It has been generally accepted that English is internationally recognised as the *lingua franca* in many contexts (Mauranen, 2017; Tan, 2023). It has been present as an official language and/or second language (India, Singapore, Nigeria, Ghana) or taught as a foreign language (Spain, Brazil, to name a few) since the second half of the last century (Crystal, 2003). The dominance of the English language cannot be understood without considering colonialism and the political, military, and economic hegemony of English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The global position of English has favoured its use as a lingua franca in a wide range of contexts. The expansion of English is partly explained by the fact that non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers and frequently use English to communicate with interlocutors who do not share a first language (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011). Nevertheless, in many educational settings, learners continue to orient towards Standard British English and Received Pronunciation as default benchmarks (Gómez Alberto, 2024). This raises a central question for English Studies: what is meant by ‘standard’, and on what grounds are particular native norms privileged over others?

2.- Justification

The rationale for this study rests on three interconnected needs. First, expanding awareness of the wide varieties of English is essential if future professionals are to develop greater tolerance towards linguistic diversity. Second, teachers must engage in reflective practice to ensure their pedagogy remains responsive, evidence-based, and innovative. Third, learners themselves benefit from structured opportunities to cultivate reflective habits, enabling them to interrogate assumptions and consolidate knowledge. Taken together, these dimensions provide the foundation for the present intervention and clarify its relevance to higher education contexts.

2.1 *Expanding linguistic tolerance through greater awareness of Englishes*

Although scholars often describe around 15-20 codified national varieties of English, the World Englishes tradition recognises dozens more, and the number of localised varieties and dialects is far greater (Kortmann, Lunkenheimer & Ehret, 2020). Kachru’s *Three Circles model* (1985) distinguishes i) Inner Circle Englishes (e.g. English is L1 in Great Britain), ii) Outer Circle institutionalised Englishes (e.g. postcolonial Englishes like Indian English) and iii) Expanding Circle learner varieties (e.g. Japan). If the scope is broadened to include nativised and institutionalised Englishes, more than 70 are commonly identified, each with distinctive phonology and lexis and, in some cases, grammar (Schneider, 2007; Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008; Seoane & Suárez-Gómez, 2016). Table 1 below summarises commonly recognised geographic varieties of English by region and by specialised researchers.

	Geographical Varieties Commonly Recognised	Researchers
British Isles	British English (Received Pronunciation, regional varieties), Irish English, Scottish English	Trudgill & Hannah (2001); Hickey (2014)
North America	American English, Canadian English, Caribbean Englishes (e.g., Jamaican, Barbadian)	Wolfram & Schilling (2016); Schneider (2007)
Australasia & Pacific	Australian English, New Zealand English, Fiji English	Burridge & Kortmann (2008); Trudgill & Hannah (2017)
Africa	South African English, Nigerian English, Ghanaian English, Kenyan English	Mesthrie (2006); Schneider (2007)
South Asia	Indian English, Pakistani English, Sri Lankan English, Bangladeshi English	Kachru (1985); Mesthrie & Bhatt (2008); Suárez-Gómez, & Seoane (2023)
Southeast Asia	Singapore English, Malaysian English, Philippine English	Brown (1988); Schneider (2007); Kirkpatrick (2007)
East Asia	Hong Kong English, Chinese English (emerging variety), Japanese English (EFL-influenced)	Bolton (2003); Schneider (2007)
Middle East	Gulf Englishes (e.g., UAE, Saudi Arabia), Israeli English (emerging)	Gallagher, (2025); Jenkins (2015); Kirkpatrick (2007)

Table 1. Commonly recognised national varieties of English by region and specialised researcher

Among many other aspects about the notion of standard English, Trudgill and Hannah (2001), for instance, discuss in their seminal work on varieties of English around the world how some features of West African English, since English is used as an official language in many countries for a varied range of reasons, may actually facilitate learning and communication among West African speakers more effectively than British English. In that case, these researchers claim that the difficulty that British listeners might have in understanding West African English is arguably not decisive, just as American difficulties with Scottish English are not taken as a reason to alter the Scottish variety. Still, the comparison is not exact: Scottish English is spoken natively and thus carries a legitimacy that West African or Indian English may be denied, and many West Africans and Indians see themselves as aspiring towards a British norm. Trudgill and Hannah (2001) maintain that while there are no simple answers, deviations from British English in African or Indian varieties should

not be considered problematic as long as they are not too pronounced. Native English speakers should also be prepared to accommodate non-native varieties—just as visitors to Scotland adapt to Scottish English—rather than insisting on “more English” English in those regions.

In Spain, English learners have traditionally been exposed to Standard British English rather than to General American English or other native varieties (Escribano & Herrando-Rodrigo, 2019). Although access to global English-language media is rapidly diversifying students’ input, Standard British English is still frequently treated as the default professional and academic benchmark in many European university contexts. For this reason, the module aims to raise awareness among English Studies students—many of whom intend to become teachers, translators, or language mediators—of how attitudes towards particular varieties and their speakers shape perceptions of legitimacy and expertise.

2.2 The value of reflection in teaching practice

A second concern this study addresses is the need to promote reflective practices. The call for teachers to become reflective practitioners is grounded in the recognition that teaching is not a static craft but a dynamic and context-dependent practice. Dewey (1933) was among the first to argue that reflective thinking is essential for linking experience with learning, while Schön (1983) later emphasized how professionals develop expertise through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Building on this tradition, Brookfield (2017) highlights the importance of critical reflection for uncovering assumptions that shape teaching practices, especially in higher education. Evidence from Gil’s (2023) doctoral research shows that teachers often rely on intuition rather than firmly established pedagogical principles, leading to inconsistent classroom results. Reflection provides the bridge between theory, research, and practice, enabling educators to align their intuitive decisions with evidence-based strategies and to justify their choices to students, colleagues, and stakeholders.

Reflective teaching also enhances professional self-efficacy. Teachers who critically examine their classroom practices gain deeper awareness of how their methods influence learning outcomes, which in turn fosters confidence and the capacity to innovate. For instance, Gil (2023) shows that when teachers systematically gather evidence—through student feedback, observation notes, or Google Apps for Education tools—they can redesign activities that did not meet expectations and adapt them to diverse classroom realities. Reflection, therefore, becomes a cycle of experimentation, evaluation, and refinement, allowing teachers to better respond to learner needs. This resonates with Brookfield’s (2017) argument that reflection empowers teachers to identify not just what works, but why it works, and under what conditions.

A further motivation for reflective practice is its role in sustaining professional growth. Dewey (1933) noted that, without reflection, experience risks becoming routine rather than educative. Reflective practice supports the integration of experience and theory and can

also promote collaboration and shared inquiry when reflections are made visible through peer discussion, observation protocols, or professional learning communities (Brookfield, 2017; Gil, 2023).

2.3 How lecturers could promote reflective learning among students

Just as teachers benefit from reflective practice, students also need structured opportunities to develop reflective learning habits. Dewey (1933) insisted that education becomes truly meaningful when learners are guided to reflect on their experiences. More recently, Brookfield (2017) has argued that reflection equips learners to interrogate their assumptions and engage critically with knowledge. Gil (2023) confirms these insights, showing that students become more autonomous, critical, and metacognitively aware when reflection is systematically embedded in instruction. Promoting reflective learning requires designing tasks, tools, and classroom cultures that help students make their thinking visible and evaluate their own progress.

One effective approach is the use of Visible Thinking routines (Ritchhart & Churchman 2020) developed by Project Zero. Teachers can scaffold these routines with graphic organisers or digital platforms so that learners leave a trace of their evolving ideas, which they can revisit and refine (Gil, 2023). Digital tools also play a pivotal role in promoting reflection. Platforms such as class blogs or Google Workspace for Education allow students to share work, comment on peers' contributions, and receive feedback in real time (Gil, 2023). This transforms reflection into a social practice: learners not only consider their own performance but also engage in collaborative meaning-making. By uploading drafts, final products, and reflections onto Moodle or external repositories, students create portfolios that document their learning journey. These portfolios, when combined with rubrics and self-assessment checklists, make progress visible and highlight areas for improvement (Brookfield, 2017; Gil, 2023).

Promoting reflective learning also requires the teacher to model. When teachers make their own reflective processes explicit—by explaining why they designed a task a certain way or how they adapted it in response to student needs—they provide students with a living example of reflective practice in action (Brookfield, 2017; Gil, 2023). This modelling demonstrates that reflection is not an add-on but a central strategy for learning and growth.

Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine whether integrating digital tools into the module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* at the University of Zaragoza (Spain) can promote students' reflection and, in turn, foster greater tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of English varieties beyond the standard forms of British and American English. For that purpose, the following section outlines the materials, data sources, and analytical procedures.

3.- Materials and methods

For the sake of clarity, this section presents three subsections: 3.1. Materials, 3.2. Methods, and 3.3. Data analysis.

3.1. Materials

This subsection is divided into three parts: the context and participants, the course design and assessment, and the data sources.

3.1.1 Context and participants

This teaching intervention took place within the English Studies degree at the University of Zaragoza. Within it, the core curriculum does not include a dedicated sociolinguistics module. While optional provision is strong in literature- and film-oriented subjects or modules, linguistics-related options tend to focus on areas such as translation, pragmatics of communication, and advanced academic communication rather than on sociolinguistic variation. In this context, *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* provides a distinctive space for students to engage critically with the social and cultural dimensions of English, including how language evaluations intersect with discrimination based on accent and ‘non-standard’ speech (i.e., glottophobia). Accordingly, the module offers participants curricular opportunities to reflect on linguistic diversity beyond purely structural descriptions.

The elective module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* is typically taken in the third or fourth year. Across nine academic years (2016–2017 to 2024–2025), total enrolment amounted to 325 students (see Table 2 below). In line with the university’s ethical code and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), no personally identifiable data is reported; student feedback excerpts are anonymised and coded by cohort and response order. For this reason, no personal data (e.g., age, gender, nationality) is reported. It should nonetheless be noted that all participants were in the final years of the undergraduate degree, which may contribute to greater maturity in their responses and engagement with the learning process.

Academic year	Number of students enrolled in the module
2016-17	34
2017-18	34
2018-19	45
2019-20	65
2020-21	29
2021-22	25
2022-23	38
2023-24	26
2024-25	29
Total students enrolled	325

Table 2. Total number of students registered in this module from 2016 to 2025.

3.1.2 Course design and assessment

The module is structured around four content units. These units are mapped onto the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which provide the framework for the module's social and civic orientation (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>):

- Unit 1. English as an International Language and global vehicle of communication: English as Lingua Franca, English Foreign Language and World Englishes.
- Unit 2. The main Standard Varieties of English. Language and nation. Linguistic Symbolic value.
- Unit 3. English in North-America. History, diversity, and change.
- Unit 4. Other varieties: World Englishes.

The course content has not changed over these nine years reported in this paper, to fit the quality criteria of the Spanish agency ANECA (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation), even though the ethnographic action research conducted has triggered the incorporation of new digital tools for the sake of students' self-reflection and deep learning¹

Module information, handouts, readings, and activity submissions are accessible from the Moodle page of the module (digital teaching and learning space provided by the University of Zaragoza):

1 ANECA is an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Universities. Its responsibilities include evaluating, certifying, and accrediting the Spanish higher education system—covering university programmes, faculty accreditation, and higher education institutions—with the aim of improving quality and aligning the system with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).



Image 1: Screen capture of the module Moodle page (2024–2025).

It should now be noted that students can pass this module by choosing two different assessment paths: (i) final assessment—consisting of a final exam—and (ii) continuous assessment. To participate in continuous assessment, students must complete all tasks listed in a shared course chronogram (class diary), accessible through a Google document that records the evolving course development (see 2025–2026 chronogram: <https://acortar.link/aTG6wm>). Each teaching session begins by revisiting the chronogram, which helps students take responsibility for monitoring completed tasks, ongoing work, and expected learning outcomes. Four tasks are assessed with a quantitative mark or grade (described below); the remaining activities consist of reflective tasks hosted on Moodle and other digital spaces (see Section 4).

Task 1. In October, students select a case study or English variety from those offered by the teaching staff for their in-class oral presentation. The presentation, delivered individually in English, is prepared under the lecturer’s supervision. One week before the scheduled presentation, students submit the document they have prepared (preferably a PowerPoint file) to the lecturer. Oral presentations take place from late November onwards. After delivering the presentation, students upload the final version of their visual support to the course’s Moodle page in the designated space (30 points). In addition, the feedback document for all presentations must also be uploaded to Moodle as part of students’ participation and active listening (10 points).

Task 2. At the end of Units 1 and 2, students sit a written test consisting of a theoretical section and a practical section (a commentary on a written or audiovisual text). (20 points)

Task 3. At the end of Units 3 and 4, students sit a written test consisting of a theoretical section and a practical section (a commentary on a written or audiovisual text). (20 points)

Task 4. Over the course of the semester, students design a practical case study in groups and present it to their classmates in a seminar format. Following the seminar, students upload the visual material or script used in the course to the designated space on the course's Moodle page. (20 points)

These assessment components also generated the core qualitative dataset: oral presentations were accompanied by peer-feedback forms; written tests included commentaries that required students to position themselves attitudinally towards linguistic variation; and student-designed seminars produced collaborative scripts and reflections. Together with Moodle reflections, Exit Tickets, and AnswerGarden prompts, these artifacts provided longitudinal evidence of shifts in students' sociolinguistic awareness.

3.1.3 Data sources

As mentioned above, throughout the nine-year observation period, students were asked for permission to use anonymized feedback to improve the module's teaching approach. By way of example, Image 2 shows a Google Form questionnaire shared on the final teaching day, which students completed voluntarily; it illustrates how students are explicitly informed about the purposes of such questionnaires.

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

Variedades geográficas de la lengua inglesa 2022-23

The information gathered will be used anonymously by your lecturer for innovative teaching purposes (to re-design future editions)

herrando@unizar.es [Cambiar de cuenta](#)

No compartido

Now that you are finishing this course, Is your margin for tolerance of deviation wider? Why? How? To what extent?

Tu respuesta

Should we make the effort to improve our comprehension of the non-native variety of English rather than argue for a more English-type English?

Tu respuesta

What social values (ideology) we (un)consciously associate with a given variety of English? Has this course helped you to reflect further on this issue?

Tu respuesta

Has this teaching module somehow helped you to raise awareness about SDG? If you, Could you please share how/what?

Tu respuesta

Image 2: Screen capture of the last day Google Form questionnaire (2022-23).

Regarding the dataset, two stages must be distinguished (see also Sections 4.1 and 4.2). In the initial stage, pedagogical intuition and classroom notes were contrasted with students' qualitative and quantitative feedback gathered through ATENEA (the University of Zaragoza quality platform for student evaluations). Because this process is fully anonymous and lecturers only receive aggregated results, early excerpts were not systematically coded. In later stages, the feedback repertoire was expanded through students' reflections collected via digital tools within the continuous assessment pathway. The code for individual excerpts follows the format: S (student), number (order of response), and academic year (e.g., S.11.23–24).

Eventually, data sources also included: (i) lecturer field notes and classroom observation notes; (ii) ATENEA student evaluation scores and open comments (aggregated and anonymised); (iii) Moodle-based reflective tasks and peer-feedback forms; (iv) Socrative Exit Tickets; and (v) Google Docs and an AnswerGarden word cloud generated in a final plenary session. These sources were used to document changes in students' metalinguistic commentary and reported attitudes towards language variation.

3.2 Methods

The intervention was designed as a Global Englishes-informed pedagogy in which attitude change is treated as an explicit learning outcome rather than a by-product of exposure to variation. Following the rationale that awareness-raising activities can broaden learners' orientations towards diverse Englishes and reduce negative evaluations of non-standardised national varieties (Galloway & Rose, 2015), the digital tools were selected and sequenced to scaffold both individual reflection and collective reflection. This design allowed transformations in students' perceptions of legitimacy, intelligibility, and appropriateness. Hence, this study adopts the framework of ethnographic action research, defined as a methodological approach that combines the descriptive depth of ethnography with the cyclical intervention-oriented practices of action research (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003). The ethnographic dimension lies in the systematic collection of field notes, classroom observations, and students' reflections across nine academic years, providing a thick description of attitudes towards English varieties. The action research dimension is reflected in the interactive design, implementation, and refinement of teaching strategies using digital tools such as Moodle, Socrative, and AnswerGarden over the nine-year study period. Ethnographic action research thus situates the module as both a site of academic research and pedagogical innovation, aligning research outcomes with improved teaching practice.

3.3 Data analysis

For this study, 'attitudes' are operationalised as students' evaluative stances towards varieties of English and their speakers, as expressed in reflective writing and short-response tasks. 'Tolerance' and 'acceptance' refer to an increased willingness to treat linguistic vari-

ation as legitimate and contextually appropriate rather than as ‘deviation’ from an external norm.

Qualitative data (Moodle reflections, peer-feedback forms, Exit Tickets and word-cloud prompts) were analysed through an iterative thematic coding process aligned with the cyclical logic of ethnographic action research (plan–act–observe–reflect). Codes were developed inductively from recurring themes (e.g., intelligibility vs prestige, legitimacy, stereotypes, professional readiness) and refined across cohorts. Quantitative indicators (Institutional evaluations of students’ satisfaction through the ATENEA platform; participation counts; Exit Ticket self-ratings) were used descriptively to contextualise the qualitative trends.

To mitigate bias associated with the lecturer-researcher role, only anonymised excerpts were retained for analysis, and the use of student feedback for research purposes was separated from assessment decisions. Triangulation across multiple data sources (institutional evaluations, classroom notes, and digital reflective practices) was used to strengthen trustworthiness.

4.- Results

This fourth section is divided into two subsections to reflect on the chronological and methodological progression of this educational intervention, based on ethnographic action research. Phase 1, Teacher’s notes, contrasted pedagogical intuition, and university quality questionnaires, documents the initial stage of the intervention, where the lecturer’s field notes and institutional feedback provided a baseline for identifying challenges and shaping pedagogical responses. Phase 2, Developing sociolinguistic awareness through digital tools, presents the subsequent stage in which targeted digital strategies were introduced to foster students’ reflection and tolerance towards English varieties. This two-part structure allows the analysis to move from the diagnostic and exploratory dimension of the research to the implementation and evaluation of innovative digital practices.

Across the nine years, a total of 325 students enrolled in the module. Of these, 316 students (97.2%) opted into the continuous assessment pathway and consented to the use of anonymised feedback for pedagogical research and quality enhancement.

4.1 Phase 1: Teacher’s notes, contrasted pedagogical intuition, and University quality questionnaires

The ethnographic archive began in the first two academic years (2016–2017 and 2017–2018). In line with Gil’s (2023) work, my pedagogical intuition was that the module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* could function as a vehicle for sociolinguistic awareness, going beyond the transmission of concepts related to ELF, Standard English, and national symbolic value. Accordingly, I triangulated classroom observation notes with students’ satisfaction rate and feedback gathered via ATENEA. I introduced film and television clips to illustrate key sociolinguistic issues related to stereotypes discussed in class. As an example, Table 3 illustrates students’ satisfaction ratings in ATENEA and the number of open comments students posed each academic year:

Academic year	Students' satisfaction grade (máx. 5 points)	Number of students' open comments
2016-17	4.32	1
2017-18	4.44	1
2018-19	4.65	3
2019-20	4.77	12
2020-21	4.71	14
2021-22	4.81	19
2022-23	4.83	21
2023-24	4.76	20
2024-25	4.89	18

Table 3. Students' quantitative and qualitative feedback gathered by the University quality system ATENE-NEA

Across nine cohorts, satisfaction increased from 4.32 to 4.89 (out of 5), a pattern consistent with progressive enhancement of the module through iterative action-research cycles and the systematic integration of digital scaffolding—described in depth in subsection 4.2.

The only student's open comment posed in the ATENE-NEA quality platform in 2016-17 was:

"I think this is a very useful course and different from the rest of the degree. Although it is an elective and I am not very knowledgeable in the field of linguistics, I found it very interesting. The professor made the task much easier, always helping as much as possible and being very willing to answer questions. However, the pace of the class was sometimes a bit slow."

Even though this was a positive comment, it could be interpreted as indicating that students lacked the motivation to participate in or engage with the evaluation of the module or the lecturer's teaching practice.

Once I introduced some film clips with no other task associated with them in 2017-18, I again got one open suggestion, which was:

"I'm not going to suggest anything because there's nothing that could be improved. I loved this course. It was full of audiovisual resources, and the students' independent, autonomous work facilitated the learning of different topics. The course provided the foundation for a good understanding of the emergence of various dialects of the English language."

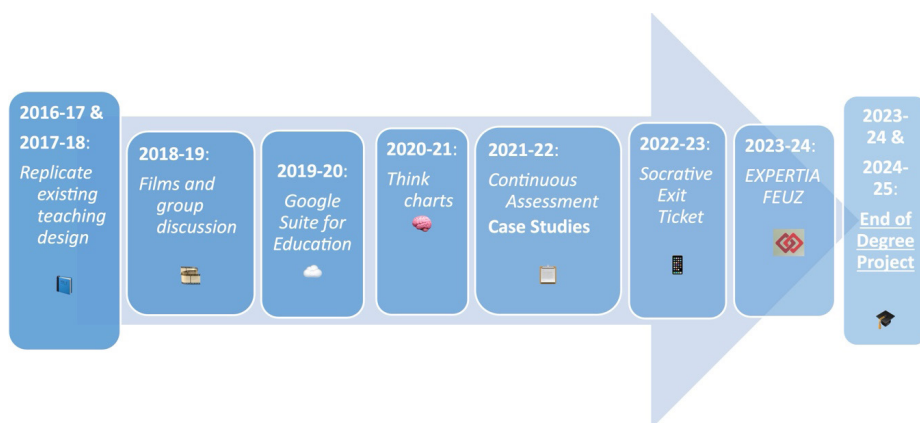
It was in 2018-19 that I asked students, individually and in groups, to write their reflections on these films. Students' reflections on the film characters' linguistic features and the values associated with them (Milroy & Milroy, 2012) had to be uploaded to the module Moodle as a task that I would gather and read. Students analyzed, for instance, differences in converging or diverging with the notion of Standard and non-standard British and

General American English (Kirkpatrick, 2007), using films and TV series such as *Friends*, *The Holiday*, *The Get Down*, or *Bend it like Beckham*. The following excerpts are illustrative of recurring themes in students' feedback:

"This course is one of the most important in the degree because it helps with other courses such as Acquisition or History of the Language, in addition to learning about issues and topics that are important for the development of English in the world in general."

As shown in Table 3, both satisfaction scores and the volume of qualitative feedback increased over time. It could be said that practicing self-reflection might have been an invitation or an attraction for students to participate in the ATENEA satisfaction questionnaires.

The COVID-19 pandemic functioned as a contextual turning point that accelerated and legitimised the systematic integration of digital tools within the intervention, following the expansion of the institutional licence for Google Workspace for Education. Graph 1 visualises the sequence of digital tool implementations across the nine years and the sustained cycles of design, feedback, and revision.



Graph 1. Illustration of the flow of implementations based on my teaching practices reflections

This Graph or timeline represents the evolution in the use of additional tools to assist my teaching practice. Although students' ratings were very positive (see Table 3 above), I still observed room for improvement: more dynamic teaching and learning activities and safe spaces where students could engage in other types of learning or sociolinguistic contextual awareness. To illustrate this, two of the three comments submitted by the students in the academic year 2019-20, which made me reflect on the need to include more practical and interactive tasks in future editions, are provided below:

“Less weight on the part about English as a Lingua Franca. More exercises on distinguishing between accents and varieties.”

“I hope the option of continuous assessment can continue because I think it is very interesting and helps us internalize the contents of the course in a very interactive and engaging way for a large part of the students.”

Hence, the 2019-20 academic year triggered another turn of the screw, deepening immersion in the use of digital tools to promote sociolinguistic awareness and self-reflection practices.

4.2 Phase 2: Developing Sociolinguistic Awareness through Digital Tools

Based on critical reflection on students' feedback (see Table 4 below) on ATENEA and my classroom notes observations, I progressively (as shown in Graph 1) integrated a set of digital tools to create structured spaces for self-reflection and sociolinguistic awareness. For clarity, the following subsections describe how each tool was used and the type of reflective evidence it generated.

Google Workspace for Education (Docs, Slides, and Forms) was integrated to scaffold collaborative reflection and to produce a traceable record of students' evolving ideas. Docs supported a shared course chronogram and collaborative note-taking; Slides enabled visible-thinking routines and group synthesis; and Forms supported end-of-course self-reflection.

Concretely, a Google Doc was used as a living course chronogram. Revisiting it at the start of each teaching session helped students to track completed work, current focus, and upcoming tasks, thereby supporting responsibility for their learning process.

Google Forms were used to administer an end-of-course questionnaire, inviting students to reflect on whether their tolerance threshold for linguistic deviation had widened. All respondents reported a positive shift in their tolerance towards linguistic deviation. The following excerpts are illustrative of recurring themes in students' feedback:

Example a: “Yes, it has helped me realize how wide English variations and accents really are, not only regarding their nationality but also their gender and social class. Each variety should be appreciated.” S.50.19-20

Example b: “Yes, the course has helped me see that prejudices should not be made when hearing someone speaking a different variety of English than our own because it may have an important background that we don't know.” S.28.20–21

Example c: “Yes it is. Getting to know how many varieties of English exist and how different they are from one another, I have realize that Standard English is actually the odd one. I have learnt to appreciate the different varieties and I also want to learn more of them.” S.24.21-22

Overall, these excerpts indicate a shift from deficit-oriented evaluations of non-standard English towards an explicit appreciation of variety, contextual knowledge, and the social dimensions of language.

Google Slides enabled the transparent sharing of individual and collective work. Students selected a slide (or a set of slides) as their working space, enabling synchronous collaboration and an archived record of work in progress and final output. Two examples are provided below (individual work). The first illustration is an individual Think Chart (S1.20–21) related to an introductory video on US accents. Before viewing the clip, I asked students to record prior assumptions; the follow-up task required them to reflect on what they had learned:

Name:

	BEFORE I KNEW	NOW I KNOW
US ACCENTS	US accent tends to be straightforward, with a general lack of adverbs and the preference for simple sentences. Us accent is characterised by long vowels	us accent does not include all the accent, since no everyone from the same place sounds the same.
PERSONAL ACCENT AND IDENTITY	Personal accents are connected to an individual's background and education level. The personal accent can also be helpful in order to have a general overview of someone.	
AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH	It is the use of double negatives ("I ain't got none").	at the beginning they talked some different dialects, then with the contact with English people, we assist to an unusual learning

Image 3. Students' example of Think chart (S1.20-21)

A further example of group work (collective work) is the Group of Experts activity introduced in Unit 1 (World Englishes and ELF). Each student became an 'expert' on an assigned academic paper (available via Moodle). In groups of four, students shared key insights, negotiated a synthesis, and co-produced a short presentation in Slides. The class selected the most complete presentation, which then served as a shared revision resource and an assessment reference point.

Socrative was used as a student response system to administer Exit Tickets at the end of selected sessions. Students answered three prompts on comprehension, key learning points, and a targeted teacher question. These short, repeated reflections provided timely evidence of students' understanding and emerging sociolinguistic positioning. For example, in the academic years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, the module participated in the EXPERTIA programme (*Fundación Empresa Universidad de Zaragoza*; Chamber of Commerce). Through EXPERTIA, an alumnus working in international trade delivered the talk "English as an International Vehicle of Communication in Foreign Trade: Linguistic-Social Reality, Stereotypes, and Communicative Purposes" (Photograph 1).



Photograph 1. EXPERTIA talk celebrated in 2024-25

For the first Exit Ticket prompt ('How well did you understand today's material?'), all 53 respondents across the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 cohorts selected option A ('totally got it'). An example response to prompt 2 ('What did you learn today?') is provided in Image 4 below:

Today's class served to raise awareness of different paths that are, perhaps, less traditional or given less emphasis. The accent was on the usefulness of learning languages in our present-day, global, interconnected world.

Image 4. Socrative screen capture S15.23-24 answer to question number 2

For prompt 3 ('Answer the teacher's question'), I asked students to report their main takeaway. An illustrative response is provided in Image 5 below.

The main takeaway for me is related to the paradigm of English as a lingua franca to establish transnational liaisons for whatever purpose, be it commercial, educational, for research purposes, etc. It was very motivational and inspiring to learn about the experience of someone who did not choose the common path and, instead, opted for a career direction where English is really a tool to meet an end instead of the end itself. It made me reflect on the endless opportunities that we all have access to thanks to English.

Image 5. Socrative screen capture S8.24-25 answer to question number 3

In this task, specifically, the Exit Ticket responses suggest increased metacognitive engagement and explicit connections between course content and professional communication contexts.

Moodle served as the central repository for readings, submissions, and reflective tasks. It was used (i) to host students' final presentation slides and seminar materials, and (ii) to collect micro-reflections (e.g., peer feedback forms for oral presentations). These artifacts provided evidence of active listening and contributed to the qualitative dataset.

The last tool introduced in this pedagogical intervention was AnswerGarden, implemented in the final session (2024-25) to prompt collective reflection on “Glottophobia and language prejudice”. AnswerGarden generated real-time word clouds from short student responses, making shared perceptions visible and providing a starting point for discussion. Image 6 illustrates the word cloud resulting from this final module session:

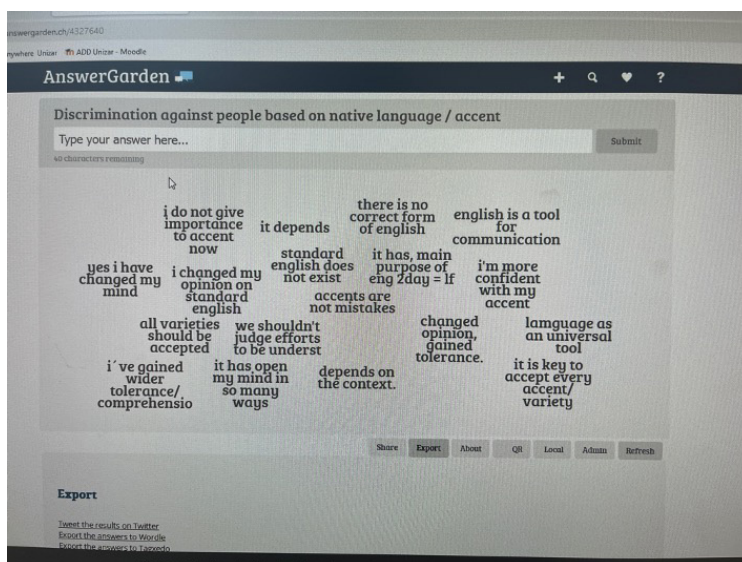


Image 6. AnswerGarden screen capture created in class on the last teaching day (2024-25)

Image 6 provides end-of-module evidence of a shift in students' scope for variation from deficit-oriented evaluations of 'non-standard' English towards a functional, contextualized orientation to variation. Students' responses foreground intelligibility and communicative purpose (see, for instance, the response: “English is a tool for communication”) and explicitly reject a monolithic notion of correctness (“there is no correct form of English”). As a collectively produced digital artifact, the AnswerGarden output supports the claim that digital tool-mediated reflection can make attitude change visible, immediate, and dialogic.

Ultimately, I return to the ATENEA quality system at the University of Zaragoza to present, in Table 4, a sampling of the most recurring themes in the comments submitted by students from the academic year in which computer tools were systematically introduced to conduct this ethnographic action research.

Academic year	Anonymous students' feedback comments
2020-21	You have to work a lot, so it could be worth more credits. But I think it is the best course I have taken in the entire degree. Not only the best, but also the one that is best designed
2021-22	It encourages participation and attendance in class. Whenever there's a mistake in one of the presentations, it is explained so that it can be improved for other courses. In addition, the professor is always willing to give tutorials, even for small issues. She is one of the best professors I have had so far and one of the few who has motivated me to study and research about the course outside the classroom.
2022-23	The lecturer explains clearly and understandably. The materials she uses are very visual, engaging, and help a lot in understanding the theory. She is genuinely interested in the course, which shows in her classes, and she cares about the students, helping them when needed
2023-24	The classes are structured with an active dynamic that promotes interest in the subject and participation in it. The system of continuous assessment is very well designed, going beyond memorizing and writing on paper. The classes are designed to make us think and learn how to research.
2024-25	Every day the lecturer reviews the course schedule on Google and organizes everything we are going to cover. The evaluation is quite accessible since continuous assessment facilitates both reflective learning and good grades. There is a lot of group work, which helps us share knowledge and support each other.

Table 4. The most representative themes in the comments submitted by students in the ATENEA quality system at the University of Zaragoza

Considered jointly, these cohort-by-cohort evaluations also point to a further benefit of conducting action research longitudinally. Because the module was iteratively refined through successive cycles of implementation, feedback, and adjustment, students' recurring references to coherent design, clear organization, and increasingly structured continuous assessment are consistent with the cumulative effects of sustained reflective practice. In this sense, the multi-year action research approach not only generated data on learner attitudes but also served as a mechanism for progressive pedagogical optimisation, strengthening alignment among learning activities, assessment, and the module's sociolinguistic aims.

5.- Further remarks

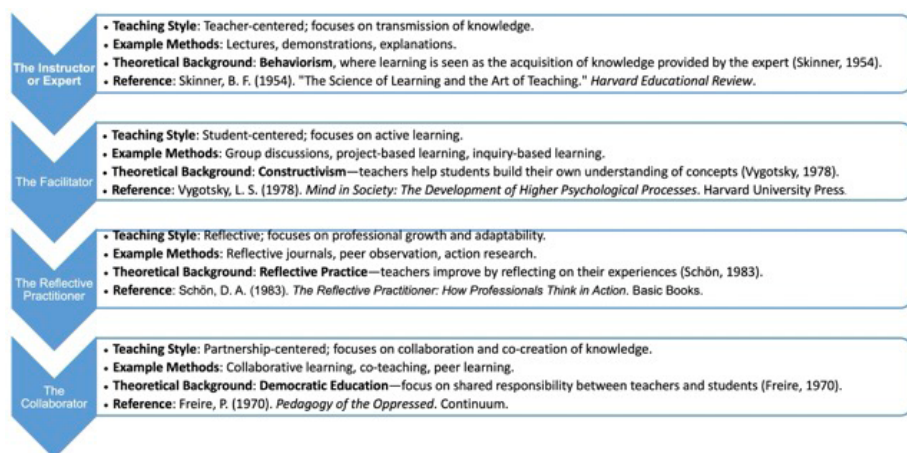
From the ethnographic repertoire, student feedback, and lecturer observation notes, it can be inferred that the module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language*—particularly through the integration of digital tools—supported the development of sociolinguistic

awareness and reflective learning among students. Students reported that they not only became aware of the diversity of English varieties worldwide but also began to question the privileged status of ‘standard English’. They highlighted a shift away from prejudice and towards appreciation, tolerance, and curiosity about linguistic diversity, viewing varieties as embedded in histories of nation, gender, and social class.

The use of digital tools in this module proved especially useful in promoting this reflective stance: they enabled students to engage with audiovisual resources actively, compare varieties in authentic contexts, and record their evolving understandings. This digital dimension transformed learning into a participatory process in which students could revisit their insights, share reflections, and understand that English is a plural, dynamic, and socially situated language rather than a single monolithic code.

Additionally, during the final two academic years, I supervised six End-of-Degree projects for this module (three in 2023–2024 and three in 2024–2025). This is noteworthy given my primary teaching and research focus in Applied Linguistics, particularly Grammar and Academic English. The projects indicate sustained student interest in language variation and tolerance-related themes.

From an autoethnographic perspective, this study also has implications for my role as a lecturer and as a potential agent of change regarding linguistic tolerance and legitimacy. The analysis prompted sustained reflection on how my teaching role evolved over the period studied (Graph 2).



Graph 2. Evolution of my identity as a lecturer, based on the evolution of the teaching methods and activities proposed and critically modified over the nine-year study period.

As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) argue, the analytical process of this experience has been, above all, therapeutic (Poulos, 2008). It has eventually encouraged personal respon-

sibility and agency (Pelias, 2007), raising awareness and promoting cultural change (Goodall, 2006) in the development of this module's teaching.

6.- Conclusions

In contemporary contexts, English is best understood not as a single, uniform system but as a constellation of socially situated varieties. Conceptualising the language as 'Englishes' foregrounds a central premise: diversity is not peripheral but constitutive, and the multiple forms English takes are each linguistically and sociolinguistically important (Seargeant & Pan, 2025). In the light of this context, the present study set out to examine whether the systematic use of digital tools—purposefully designed to scaffold both individual and collective reflection within an ethnographic action research framework—could reshape undergraduates' orientations towards geographical varieties commonly positioned as non-standard. Across nine academic years of iterative implementation, observation, and adaptation, the evidence suggests that digitally mediated reflective work can support meaningful attitudinal change, moving learners beyond deficit evaluations and towards a more informed, context-sensitive understanding of variation.

The rationale for this intervention rested on three interconnected needs. First, expanding awareness of the wide varieties of English is fundamental if future professionals are to develop greater tolerance towards linguistic diversity. Second, teachers must engage in reflective practice to ensure that pedagogy remains responsive, evidence-based, and innovative. Third, students benefit from structured opportunities to cultivate reflective habits that enable them to interrogate assumptions and consolidate knowledge. Taken together, these dimensions provided the foundation for the design of the module teaching practices. They clarified its relevance for higher education contexts where sociolinguistic awareness is increasingly inseparable from professional readiness.

Over nine academic years, the module *Geographical Varieties of the English Language* provides evidence that integrating digital tools into ethnographic action research can broaden students' tolerance of variation and strengthen sociolinguistic awareness. Student reflections repeatedly indicate a shift from framing non-standard varieties as 'deviations' to recognising them as legitimate, socially and culturally embedded forms of English. Moodle, Socrative, Google Workspace for Education, and AnswerGarden created structured digital spaces for participation, self-regulation, and dialogic reflection. At the same time, the EXPERTIA programme helped connect course content to the communicative realities of global professional environments. From my perspective, as a lecturer, the sustained cycles of design, feedback, and revision were likewise transformative, consolidating a reflective teaching stance and reinforcing educators' role as agents of sociolinguistic change.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. Participation depended on students' access to personal devices and stable connectivity, which occasionally constrained engagement. In addition, some reflective tasks required a degree of abstraction that proved demanding for a subset of learners, particularly those with specific learning

needs. Finally, while the dataset is rich in depth and longitudinal scope, it derives from a single module at a single Spanish institution, which necessarily limits claims of broader generalisability.

Despite these constraints, this pedagogical intervention offers a potentially transferable model for other higher education settings seeking to combine digital pedagogy with experiential, reflective practice to foster tolerance, critical awareness, and even employability-oriented communication skills. Future research could explore how similar designs operate across disciplines and institutional contexts, and how tool-mediated reflection might be tailored to diverse learner profiles, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and globally oriented higher education landscape.

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