

Racial Criticism as Part of Language Teacher Identity?

**Pre-Service ELT Teachers' Positionings
Towards Problematic Teaching Material**

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Abstract: The fact that teachers as disseminators of (racist relevant) knowledge (Scharatow, 2011, p. 19) not only *could* but, in fact, *should* make an important contribution to discerning, addressing, problematizing, and ultimately deconstructing and reducing racism is shown by various promising approaches to racial critical work at schools and in the classroom. But do teachers feel ready to act racial critically? It is precisely this question that this article pursues by exploring the evaluative and epistemic positioning practices of pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers in relation to stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism. On the supposition that critical perspectives on racism are closely connected to individual identarian convictions, these positioning practices are used to shed light on the pre-service teachers' Language Teacher Identity (LTI), which is an important concept in determining the relevance of study contents to pre-service teachers. The overall framework of the analysis is inspired by Weiser-Zurmühlen's Positioning Analysis model (2021, 2022). Within this framework, Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is used to analyse these positionings on a content-level. Key results include that the participants position themselves as harsh critics of problematic teaching materials and proponents of implementing racial critical teaching approaches into their (future) classrooms. Additionally, selected case-analyses are conducted to explain how these positionings are occupied, shedding light upon questions of social desirability and entitlement to take positionings. This article concludes by pointing out what the first phase of teacher education can do to include study contents that are likely to influence pre-service teachers' teaching approaches sustainably.

Keywords: racial criticism; Language Teacher Identity; critical pedagogy; anti-racism; Positioning Analysis; Social Justice Education; teacher education

1 Introduction, or: Why take action right now?¹

Potsdam, November 2023: High-ranking Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) politicians, far-right-wingers, and investors gather to plan the forced remigration of millions of people based on racist criteria in a “[s]ecret plan against Germany” (Bensmann et al., 2024). Sylt, May 2024: Just a few weeks before the European elections, young people cry racist chants alienating the lyrics of Gigi D’Agostino’s “L’Amour Toujours” (Tagesschau, 2024). The results of the European elections by itself: At almost

¹ Research for this article was conducted as part of my master’s thesis.

16 percent, the AfD not only gained 5.9 percent compared to the last European elections, but also became the second most popular party in Germany (Europäisches Parlament, 2024). Leipzig, July 2024: A Turkish footballer celebrates his goal in the round of 16 of the European Championship against Austria by displaying “the rightwing extremist ‘wolf salute’” (Connolly, 2024). These events and their extensive discussion in media show that racism is a widespread, increasing phenomenon.

In fact, this assumption is scientifically proven. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights’ (FRA) latest *Being Black in the EU* report² (2023) shows that racism is a growing issue in the EU. The report titles: “Almost half of the people of African descent surveyed experienced racial discrimination, an increase from 39 % in 2016 to 45 % in 2022” (FRA, 2023, p. 14). Further, it is found that “racial discrimination has substantially increased across all areas of life” (FRA, 2023, p. 39). One of these areas is that of education. The situation is particularly serious in Germany, where 38 percent of parents or legal guardians disclosed that their children experience offensive or threatening comments at school “because of their ethnic or immigrant background” (FRA, 2023, p. 45).

However, racism does not only occur in these explicit forms in schools. All too often, it operates on implicit levels such as in textbooks (Bönkost, 2022) or the hidden curriculum (Quehl, 2011). Hence, schools take an active part in the maintenance and reproduction of both, explicit and implicit racist knowledge, structures, and practices (Korooshy et al., 2023, p. 33).

And yet, it is a school’s and every teacher’s mandate to inform their students about prejudices and nurture the destruction of racism (Güllü & Gerlach, 2023, p. 33). On an interdisciplinary level, for instance, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs’ (*Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister, KMK*) declaration *Interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule* (2013, p. 2) determines to reduce structural discrimination and

² In 2022, the data for the second edition of the *Being Black in the EU* report were gathered by the FRA within the scope of “its third survey on immigrants and descendants of immigrants, collecting comparable data in 15 EU Member States from 16124 respondents” (FRA, 2023, p. 8). A sub-sample focusing on one survey group, the “responses of 6752 immigrants and descendants of immigrants of African descent resident in 13 Member States” (FRA, 2023, p. 8; emphasis in original) provide the data basis for this report.

establish equal opportunities as the main tasks of education. More specifically, the core curriculum for English predefines that students are to be supported in their development as socially responsible citizens based on values and democracy education as well as political and cultural education (MSW NRW, 2023, p. 9).

This educational mandate, however, collides with reality in two respects: Firstly, as already stated, teaching materials used in English lessons not only convey but strengthen racist knowledge and structures (Alter et al., 2021; Bönkost, 2022; Klaes, 2021; see Section 2.1). Secondly, in-service English teachers are not aware of stereotypical depictions of People of Colour (PoC) in teaching materials without being explicitly questioned about them (Klaes, 2022). The solution to these paradoxes might appear simple: Why not substitute stereotypical for racial critical³ teaching materials? According to Güllü and Gerlach (2023, p. 23), however, this is not sufficient. Instead, teachers need to be educated from a racial critical perspective to be able to detect and dismantle racism in all its forms and foster self-reflective and racial critical thinking skills in their students. Again, the solution might appear straightforward: a paradigm shift towards a racial critical teacher education. This, I argue, is too short-sighted for we first need to know if and under which circumstances such a shift is actually meaningful to pre-service teachers. This is based on the following premise: Only if study contents are compatible with the pre-service teachers' identarian convictions, will they have a lasting impact on their (future) teaching approaches (Gerlach, 2023, p. 153). This approach entails finding out first how relevant the topic of racial criticism is to pre-service teachers, and how much initial identity work would, in fact, be necessary as part of such a paradigm shift.

Consequently, this article investigates the Language Teacher Identity (LTI) of pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers by exploring their evaluative and epistemic positioning practices towards stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism. While often ignored in national research on the professional development of teachers, LTI is an innovative construct that allows to reconstruct positioning processes of teachers (Gerlach, 2023, p. 144). In other words, investigating pre-service teachers' LTI is a promising first

³ For a lack of an exact translation of the German compound *Rassismuskritik*, the term will be paraphrased by the expressions 'racial criticism', 'racial critical perspective', and 'critical perspective on racism' throughout this article. The terms 'racial critical', 'racial sensitive' and 'critical/sensitive to racism' are used to paraphrase the corresponding adjectives *rassismuskritisch* and *rassismussensibel*.

step to establish a meaningful teacher education that has the potential to disrupt discriminatory practices as those mentioned above by focusing on promoting social justice – if this matches the pre-service teachers' LTI, that is. In this context, social justice is understood as “parity of participation” (Fraser, 1998, p. 5) – a notion that is only possible if the “participants’ independence and ‘voice’” (p. 5) as well as “equal opportunity for achieving social esteem” (p. 5) are ensured.

After outlining the basics of racial criticism and its connection to a critical foreign language didactics (2.1), the concept of LTI (2.2) is introduced. In Sections 3.1 and 3.2, the procedure of data collection and data analysis is portrayed, respectively. Following this, the evaluative (4.1) and epistemic (4.2) stance taking activities of pre-service ELT teachers towards both, stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism as well as how these positionings are occupied (4.3) are analyzed⁴ following the methodology of Positioning Analysis. Based on the findings, Section 4.4 considers the positioning object with regard to social desirability and questions of entitlement. The article concludes by providing an outlook (5).

2 Key aspects of racial criticism, critical foreign language didactics, and Language Teacher Identity (LTI)

2.1 Racial criticism and its connection to critical foreign language didactics

Racial criticism understands racism “as both discourse and social practice which construct and perpetuate unequal relations of power through inferiorization, a process in which the Other is rendered inferior to the Self” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 6). In this Othering process, which is historically grown and affects society as a whole, ‘race’⁵ serves as the distinguishing feature (Fereidooni & El, 2017, p. 15). Nowadays, “racial difference has increasingly been

⁴ In terms of self-reflection, a term that is crucial in racial criticism (see Section 2.1), it is necessary to acknowledge that my perspective as a *white* female trainee teacher born and raised in Germany and committed to issues of social justice inevitably influences the analysis of other pre-service ELT teachers’ positioning practices towards stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism. As a member of the *white* majority society, I benefit from *white* privilege, which already implies that I am entangled in racist structures and mindsets, myself.

⁵ In the style of Eggers et al. (2017, pp. 12–13), the term ‘race’ is put in single quotation marks whenever it is used to refer to its social construction. Italicized,

replaced by the notion of cultural difference, a more benign and acceptable signifier than *race*” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 4; emphasis in original). This culturalism, however, has the same function as racism: It is

“used to differentiate, exclude, or privilege certain groups of people. Therefore, issues of culture can be investigated with the understanding that they are often implicitly and yet profoundly connected to the idea of *race*.” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, pp. 4–5; emphasis in original)

The same holds true for the term ‘ethnicity’. According to Rattansi (2007), just as culture and ‘race’, ethnicity “is above all a matter of drawing boundaries around zones of *belonging* and *non-belonging*” (p. 88; emphasis in original). Put differently, each term – ‘race’, culture, and ethnicity – is used to homogenise, essentialise, and dichotomise a certain group of people based on their phenotypical and/or sociocultural characteristics (Becker, 2023, p. 10).

Further, racial criticism does not recognise racism primarily as an individual but a holistic phenomenon that structures the social reality of every human being (Leiprecht et al., 2011, pp. 10–11). This leads to a central assumption of racial criticism: If racism is a structural feature of every society, there are no spaces free from racism.⁶ This implies that one way or another, every individual gained racist knowledge qua their socialisation and, hence, is entangled in racism (Simon & Fereidooni, 2023, pp. 153–154). To deconstruct this knowledge, it is important to continually and critically reflect upon experiences in one’s socialisation process, one’s privileges, and social positionings (Massumi & Fereidooni, 2017, p. 69). As such, racial criticism is an analytical practice that focuses on three aspects: firstly, the effects of dominance relations, secondly, the conditions (of emergence) of these relations, and thirdly, the consequences for both, individuals and institutions (Korooshy et al., 2023, p. 41).

race indicates an analytical category. This distinction polarizes academics: According to Kubota and Lin (2009, p. 3), some scholars argue against using *race* as an analytical category for a fear of fueling the misbelief that ‘races’ exist. On the contrary, not using *race* as an analytical tool would imply that power structures remain invisible (Korooshy et al., 2023, p. 41). Since racial criticism is devoted to uncovering these socially constructed categories and their effects, using these terms in the appropriate spelling is, in fact, essential.

⁶ This racial critical assumption marks one of the main differences that sets it apart from the concept of anti-racism which assumes that spaces free from racism do, indeed, exist (Simon & Fereidooni, 2023, p. 154).

One approach of bringing racial criticism into German schools is that of a racial critical educational work (*rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit*; Quehl, 2011). This approach is about establishing equal opportunities, thematising racism, experiences of (non-)belonging, labelling processes, and deconstructing binary thinking (Quehl, 2011, p. 228). Another characteristic of this approach is the continuous (self-)reflection not only on one's involvement in racial discourse, but also on discriminatory institutional parameters (Quehl, 2011, p. 228). Based on this, alternatives for action should be developed (Scharatow, 2011, p. 17). The aim is to raise the students' awareness for racism in such a way that they themselves are able to recognise racism in its multimodal appearance – be it in pictures, texts, songs, maps, or in the curricula –, problematise these issues, and finally, deconstruct racism (Simon & Fereidooni, 2022, p. 4).

At schools, racism mainly operates on an “ideological-discursive level”⁷ (Korooshy et al., 2023, p. 47) which concerns textbooks and teaching materials depicting and solidifying racist knowledge. Both Marmer and Sow (2015) and Güllü and Gerlach (2023) attest that textbooks – irrespective of the subject – reproduce racist knowledge. Receiving these (implicit) racist relevant messages, they become firmly established knowledge to the students. For English textbooks, especially, Gerlach (2020) states that *isms*, as part of the PARSNIP concepts⁸ are almost actively avoided. If these topics are addressed in ELT textbooks, however, they must be critically analysed not only in terms of their linguistic complexity, but also in terms of an appropriate, holistic depiction of the topics (Gerlach, 2020, p. 23). Here, one should focus on “supposedly well-intended textbook characters who, following a broad concept of diversity, have multicultural and multisectional characteristics”⁹ (Gerlach, 2020, p. 24).

To illustrate the problematic potential of ELT textbooks, a closer look should be taken at an exemplary textbook and its characters.¹⁰ In the unit “Around

⁷ The original reads as follows: “ideologisch-diskursive Ebene”.

⁸ PARSNIP is an acronym for the terms politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pornography – all of which topics that are meaningful to adolescents and hence, demand to be addressed at schools (Gerlach, 2020, p. 23).

⁹ The original reads as follows: “vermeintlich gutgemeinte Lehrwerk-Charaktere, die einem breiten Diversitätsbegriff folgend multikulturelle und multisektionale Eigenschaften mitbringen”.

¹⁰ This section summarises the results of an analysis which I elaborate on in more detail in Klaes (2021).

South Africa” of the English textbook *Orange Line 5*, designed for grade 9 at comprehensive schools, the students deal with five short texts depicting multiple perspectives of people involved in “an accident between a bus with students from the private Redhill School and a car” (Haß, 2018, p. 50; see Fig. 1).

Talking about social differences

2.3-7 **After the accident**


1 (SPEAKING) Why do road accidents often happen?

2 (READING) Read the texts.

A INTERNET

Daily News NEWS SPORTS LIFESTYLE

Accident near central Durban



10 Jan – There was an accident between a bus with students from the private Redhill School and a car at around 1 p.m. yesterday. The driver of the bus died and a student, Piet Jansen (16), went to hospital with face injuries.

The driver of the car, Kagiso Sekibo (40) from Cape Town, suffered back injuries, but her daughter, Cebile (17), wasn't hurt.

The reason for the crash is not clear yet. But a young worker from the Umlazi township, who had seen the accident, was taken to the police station for questioning.

C DURBAN POLICE

Police officer: Why were you at that street corner?

Lefa (16): Officer, I don't understand why you're asking me that. The bus to work picks me up there. I stand on that corner every day. I swear I didn't do anything. I just saw the car driving out of control towards the bus. That's it.

Police officer: Answer the questions about your personal background that I asked you earlier, please. We'll decide how to go on when you have answered them.

Lefa: OK, I grew up in a township. My dad left two years ago, and my mum had no money. Either I could go to school hungry or I could go to work. So I dropped out of school like most of my friends. You know, being poor and black, it's hard to get a good job, especially if you live in a township.

Police officer: Thank you. You'll have to stay here for further questioning.

Lefa: Officer, please! I work in construction. I'm paid by the day. If I don't show up in an hour, I'll lose my job!

B E-MAIL

1 Dear Sir or Madam,

I read your report about the bus accident in Durban yesterday. We really need to talk about this problem! Why are there so many crazy drivers on South Africa's roads? Don't those drivers think about the consequences for themselves and for others?

5 The number of deaths and accidents every day is terrifying. I feel so sorry for the victims. I think bad drivers should pay for the accidents they cause!

Yours faithfully,
Tinus Botha

50 fifty

Figure 1a: Stimulus 1 – texts under scrutiny (Haß, 2018, pp. 50–51)¹¹

¹¹ In kind agreement with the Klett publishing house, this textbook excerpt is reproduced here on the basis of § 51 UrhG.

Station 1 3

D E-MAIL

1 Hi Dawn,
Mum said you called. I feel a bit better now, but I often have flashbacks at night. They frighten the hell out of me. I always see the car coming closer and closer. Since the accident I haven't been sleeping well, so I'm going to see a doctor about it. Having good health insurance makes things a lot easier. Our school rugby team was on the bus. We had just left school for a game ten minutes before. Now the doctor won't allow me to play for two months. Grr! 😡 You know how I love rugby. It's a nightmare. But I can still go on my trip to the UK in March. Dad just told me.

15 After I talked to Dad, I had a thought: we all live in this gated community for whites only, with high walls and guards. But then someone stupid ruins your career in one second. It's so unfair.

20 See you,
Piet

E CEBILE'S DIARY

15th January

I can't forget that horrible accident. My body still hurts. And I can't forget those pictures of people bleeding and crying. I don't think Mama can either.

I know she struggles with the situation. She thinks it was her fault. And that's why she feels guilty. She probably wasn't concentrating. A few hours before the accident happened, she had heard some bad news. She had lost her job. Looking at Mama, I'm proud of her. She is well-educated. Not many black South Africans were able to go to a white state school. She got a place just after apartheid ended. And now I go to the same state school as Mama did. My dream is to become a journalist. We don't really live the life of the rich (we're middle class, I'd say), but we've got everything we need.

Except good health insurance. I wish we had that. Mama needs some treatment.

Language tip → G5, p.173
I saw the car driving towards the bus.
Being poor and black, it's hard to get a job.

3 Work with the texts.

51/1-2 **a) Answer the questions.** 52/3

1. Where and when did the accident happen?
2. Who was involved in it?
3. What was Lefa's role in the accident?
4. How does Piet feel after the accident?
5. Why is Cebile worried about her mum?
6. What is Tinus Botha's opinion of the South African traffic situation?

b) Find out the information from the texts for each person. Make a table. → M Jigsaw, p. 181





a) Age?
b) Social status?
c) Black or white?
d) Lives in?
e) School?
f) Health insurance?
g) Plans for the future?

fifty-one **51**

Figure 1b: Stimulus 1 – texts under scrutiny (Haß, 2018, pp. 50–51)¹²

The main characters are Lefa, whom the police suspect to have something to do with the accident, Cebile, who is a passenger of the car involved in the crash, and Piet Jansen, a bus passenger who suffers injuries and has to go to the hospital. Task 3b), supposed to target the students' detailed reading comprehension, asks the students to tabularise information about the characters'

¹² In kind agreement with the Klett publishing house, this textbook excerpt is reproduced here on the basis of § 51 UrhG.

age, social status, skin colour, neighbourhood, school, health insurance, and plans for the future (see Fig. 2).

3 Work with the texts.

51/1-2 52/3

a) Answer the questions.

1. Where and when did the accident happen?
2. Who was involved in it?
3. What was Lefa's role in the accident?
4. How does Piet feel after the accident?
5. Why is Cebile worried about her mum?
6. What is Tinus Botha's opinion of the South African traffic situation?

b) Find out the information from the texts for each person. Make a table. → M jigsaw, p.181

Lefa Cebile Piet

a) Age?
b) Social status?
c) Black or white?
d) Lives in?
e) School?
f) Health insurance?
g) Plans for the future?

fifty-one 51

Figure 2: Stimulus 2 – task 3b) (Haß, 2018, p. 51)

The sample solution to this task which I suggest (Fig. 3 on the next page) shows how boldly stereotypes and seemingly insurmountable social differences are applied in the depiction of the car crash. Amongst others, Piet serves the cliché of the *white*¹³ boy who is rich and privileged but a victim of the poor, uneducated Black¹⁴ people represented by Lefa (Klaes, 2021). This is a common framing. Fereidooni (2019) states that “Black people in children’s books [and textbooks; M.K.] are often portrayed as primitive, exotic, anti-social and as a threat to society” (p. 22). Since the task fails to address and/or deconstruct these stereotypes, racist knowledge remains unquestioned and thus, is reproduced. Following Quehl (2011, p. 235), this example is used to show that racial criticism can enter school discussions only if textbooks and therein implicitly depicted normalities are critically questioned.

¹³ In the manner of Eggers et al. (2017), *white* is italicised to indicate its constructed character. It does not refer to the actual color of one’s skin but to a socially constructed and shared knowledge about being *white* and thus, not being negatively affected by racism. Further, it indicates the awareness that being *white* inevitably includes profiting from structural as well as individual advantages (Güllü & Gerlach, 2023, p. 24).

¹⁴ The capitalisation of Black, following Eggers et al. (2017), indicates its usage as a political autonym chosen by Black people to signify a shared sphere of experiences. It is not used to refer to one’s skin colour.

p. 51, no. 3b) – Sample Solution

	Lefa	Cebile	Piet
Age?	16	17	16
Social status?	low (poor)	middle class	high
Black or white?	Black	Black	white
Lives in?	Umlazi township	Cape Town	gated community for whites only with high walls + guards
School?	dropped out of school	white state school	private Redhill school
Health insurance?	no	no	yes
Plans for the future?	none	becoming a journalist	rugby career (now ruined)

Figure 3: Stimulus 3 – sample solution to task 3b) (own text)

As another approach to teaching, critical foreign language didactics (Gerlach, 2020), originating from *Critical Pedagogy* (Giroux, 2020), is committed to such a critical reflection of teaching material, teaching, schools, and educational institutions as such. It aims at bringing these critical reflections into the classrooms (Gerlach, 2020, pp. 12–13). “Through critical examinations of power and politics that produce and maintain domination and subordination in various dimensions of local and global society” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 12), education becomes a tool to pursue social justice. These critical examinations “engage teachers and students in dialogues on relations of power with regard to race, gender, class, and other social categories” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 12). Assuming that knowledge constructed and shared in the classroom is never neutral but always political, critical foreign language didactics aims at thematising and recognising power relations, reducing prejudices and stereotypes, as well as developing social equity and education for democracy (Gerlach, 2020, p. 8). With their genuine focus on foreignness of languages and cultures in topics such as Apartheid, the British Empire/Colonialism, Nigeria, and multicultural Britain, English lessons specifically come to the fore (Gerlach, 2020, p. 8; Güllü & Gerlach, 2023, p. 28; Zimmermann, 2023). Although these conceptual approaches to teaching are important, they are condemned to remain ineffective if a critical perspective on racism is not part of the LTI of teachers who are supposed to apply these programmes.

2.2 Professional development of teachers: Language Teacher Identity (LTI)

Since “race constitutes an integral part of individual and group identity that shapes the ways people think, believe, and act” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 11), one’s identity is closely connected to one’s ideas of ‘race’ and racism. As teachers not only initiate learning processes but fulfil an educational mandate (see Section 1), it is important to unfold what a (Critical) Language Teacher Identity (LTI) is – a concept that is best approached by focusing on its word components:

Identity. While identity as a scientific construct is vaguely defined, there are three central aspects about identity generally shared throughout different research fields: Firstly, identity is a phenomenon that “is multiple, shifting, and in conflict” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). Secondly, identity is context-bound and “crucially related to social, cultural, and political contexts” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 23). Thirdly, identity “is constructed, maintained, and negotiated to a significant extent through language and discourse” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 23). As such, identity is understood as a dynamic, processual construct (Schultze, 2018, p. 13).

Teacher Identity. According to Richards (2017), teacher identity “is both individual as well as social in nature. On the one hand, it reflects who the teacher is, the teacher’s view of self and how he or she is positioned in relation to other people” (p. 141). This individual part of a teacher identity, influenced by the teacher’s biography, covers their role as well as their value system brought into the classroom. On the other hand, a teacher’s identity is shifting and constructed for it is “shaped by the social context” (Richards, 2017, p. 141).

Language Teacher Identity. As already discussed in Section 2.1, a study could show that “many aspects of identity – including, though not restricted to, matters of race, gender, sexual orientation – were of the utmost importance in the language classroom” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). Consequently, language teachers act in a social room that is identity-establishing in two respects. On the one hand, this means that the teacher’s LTI shapes what happens in the classroom and, hence, has the potential to change one’s own as well as the students’ behaviour, attitudes, and actions. This way, LTI “is a key source for agency for social change” (Morgan, 2017, pp. 205–206). On the other hand, classroom (inter)actions influence the teacher’s LTI, making the relationship between classroom (inter)actions and LTI a reciprocal one. In addition to that,

LTI can be considered a methodological tool, “a foil for both reflecting teachers’ professional self-understanding and the situatedness of the teacher in the institutional context” (Gerlach, 2023, p. 143).

Critical Language Teacher Identity. According to Kubota (2017), “[a] critical teacher identity can be characterized by a firm commitment to social justice” (p. 212). While every teacher has a “certain ideological or political inclination” (Kubota, 2017, p. 210), teachers endorsing critical orientations “tend to have an identity with a distinct ethical commitment, which guides their pedagogical practices” (Kubota, 2017, p. 212).

Since LTI is accessible via reflection but can also be shaped by reflections initiated by acts of positioning within reflexive discourses, it is a promising concept for teacher education (Güllü & Gerlach, 2023, p. 23). Creating opportunities for reflection and dealing with one’s LTI is important as values, norms, and positionings influence what and how teachers teach (Gerlach, 2023, p. 149), and are, in turn, influenced by what happens in the classroom. Thus, LTI should not be neglected when examining the professional development of teachers (Gerlach, 2023, p. 153). Since one’s identity can be expressed in and shaped by acts of positioning, LTI can be examined by analysing precisely these positioning practices established in linguistic discourses (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004, p. 168).

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Instrument

To explore the underlying research question *To what extent is a racial critical perspective part of pre-service ELT teachers’ LTI?* within focus group interviews, it was operationalised in the interview guide by focusing on two main aspects:

- A): How do pre-service ELT teachers position themselves evaluatively and epistemically towards stereotypical teaching materials (specific focus)?
- B): How do pre-service ELT teachers position themselves evaluatively and epistemically towards critical racism (abstract focus)?

Resulting from this, implications for the first phase of teacher education can be derived.

A semi-structured interview guide, structured according to questions A) and B), was used to gather information about the pre-service ELT teachers' LTI within focus group interviews. After posing some warm-up questions that enquired definitions of basic terms and, hence, were meant to ease into the interview and establish a framework of reference shared by the interviewees, the main part of the semi-structured interview guide was split into two sections. For question A), the interviewees were confronted with the teaching materials portrayed in Section 2.1 (Fig. 1–3). Presenting one stimulus at a time, the interviewees were asked to comment on the texts, task, and sample solution, respectively. For question B), the interviewees were enquired about racial criticism in general. Closing questions were used to wind down the interview and give the opportunity for the interviewees to add anything they felt was missing (Burns, 2010, p. 80).

Since this research endeavor is social in nature as it is about individuals and their thoughts, it was ensured that it strictly followed ethic guidelines. Thus, the respondents' right to privacy, their right to refuse to answer, their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time without offering an explanation and having to risk negative consequences, as well as their right to remain anonymous were accounted for and mentioned within the consent form.

3.1.2 Method and participants

It was decided to investigate the research question within focus group interviews, "defined as group discussions which focus on a specific topic or situation" (Galloway, 2019, p. 290). From the participants' perspective, the focus group interview format ensures that the focus is on the negotiation of answers in the group rather than on their individual responses. This can and should take pressure off the individual (Galloway, 2019, p. 290). For two aspects, this is beneficial for the research proposal. Firstly, the "focus group format is based on the collective experience of group brainstorming, that is, participants thinking together, inspiring and challenging each other, and reacting to emerging issues and points" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). This means that participants are required to take a stance to a given stimulus and position themselves not only with regard to this stimulus, but also to other participants' opinions. This way, not only meaning is being constructed collaboratively, but also the participants' LTI is being constructed discursively. As such, the focus group

interview format allows to get an insight into identity construction and identification processes. Secondly, the first-mentioned aspects combined with the group format has the potential to make the participants feel more comfortable to talk about sensitive topics than in one-on-one interviews.

While focus group interviews are usually conducted “with groups of six to eight participants” (Burns, 2010, p. 77), sometimes even with “6–12 members” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144), two focus groups with two participants each were used for this research endeavour. Section 3.2.2 will explain why this group size is still sufficient. As shown in Table 1, all participants are students of ELT, which marks the homogeneous feature in the group composition. Tim¹⁵, whose second subject is Physical Education, and Amy, who studies German alongside ELT, participated in the first focus group interview. Louis, studying Spanish alongside ELT, and Sophia, whose second subject is History, participated in the second focus group interview. Apart from Amy, who aims to become a teacher at comprehensive schools (*Haupt-, Real, and Gesamtschulen, HRSGe*) with integrated teacher training for special education (*Integrierte Sonderpädagogik, ISP*), all participants are in their Master of Education programmes for grammar schools (*Gymnasien und Gesamtschulen, GymGe*) at a university in North Rhine-Westphalia. In late October 2023, the focus group interviews were held and recorded in a face-to-face setting.

Table 1: Composition of the focus group interviews (own research)

<i>Focus group interview</i>	<i>Date of recording</i>	<i>Interview duration</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Type of school</i>
Interview I	October 23, 2023	01:20:21	Tim	ELT, Physical Education	<i>GymGe</i>
			Amy	ELT, German	<i>HRSGe with ISP</i>
Interview II	October 24, 2023	01:19:11	Louis	ELT, Spanish	<i>GymGe</i>
			Sophia	ELT, History	<i>GymGe</i>

¹⁵ Conforming with research ethics (see Section 3.1.1), the names of the participants are anonymized.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Procedure

The interviews were transcribed according to Dresing and Pehl's (2018, pp. 21ff.) extended content-semantic transcription system. Exemplary sequences selected for this article were additionally transcribed according to the conventions of GAT 2 (Selting et al., 2009). Subsequently, the interviews were coded following Mayring's (2022) Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). While the different sections of the interview guide already predetermined the categories emerging from the analysis to a certain degree, the analysis still allowed for more categories to evolve inductively from the data. In total, nine main codes (MCs) with zero to eight sub codes (SCs) derived from the data (see Appendix 1).

3.2.2 Instrument – Positioning Analysis enhanced by QCA

While QCA was used to analyse the pre-service ELT teachers' positioning practices on a content-level, the overall framework of the analysis is provided by Weiser-Zurmühlen's Positioning Analysis model (2021, 2022). Combining Davies and Harré's Positioning Theory (1990) and Du Bois' Stance Taking Theory (2007), Weiser-Zurmühlen (2021, 2022) provides a model that allows to use the concept of positioning as a means to gain empirical insight into the construction of identities based on narratives.

According to Davies and Harré (1990), positioning is understood as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). Within this discursive process, identities are not only constructed but enacted (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004, p. 168). With their definition of positioning, Davies and Harré (1990) have laid the foundation for Du Bois' stance taking theory (2007), which describes stance taking as

“a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field” (p. 163).

This understanding already implies that the act of stance taking is “a set of three actions (evaluation, positioning, alignment)” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 169) enacted with the involvement of “three entities (first subject, second subject, stance object)” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 169). Let us first focus on the entities: To

take stance, at least two subjects are needed, which explains why it is sufficient to conduct focus group interviews with just two interview partners (see Section 3.1.2). The subjects refer to what Du Bois (2007) calls the stance object, the “target toward which the stance is being directed” (p. 147). Now, let us shift the focus to the three actions: While an evaluative stance describes “the process whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 143), the epistemic stance indicates how knowledgeable a speaker pretends to be (Du Bois, 2007, p. 143). Alignment, in this case, indicates the degree to which a speaker agrees with their interlocutor’s opinions, beliefs, and positionings (Du Bois, 2007, p. 144). A typical stance act proceeds like this: Within a so-called stance lead, subject 1 positions themselves evaluatively and/or epistemically towards the stance object. In a stance follow, subject 2 also positions themselves evaluatively and/or epistemically towards the stance object, but at the same time, they are already influenced by the first subject’s stance taking process – and thus, positioning – which means that they create (dis-)alignment (Du Bois, 2007, p. 161).

As displayed in Figure 4 on the next page, Weiser-Zurmühlen (2021, 2022) follows these understandings, but expands the stance taking model by the following three aspects:

- Represented by B+, the model indicates that the act of positioning requires at least two interlocutors but may include more than that (Weiser-Zurmühlen, 2021, p. 288).
- The interlocutors position themselves and others not only with local but also with global scope. While local scope pertains to the interaction, global scope alludes to general discourses related to the topic under discussion (Weiser-Zurmühlen, 2021, p. 289).
- The positioning object may be concrete or abstract (Weiser-Zurmühlen, 2021, p. 289).

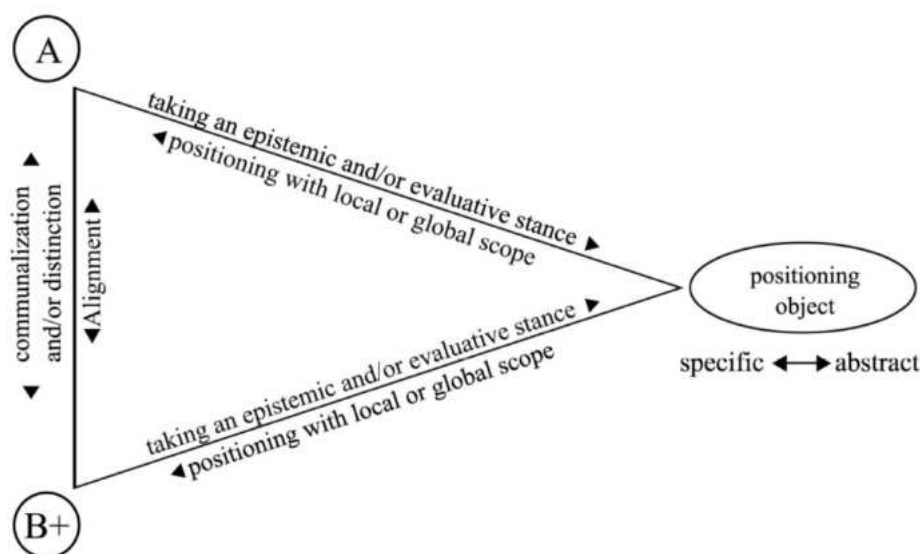


Figure 4: Positioning analysis model according to Weiser-Zurmühlen (2022, p. 7)

Applying the positioning analysis model to my research, the interview partners take both, evaluative and epistemic stances towards stereotypical teaching materials as the specific positioning object and critical racism as the abstract positioning object. Consequently, they position themselves and their partners with local scope, pertaining the interview situation as such, and with global scope, concerning general discourses surrounding racial criticism. While all of this happens in the interactive discourse, the interlocutors also (dis-)align with the other interview member's stances towards both, the specific and abstract positioning object. In this process, the participants share parts of their identity construction.

4 Analysis

In a first step, it will be analysed what kinds of evaluative (Section 4.1) and epistemic stances (Section 4.2) the participants take towards the stereotypical teaching materials (specific positioning object) and racial criticism (abstract positioning object) on a content level. In a second step, the degree of (dis-)alignment will be investigated explaining how positionings are occupied by the stance takers (Section 4.3). A last analysis section will focus on the emerging questions of entitlement and social desirability (Section 4.4).

4.1 What kind of evaluative stances do pre-service ELT teachers occupy towards stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism?

With regard to sub-question A (see Section 3.1.1), the first stimulus – the texts (see Fig. 1) – is predominantly assessed positively by both focus groups. Mainly, the text format including different perspectives and its linguistic adequacy are positively evaluated. Further, Tim deems the texts to be exciting, realistic, and authentic. He justifies his assessment with the statement:

Also dieses Schichtdenken kommt auf jeden Fall sehr gut rüber [...]. Also für mich sind/ scheinen die schon relativ relativ authentisch zu sein (Interview I, passage 72).

So this thinking in social strata definitely comes across very well [...]. So to me they are/seem to be relatively authentic.

This indicates that, at this point in focus group interview 1, social differences are recognised but not yet problematised. The participants rather focus on the (linguistic) authenticity of the text, without a specific mention to the stereotypical representation yet – however, they further problematised this in a following sequence.

- 01 A: also ich muss sagen (.) so (-) auf den Ersten blick hatte ich
kurz ein bisschen schiss (.) dass das ETwas stigmatisierend sein
könnte; =
- 02 I: [hm hm],
- 03 A: =[also] wenn das so ein bisschen so ist> (.) äh ja keine ahnung
der (-) junge der von mir aus SCHWARZ ist (--) wird dann
beFRAGT,
- 04 Und äh oder (-) hat irgendwie (--) KEINE guten AUssichten auf
die zUkunft,=und
- 05 also (.) ich glaube ihr WISST was ich meine;=[ne]=
- 06 T: [ja voll]
- 07 A: =[da hatte ich]
- KURZ kurz ein bisschen SORGE,
- 08 andererseits denke ich dass ja (.) sowas wie beNACHteiligung von
(--) JA von bestimmten grUppen in der gesellschaft das ist ja
immer noch gang und GÄBE,
- 09 von daher wäre es ja eigentlich auch WICHTig das zu °h
thematisIEREN,
- 10 T: [ja]
- 11 A: [aber] ich glaube es ist total wichtig da drauf zu Achten dass
da eben NICHT so (--) stereoTYPEN (-) [NUR noch];=
- 12 T: [ja]

- 13 A: =also (-- ne dass man da NUR so (.) quasi da drangeht da hätte
ich ein bisschen Angst dass das sonst KOMisch (-- wäre;
14 INSbesondere wenn man eine klasse hat die multikulturell ist;
15 T: ja
16 A: fände ich das ein bisschen (.) ähm (---) ja (-- bisschen KURZ
gedacht;
17 T: ja (-- voll-
18 ja ich würde mich da auf jeden fall ANschließen,=
=und ähm genau [...]

Extract 1: kurz ein bisschen schiss (.) dass das ETwas stigmatisierend sein könnte
(taken from Interview I, passages 98–103)

Within an evaluative stance, Amy describes her initial thoughts when seeing task 3b) for the first time. She utters the worry that the material could be stigmatising since a Black character who is portrayed as poor and without any plans for the future is interviewed and disrespected by the police officer. To this stance lead, Tim establishes alignment by using the stance verb: “*ja voll*” (Extract 1, l. 6). Following this, Amy refutes her former argument by considering that the thematization of Black people being the subject to discrimination is not only important, but real. This part, especially, does not only show Amy’s multi-perspective angle towards the matter, but also her insecurities when dealing with teaching materials like this. Once again, Tim expresses his alignment by using the stance verb “*ja*” (Extract 1, l. 10). Concluding, Amy highlights the importance to avoid this kind of stereotypical depiction of Black people in multicultural classrooms, especially. To this aspect, Tim first agrees by using the stance verb “*ja (-- voll*” (Extract 1, l. 17) once again. Yet, he also clarifies his alignment to both aspects – the stereotypical and the authentic aspect of the material – within his stance follow (Extract 1, ll. 17–18).

However, he relativizes this issue by adding “*aber halt auch realistisch, real realgetreu*” (Interview I, passage 103). When the third stimulus – the sample solution (see Fig. 3) – was brought in, the two participants’ opinions consolidate. Amy, for instance, classifies the tabular categorisation as “*total --problematisch--*” (Interview I, passage 134). Her evaluative stances towards the three stimuli, in particular, disclose an intensification process as she proceeds from assuming that the material could be “*ETwas stigmatisierend*” (Extract 1, l. 1) to explicitly evaluating it as “*total --problematisch--*” (Interview I, passage 134; emphasis M.K.).

A similar phenomenon occurs in focus group 2. When evaluating the first stimulus, already, Louis briefly addresses the role allocation, which he believes to be “*irgendwie auch so leicht stereotyp*” (Interview II, passage 50).

As soon as focus group 2 is confronted with the third stimulus, Louis states: “*Also ähm das ist irgendwie eine sehr stereotype Darstellung*” (Interview II, passage 75). Just as with the first focus group, this clearly indicates a process of intensification in the evaluative stance taking activities.

Not only is this intensification process visible through the participants’ increasingly sophisticated opinions but also through the clear designation of racism as the underlying issue in the material. Very early on in the second focus group interview, Sophia encapsulates the underlying issue by saying:

Also ich frage mich auch so, wo der SINN dahinter liegt, also was man daran erkennen soll. Also wenn ich jetzt zum Beispiel dann aufschreiben würde, okay also Lefa und Cebile, wenn man das so ausspricht, sind jetzt beide black UND haben keine Health Insurance, also WAS sollen denn die Schüler daraus lernen? Also weil Menschen in Südafrika schwarz sind, haben sie dann keine ähm Krankenversicherung? Also das ist ja auch, also ich weiß nicht, ob es die richtigen Schlüsse/ ob es die Schüler die richtigen Schlüsse ZIEHEN lässt. (Interview II, passage 57)

So, I also wonder about the meaning behind it, so what you are supposed to understand from it. So, if I were to write down, for example, okay, so Lefa and Cebile, if you pronounce it like that, are now both black AND do not have any health insurance, so WHAT are the students supposed to learn from that? So, because people in South Africa are black, do they not have any health insurance? So that’s just, I don’t know if it draws the right conclusions/ if it lets the students draw the right conclusions.

Even though it becomes clear that Sophia is referring to the stigmatizing categorization, understands and describes it, she does not explicitly denominate it, i.e. by explicitly calling the material “racist”. Later in the interview, however, she clearly addresses the issue, which is that “*rassistische Narrative reproduziert werden und aber auch nicht re/DEkonstruiert am Ende*” (Interview II, passage 109). What we see here is a tentative approach to tackling the problem of stereotypical representations in the material.

These examples show that the participants recognize stereotypical aspects in the teaching material from very early on and increasingly problematize the unquestioned reproduction of racial stereotypes. Although the participants show initial uncertainties in labelling stereotyping and racism, which will be examined in Section 4.2, this intensification process in the evaluative stance taking activities (from “*etwas stigmatisierend*” to “*total problematisch*” and from “*leicht stereotyp*” to “*sehr stereotype Darstellung*”) indicates that stereotypical representations in textbooks are clearly relevant to them. Thus,

they position themselves as harsh critics of the materials under scrutiny. At the same time, it can already be stated that the reinforcement of their opinions indicates that the participants increasingly position themselves as knowledgeable by taking epistemic stances towards the material.

Focusing on sub-question B (see Section 3.1.1), one can say that the pre-service ELT teachers align in terms of the importance of racial criticism and its implementation at schools. When asked to comment on the importance to integrate racial critical perspectives into their own (future) teaching, all of them stated that it is “[s]ehr wichtig” (Interview I, passage 311), “super, super wichtig” (Interview I, passage 318), “schon ziemlich [wichtig]” (Interview II, passage 158), and “VIEL wichtiger ähm als Sprachübungen zu machen” (Interview II, passage 159; see Section 4.4). As such, they unambiguously position themselves as advocates of racial criticism. Hence, this indicates that racial criticism constitutes a facet of their LTI. According to Gerlach and Fasching-Varner (2020, p. 222), this kind of motivation and self-efficacy is vital for implementing social justice teaching approaches. However, in these evaluative stance taking activities, a number of uncertainties are mirrored, which have an effect on the epistemic level of stance taking and will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 What kind of epistemic stances do pre-service ELT teachers take towards stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism?

Since, as the focus group interviews progresses, the positionings become increasingly clear through evaluative stance taking activities, the impression could be gained that the participants position themselves as experts in the subject area. Further, Tim explicitly positions himself as knowledgeable by saying:

Ich würde auch sagen, wenn sich jemand wirklich damit befasst und ähm also (..) auskennt also zum Beispiel wie es jetzt vielleicht bei uns würde ich HOFFEN sage ich mal. (Interview I, passage 271)

I would also say that if someone is really concerned with it and, um, (..) is well informed, for example, as it is the case for us, I would HOPE I'd say.

With a statement like this, he explicitly ascribes expertise to deal with racial criticism to both, himself and Amy.

Implicitly, all participants position themselves as knowledgeable when suggesting approaches to teaching the material under scrutiny. For instance, Tim suggests using the material as an introduction to a teaching sequence about

South Africa which would thematize the positive depiction of *white* privileges. Amy recommends initiating reflection processes on the part of the students, for instance by discussing the materials. Further, she would instruct the students on doing research on the reality in South Africa as well as on stories “*die dieses Schema völlig durchbrechen*” (Interview I, passage 385). Another of her approaches is to complement the table in task 3b) by a column asking why the characters are living in a particular neighborhood as well as do or do not have a health insurance and/or plans for the future. Louis would adapt the material by providing as much context as possible, for instance by adding info-boxes on background-information on South Africa, its history and society. Just as Amy, Sophia would ask the students to find authentic materials from South Africa within a research phase. Using this authentic material, causes for Lefa’s situation should be addressed:

Und dann (..) welche ja SORGEN und welche PROBLEME sind eben/ also stecken dahinter? Also dann (..) zum Beispiel, also gucken wir uns jetzt Lefa zum Beispiel an, also WARUM ist es jetzt gerade für ihn SO schwer? (Interview II, passage 174)

And then (..) which CONCERNS and which PROBLEMS are at the bottom of it? So then (..) for example, let’s take a look at Lefa, for example, so WHY is it SO particularly difficult for him?

This way, she assumes that a deconstruction process is initiated. Since these suggestions are in accord with the academic discussion on established teaching approaches (i.e., Becker, 2023, on delivering facts and history of racism; Gerlach, 2020, on contextualization in foreign language teaching and critically discussing the teaching materials), it can be assumed that the participants position themselves as knowledgeable through epistemic stance taking activities.

However, as indicated in Section 4.1, the participants show insecurities at the content level, already. On the one hand, Tim and Amy utter worries with regard to implementing racial criticism into their (future) classrooms. In view of increasing standardisation processes, Tim fears a lack of support by both, teaching staff and school administration, should he decide to use self-designed materials. Amy is not sure as to whether she will actually implement a critical perspective on racism into her teaching for a fear of extra effort in a profession that is engrossing, anyways. Additionally, she doubts that she is brave enough to push through her desire to teach racial critically at any time. She shows her discomfort by saying:

*Wo ich mich dann halt auch frage wie soll man das dann (...) also wie soll man das zeitlich noch //schaffen//? Dann was du auch angesprochen hattest mit den Lehrkräften, sehe ich ähnlich. Also ich hätte auch Angst, ne? Kommt natürlich voll auf die Schule, auf die Lehrkräfte drauf an, aber wenn ich dann da als junger Hüpfen gerade aus der Uni komme und dann sind da irgendwie fünf Lehrkräfte, die das schon (...) jahrelang machen, ich weiß nicht, ob ich immer den MUT hätte, mich da so durchzusetzen. Oder ob ich nicht dann (...) ja oder ob ich nicht dann manchmal auch ein bisschen Angst hätte so dann irgendwann die Blöde zu sein, die immer gegensteuert. Also vor allen Dingen weil ich ja, wenn ich ja erstmal in die Schule reingehe, gerade was Workload angeht, ich habe ja im Prinzip ÜBERHAUPT keine Ahnung. Wenn ICH jetzt sage „Wir müssen jetzt hier aber immer das Material reflektieren“ und da sind schon drei, die fallen bald vom ****Stuhl****, (...) also (lachen). Dazu kann/ also das weiß ich ja **++nicht++** dann. (Interview I, passage 320)*

*And then I also ask myself how you're supposed to do that (...) so how are you supposed to //manage// that in terms of time? Then what you also mentioned with the teachers, I have a similar view. I'd be scared too, right? It all depends on the school, of course, on the teachers, but if I'm a spring chicken coming straight out of university and then there are five teachers who have been doing it for (...) years, I don't know if I'd always have the COURAGE to assert myself. Or whether I wouldn't then (...) yes or whether I wouldn't sometimes be a bit afraid of being the stupid one who always goes against the grain. Especially because, when I start teaching, when it comes to workload, I basically have absolutely no idea. If I now say "But we always have to reflect on the material here" and there are already three of them, they soon fall off their ****chairs****, (...) so (laughing). I can/ so I do **++not++** know that then.*

This is a crucial point also addressed in the academic discourse. For instance, Gerlach and Fasching-Varner (2020, p. 227) assume that the teacher training, already, may be a risk for critical foreign language teachers since their expectations and attitudes break with systemic guidelines, long-established structures, and existing contents. This breaking with institutional boundaries is anticipated by the pre-service teachers and leads to considerable uncertainties regarding the implementation of critical approaches even before their teacher training has started. The great danger here is that these “struggles in implementing critical pedagogy may impact their professional identity” (Kubota, 2017, pp. 211–212). This should be prevented at all costs, as the professional identity – as shown up to this point – holds huge potential for Social Justice Education.

On the other hand, these struggles become even more clear when discussing how to teach the material under scrutiny, specifically. Picturing a multicultural class, Tim and Amy struggle

damit halt umzugehen, weil man ja quasi darüber redet übers weiße Privileg (Interview I, passage 103).

to deal with it, because you're talking about white privilege, so to speak.

In this context, Tim addresses the risk of whitesplaining:

Und ich denke mir dann auch so, wenn ich das thematisiere, könnte sich eine PoC ja in meinem Klassenraum auch denken „Ach geil, nochmal eine weiße Person, die mir jetzt erklärt, was Rassismus ist“ so (lachen) (Interview I, passage 289).

And then I also imagine that if I bring this up, a PoC in my classroom might think “Oh great, another white person explaining to me what racism is” (laughter)

These insecurities are also to be seen on a linguistic level. Amongst others, the application of evasive terms is prominent in both focus group interviews. In focus group interview 1, it is Tim who repeatedly uses the term “*Apartheid[-Logik]*” whenever he is referring to racist processes:

Ähm und Schwierigkeiten halt einfach, dass dieses (räuspern)/ es wird die Apartheid auf jeden Fall hier überhaupt nicht ähm (.) RICHTIG thematisiert. Vielleicht kam es einmal vor, aber nicht so richtig. Ähm es ist ein/ ja genau. Aber und es werden halt genau diese (.) Prinzipien der Apartheid letztendlich irgendwie reproduziert ohne das zu reflektieren. (Interview I, passage 186)

Um and the difficulties are simply that this (clears throat)/ apartheid is definitely not um (.) PROPERLY addressed here. It may have come up once, but not properly. Um, it's a/ yes, exactly. But and it's precisely these (.) principles of apartheid that are ultimately somehow being reproduced without reflecting on them.

In combination with many short pauses in the speech flow and re-starting sentences, which give the impression of rumination, this conceptual imprecision acts as an indicator of a lack of knowledge that Tim tries to cover by using terms that are familiar, but do not express the same thing.

In the second focus group interview, Louis chooses to use the term ethnicity for ‘race’. This is a conscious decision as he states:

Ah ich hasse das Wort Rasse auf Deutsch. (Interview II, passage 120)

Ah I hate the word ‘race’ in German.

Consequently, he decides to use ethnicity:

Ähm sagen wir Ethnizität. (Interview II, passage 123)

Um let's say ethnicity.

In theory, scholars have often referred to the explicit decision to refrain from using the word race as trying to be “politically correct”, which seems to negotiate the intentions of Louis here, as well. However, scholars also often refer to the use of the word “ethnicity” instead as “a problematic concept” (Rattansi, 2007, p. 88) because “it is a relational concept that sets one group of people apart from another – a process of constructing differences” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 4; see Section 2.1).

In general, making use of these evasive terms can be ascribed to two potential reasons: For one thing, it can be assumed that the participants are uncertain about the distinct application of the ‘right’ terms in the ‘right’ context. For another thing, it may be that the participants (un)consciously avoid using the terms ‘race’ and racism for a fear of saying the wrong thing. This fear is reasonable as talking about racism is a highly sensitive matter and nobody wants to run the risk of being branded a racist – wrongly labelled or not. Either way, the usage of evasive terms combined with long pauses are markers for uncertainties with regard to explicitly addressing racism. While Tim and Amy already broached these struggles on a content-level, these markers, too, disclose that the pre-service teachers are less knowledgeable than they position themselves in other passages.

4.3 How do pre-service ELT teachers take these positionings and negotiate their LTI?

Investigating how these positionings are occupied, the focus is on the interpersonal alignment of the interview partners. It is striking that there is no case of misalignment regarding the positioning objects relevant to this study (evaluating the teaching materials as well as the importance of racial criticism). In fact, the participants always align with each other – even after some disagreement. Adducing the example of Extract 1 above, Amy provides an alignment offer by saying “*also (.) ich glaube ihr WISST was ich meine; =[ne]=*” (Extract 1, l. 5). As already briefly touched upon, Tim takes this alignment offer through the stance marker “*ja [voll]*” (Extract 1, l. 6). Following this, he expresses his alignment with Amy through further stance markers (Extract 1, ll. 10, 12, 15, 17) as well as stance verbs: “*ja (--) voll– ja ich würde mich da auf jeden fall ANschließen*” (Extract 1, ll. 17–18).

Louis and Sophia, in contrast, rarely use stance verbs and/or stance markers. While they never interrupt each other to indicate alignment by using stance markers, they explicitly state their alignment through phrases that clearly indicate agreement. Their discussion about whether or not critical racism is important to in-service ELT teachers provides an example:

01 L: ich glaube das ist eine TYPsache?
 02 ich glaube (.) wahrscheinlich gibt es lehrkräfte die so ein
 bisschen ähm (...) wie wie nennt man das -
 03 dienst nach protokOLL (.) mäßig oder Unterricht nach
 protokOLL machen,=
 04 =im sinne von ähm (-) ich meine man kennt ja dieses stereotyp
 oder diese stereotype person LEhrkraft auch die nur noch mit
 einem BUCH arbeitet;=
 =<<all>die sagt> okay jetzt mach mal aufgabe eins bis fünf
 und wir sprechen in einer stUnde nochMAL,
 [Auslassung 13 Sekunden]
 05 so von meinen persönlichen erfahrungen von DEN SACHen die ICH
 mitbekommen Habe,
 06 ähm (-) ich da sind schon viele bei die da ziemlich großen
 wert drauf legen;=
 =aber ich glaube das hat in dem fall auch wirklich was mit
 polItischer EINStellung zu tun;
 07 GERade wenn es um sowas geht,
 08 also ähm (..) ich habe im praxissemester mit ner
 spAnischlehrerin zusammen das thema migraTION
 durchgesprachen,
 09 und die hat pe!NI!belst darauf geachtet dass sie
 authEntisches material hat <<len>das leute nicht irgendwie
 stereoTYP darstellt>,
 10 und ich meine zu so EINstiegssequenzen brAUcht man sowas
 manchmal auch,=
 =<<all>und das hat sie auch geSAGT>,
 [Auslassung 40 Sekunden]
 11 und da hat die sich tatsächlich !WIR!klich müHe gegeben dass
 sie ähm (.) aktuELLE und auTHEntische ähm materialien
 bekommt,
 12 also aus so beispielhaft ähm (..) hat sie aus spanischen
 tageszeitungen aus dem internet ähm ARTIkel zum thema FLUCHT
 von leuten aus der ukraINE sich herausgesucht und die dann im
 unterricht besprochen und thematisiert,
 13 ähm was ja auch (...) ich sage mal nicht so
 selbstverständlich ist man kann sich auch einfach irgendwas
 keine ahnung aus so ner nem spanischbuch eine seite scAnnen,

14 ähm und das ist so der EINDruck <<len>den ich bei einigen da
 hatte>;
 in solchen KONtexten-

Extract 2: da sind schon viele bei die da ziemlich großen wert drauf legen (taken from Interview II, passages 141–148)

When asked to assess the importance to integrate racial criticism to in-service teachers, Louis takes the stance lead and states that he tends to think that some teachers are critical of the materials they are using (Extract 2, ll. 1–7). He backs his argumentation with examples gained in his *Praxissemester* (Extract 2, ll. 8–15). Sophia, in a stance follow, refuses this assumption (Extract 3, l. 17). Referring back to her *Praxissemester*, herself, her experience could hardly be more different (Extract 3, ll. 17–20):

15 S: ich glaube bei mir genau das GEGENteil,
 16 also ich habe das gefühl -
 17 also jetzt aus einer erfahrung aus MEInem praxissemester,
 18 dass die WENigsten (lachen) irgendwie noch mal drüber schauen
 was sie unterRICHTEN,
 19 und das halt einfach ein sicheres MEDium ist;
 20 also in gewisser weise kann ich es auch verSTE:hen weil es ja
 lehrkräfte halt schon entLASTET so das buch benutzen zu
 können,
 21 aber (.) ähm (-) ja ich weiß nicht also bei den meisten hatte
 ich schon das gefühl dass es eher ein ABarbeiten des buches
 ist,
 22 also gerade weil dann ja auch immer die grammatikaufgaben
 immer sehr schön ähm mit ANgereiht sind so ähm dass es alles
 am ende sozusagen AUFgeht sodass alle themen irgendwie drin
 wÄren,
 23 ähm (...) ja also ich weiß nicht -
 24 ich hatte eher das gefühl dass bei JÜNgeren lehrern also bei
 ReferenDAREN also jetzt nicht ALter sondern eher so
 berufserfahrung dass ähm die grundsätzlich irgendwie ein
 bisschen vorsichtiger waren mit dem material was sie gezeigt
 haben;
 25 aber bei den lehrkräften die ICH so sehen konnte im unterricht
 hatte ich nicht das gefühl -

Extract 3: dass die WENigsten (lachen) irgendwie noch mal drüber schauen was sie unterRICHTEN (taken from Interview II, passage 149)

Extract 2 and 3 clearly show a case of distinction, in which different layers of (mis)alignment about what current teaching practice looks like take effect. While Louis and Sophia take distinct positionings towards the abstract positioning object “(the current implementation of) racial criticism”, they relate to different dimensions of the positioning object. Referring to a Spanish

teacher, who “*hat pe!NI!belst darauf geachtet dass sie authEntisches material hat <<len>das leute nicht irgendwie stereoTYP darstellt>*” (Extract 2, l. 9), Louis narrows the positioning object down to the implementation of critical racism in foreign language teaching. Sophia, in turn, relates to the broader dimension of the positioning object inasmuch as she comments on teachers in general and their ascribed usage of the textbook. Doing this, she equates the use of the textbook with the assumption that the teaching is not critical of racism. Yet, she shows empathy for this unreflective, textbook-based approach to teaching she has experienced (Extract 3, ll. 21–22).

Even though the perception of the positioning object differs slightly, they share alignment in the sense that the two interviewees position (large parts of) in-service teachers as those to whom the implementation of critical racism does not matter (see Section 4.4).

Following this first distinct negotiation of implications from practical experiences, Louis explains his reasons for arguing that it is possible that teachers critically reflect upon their teaching (material). As he already argued in his stance lead (Extract 2, l. 1), he claims that it simply depends on the type of teacher (Extract 4, ll. 30–39). Further, drawing parallels with dedication that already shows during university, he implicitly explicates that racial critical teaching is actually to be classified as an additional commitment (Extract 4, ll. 29–37).

- 26 L: in welcher SCHUle warst du wenn ich fragen darf;
[Auslassung 436 Sekunden]
- 27 L: ich glaube das ist also wirklich sehr TYpenbasiert;
28 ich kann/ ich glaube das ist auch so ein bisschen wie
versteht man den beruf der LEHRperson,
29 es gibt ja (..) also habe ich das gefühl sogar im studium
schon diese typen menschen die sagen okay ich mache drei
jahre bachelor zwei jahre master und dann gehe ich ins
referendariat und ARbeite,
30 ähm und dann gibt es ja irgendwie leute die noch tausend
sachen nebenbei machen und sich irgendwie hier und da
engagieren und sich noch eine vertretungsstelle suchen oder
°h noch mal ein praktikum extra machen oder einen (..) ZWEIten
auslandsaufenthalt planen oder was auch immer,
31 ähm (..) die (..) glaube ich (..) das gANze als nen nen nen
BILDungsweg sehen und nicht als nen ne form von reiner
professionalisIERung,
32 I: hm hm,
33 L: und ich kann mir vorstellen dass es halt (..) ähnlich ist im
sinne von okay entweder du frühstückst halt da deinen
unterricht ab,

34 °h oder du probierst halt wirklich ähm (...) zu bilden nicht
 nur (.) zu den STANDardsachen;
 35 also nicht nur gramMATik und sprAche,
 36 sondern auch (.) ähm (..) kulturelle aspekte wie <<all>das
 ist ja so gesehen auch quasi ein kultureller aspekt>
 historischer aspekte,
 37 ähm (-) um auch vielleicht den schüler*innen so krITisches
 DENken mitzugeben;
 38 also sollte man ja eigentlich ich glaube das ist sogar im
 lehrplan verankert;
 39 aber (..) ist ja auch gar nicht SO einfach immer (.) sowas zu
 vermitteln solche also so eine ART von kompetenz,
 40 I: hm hm,
 41 oKAY-

Extract 4: ich glaube das ist also wirklich sehr TYpenbasiert (taken from Interview II, passages 150–155)

As a consequence thereof, Sophia states: “*ich finde es sehr überZEUgend was du gesagt hast*” (Extract 5, l. 42), reflects upon her thinking process, and explains why she agrees to Louis’ line of argument – his stance lead. This turning point in Sophia’s way of thinking marks the very moment in which alignment is created and positioning is negotiated.

42 S: ich finde es sehr überZEUgend was du gesagt hast;=
 43 L: [lacht]
 44 S: =also ich dachte [mein] (.) mein erster gedanke war so NEIN
 ich glaube nicht dass die meisten das tun,
 45 aber doch ich glaube ich also ich stimme dir da zu;
 46 ich denke AUCH es ist wahrscheinlich sehr tYpenabhängig;=
 47 =also ich dachte einfach nur (..) aus der erfahR also SELBST
 als schülerin von früher,
 48 habe ich so gut |wie IMmer nur mit dem buch arbeiten müssen,
 49 ähm (..) und DANN habe ich auch DAS halt gesehen in meinem
 praxissemEster,
 50 und irgendwie aus den erfahrungen habe ich dann schnell
 irgendwie dann auf viele ANdere geschlOssen,=
 51 =aber ich denke auch wenn ich so ähm (.) mir das in den
 Unikursen zum beispiel angucke wie engagIErt viele sind,
 52 ähm (.) denke ich auch dass es SEHR Unterschiedlich
 wahrscheinlich am ende ist,
 53 und ich könnte es auch gar nicht so sagen wer das tut und wer
 das NICHT tut,=

Extract 5: ich finde es sehr überZEUgend was du gesagt hast (taken from Interview II, passage 156)

While these cases of explicit alignment are rare, the content of their statements clarifies that Louis and Sophia are generally of the same opinion. In either case, these examples show how meaning – and LTI – is continually negotiated through the stance taking activities described above.

While, of course, there is a possibility that the participants actually align with each other and truly share the same opinion, the question of social desirability has to be considered, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Considering the positioning object: topic sensitivity, social desirability, and entitlement

During the two focus group interviews, it repeatedly became clear that social desirability is a factor that is likely to have had influence on the interviewees' responses. The first critical point where social desirability needs to be addressed has been discussed in Section 4.1 and concerns the fact that all participants unhesitatingly approved of including racial criticism in their lesson planning and teaching. For one thing, it is possible that the pre-service teachers felt the need to say that they would integrate racial criticism into their (future) classrooms as they assume this to be the answer that is socially accepted and expected (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 146). For another thing, “pre-service teachers often attempt to represent an explicitly correct, progressive, and evolved view” (Fasching-Varner, 2012, p. 1), which sets them apart from seemingly unprogressive, conservative in-service teachers. While, on a superficial content level, the pre-service ELT teachers take clear evaluative stances towards racial criticism inasmuch as they are of the opinion that it is absolutely important to integrate critical perspectives on racism into their (future) teaching, it is not known whether or not this is their true positioning.

A second incident is the one mentioned in the previous section. It is striking that no case of (continued) misalignment could be found throughout the two focus group interviews. Even after some misalignment such as the one discussed in the previous section, all participants formed alignment in the end. Yet again, it is possible that the participants truly align with each other in every case. And yet again, the issue of social desirability must not be overlooked. Particularly when discussing racism, closely connected to sensitive and moral questions, it is likely that the participants choose to give answers they suspect the interview partner and/or moderator want(s) to hear (Misoch, 2019, p. 19). Talking about sensitive and moral topics, it is more difficult to disagree with an interlocutor's opinion since it may seem that there is just one morally and socially acceptable answer.

This is aggravated by a second factor that Tim implicitly mentions when talking about the danger of whitesplaining (Section 4.2). The point Tim raises opens up another layer to the Positioning Analysis model, namely the question of entitlement to talk about a positioning object and/or to evaluate it. Adapting this to the classroom discourse, Tim does not only reveal the fear of saying the wrong thing as a *white* person that presumably is not in the position to talk about racism. He also raises the question of entitlement to teach racism in ELT as he is biased – and may be limited in his perspective – due to his *white* gaze (Güllü & Gerlach, 2023; see Fig. 5).

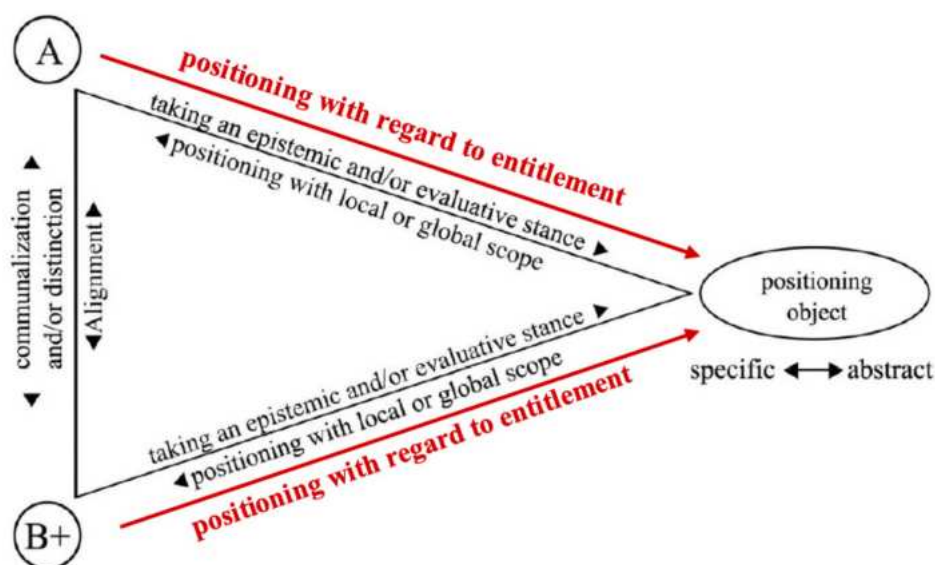


Figure 5: Extended version of the positioning analysis model (Weiser-Zurmühlen, 2022, p. 7; modifications M.K.)

5 Conclusion and outlook: How to take action right now?

Reviewing the results of this contribution, one could argue that there are two main takeaways on what needs to be considered: On the one hand, this study could show that racial criticism appears to be a part of the(se) pre-service ELT teachers' LTI. This became particularly clear through their evaluative stance taking activities towards stereotypical teaching materials and racial criticism. For one thing, all participants positioned themselves as harsh critics of the stigmatizing depiction of Black people in the stimuli under scrutiny. For another thing, they positioned themselves as strong advocates of taking racial critical approaches into account when planning and giving (future) lessons as well as designing and using teaching materials.

However, the study also emphasized that these results have to be treated with caution due to the aspect of social desirability and/or entitlement. On the other

hand, the study uncovered insecurities of the participants. While explicitly addressing insecurities regarding the implementation of racial critical approaches into their (future) teaching due to the *white gaze*, implicit epistemic stance taking practices revealed that the(se) pre-service ELT teachers have insecurities regarding the distinct usage of terms related to racism, as well. Since “the fear of doing something ‘wrong’”¹⁶ (Bönkost, 2020) and the discomfort that comes with talking about racism (Louloudi & Schildhauer, 2024) harbor the risk of stagnation in their process of becoming critical language teachers who have the intrinsic motivation to act as “change agents” (Gerlach & Fasching-Varner, 2020, p. 218), these insecurities – also with regard to the question of entitlement to talk about certain, particularly sensitive topics – need to be counteracted.

Although existing approaches on how to teach from a critical perspective on racism can provide support in this regard, the results confirm that it is useful to establish a continuum of critical practice, starting from teacher education. This kind of teacher education focuses on racial criticism and Social Justice Education more extensively. Precisely because general questions of social justice – and racial criticism in particular – constitute a facet of the pre-service ELT teachers’ identarian convictions, it is likely that study contents addressing these facets will be successfully implemented in their future teaching approaches. The teacher education should initiate and/or support the “ongoing self-reflective, self-critical learning process”¹⁷ (Bönkost, 2020, n.p.) about (critical perspectives on) racism in order to create meaningful learning opportunities for pre-service teachers and to overcome uncertainties in the long term. The consideration of the following six points, which result from the needs of pre-service teachers that emerged in the focus group interviews, could pave the way for such teacher education:

- Acquisition of theoretical knowledge of racism
- Training on critical awareness
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills concerning how to deal with racism
- Acquisition of (racial sensitive) didactical knowledge

¹⁶ The original reads as follows: “die Befürchtung, etwas ‘falsch’ zu machen”.

¹⁷ The original reads as follows: “andauernden selbstreflexiven, selbstkritischen Lernprozess”.

- Recognition of intersectionality
- Consideration as well as reflection on and of LTI

A teacher education that comprehensively educates pre-service teachers with respect to (critical perspectives on) racism and their ability to reflect upon both, multi-perspective entanglements in this discourse as well as their LTI, can sensitize pre-service teachers for not unconsciously reproducing racism (Massumi & Fereidooni, 2017, p. 67). In addition, this kind of teacher education can lay the foundation of a teacher education that tries to prepare for high-quality, inclusive lessons in which discrimination is recognized, deconstructed and countered. This is one approach of trying to ensure that all pupils can live and learn in a safe space and become change agents themselves (Becker, 2023, p. 12).

The four examples mentioned at the beginning combined with the “shocking and shameful” (O’Flaherty, 2023, p. 1) findings of the *Being Black in the EU* report – understood as “a wakeup call for action on equality and inclusion” (O’Flaherty, 2023, p. 1) – emphasize the importance of educating and emancipating critical citizens (Gerlach, 2020, pp. 8–9). This article has demonstrated that pre-service ELT teachers are willing to initiate these development processes in their students. However, it was equally shown that in order to be able to initiate these processes in a meaningful way, teachers need to be supported and empowered within the first phase of their teacher education.

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