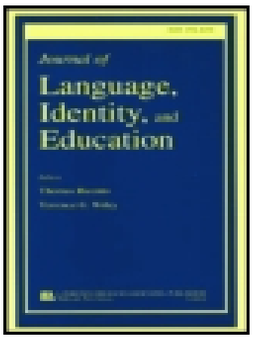

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Categorisation as Positioning-Practice in a Dutch as Second Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how teachers and learners in a Dutch as Second Language (L2) classroom in the Netherlands make sense of themselves, one another, and thereby of the diversity encountered in the class, through practices of categorisation and positioning regarding nationality, place, and culture. Categories raised during class gain meaning in interaction. Teachers and learners engage in positioning by assigning someone a relational location within or outside a respective group or category. It becomes clear that this way of social sense-making happens embedded in or alongside teaching and learning activities in the context of the L2 classroom where *using* and *learning* a language unfold as interconnected processes.

KEYWORDS

Classroom discourse; culture; language use and identity; second language acquisition

Introduction

Identifications with regard to culture and related concepts like nationality and place have received increased attention in the theoretical debate on L2 learning and teaching since the 1990s. Amongst others, this has been reflected in the integration of intercultural competences as a new learning goal (Byram, 1997, 2009). This article seeks to understand intercultural classroom realities by investigating how teachers and learners themselves make sense of their own and their (co-)learners' identifications with categories of culture, nationality, and place in interaction on the spot. The study was conducted in two Dutch L2[1] classes in the Netherlands.

In L2 classrooms like the one researched here, learners with diverse identifications and orientations set out to learn and use a language together, facilitated by a language teacher. Acknowledging that *learning* and *using* a language are parallel processes situates learning in interaction. Thereby, it shifts the focus away from language systems to meaning, and hence to culture (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). In consequence, learners are not merely learners of a language system, but just as teachers, they are users of language(s). This makes them interactants who engage in social meaning-making together in the classroom.

Given the increased attention for interculturality in L2 teaching and learning, how does this social meaning-making unfold amongst teachers and learners spontaneously? More concretely, how do they relate to their own and others' culture, nationality, and place, using the L2 and other available resources, as these topics are reflected in their own social classroom realities, where diverse participants encounter one another?

To answer these questions, I will zoom in on instances in which L2 class participants refer to one another's national backgrounds or their relation to the Netherlands. By applying the lenses of categorisation and positioning, I analyse how teachers and learners construct and use categories of place, culture, and nationality during classes and thereby make sense of one another as well as of the diversity of the class.

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To contextualize the relevance of this research for L2 studies and the implications of the L2 context for the research interest in turn, I start by reviewing didactical and theoretical conceptualisations until the so-called intercultural turn, as well as literature on cultural representations within L2 classroom discourses. It results that cultural representations emerge frequently in class and are endowed with meaning which (re-)shapes ideas about individuals and groups. Therefore, I draw on approaches established by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists who have brought to the fore how notions of self and other are dynamic as they get constantly produced, reproduced and negotiated (Cornips & de Rooij, 2013; Higgins, 2009; Thompson & Dori-Hacohen, 2012; Van de Weerd, 2019).

Building on this literature review, I focus on two Dutch L2 classes in which I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork for this study, by first presenting the research setting and then discussing three cases of categorisation and positioning practices from these classes. The final section brings together these extracts against the wider background of the L2 teaching and learning context.

This article contributes insights into classroom realities and teachers' and learners' spontaneous interactions. Thereby, it adds to a holistic understanding of discourses on culture in the L2 context as it complements theoretical and didactical studies on interculturality.

An interactional perspective

L2 teaching and learning with reunified dichotomies

L2 teaching and learning has traditionally been conceptualized as the transmission of a more or less fixed system that learners can make use of. As such, a dichotomy between *learning* (mainly inside the classroom) and *use* (mainly outside the classroom) has been conceived, drawing on Saussure's prominent distinction of *langue* and *parole* (cf. Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). Emerging around the 1990s, a growing body of research countered this dichotomy by emphasising the interactional dimension of L2 acquisition. These scholars worked towards a reunification of *learning* and *use* (e.g., Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007).

These considerations imply a dialectic approach for classroom praxis, which is reflected in my analysis of data gathered in this research: Even if students' target linguistic resources seem rudimentary in some situations, they can already have social implications and consequences, and students learn from this effective use in turn. Yet, students' emerging target linguistic resources do not work in an isolated way as one fixed system, but also combined with other linguistic resources, for example, a lingua franca like English.

As *learning* and *use* were understood together as interwoven phenomena, the new attention for interaction allowed more space for non-essentialist notions of culture in the L2 acquisition context. In the course of "the 'intercultural turn' in L2 education" (Thorne, 2010, p. 139) many scholars countered traditional concepts of culture as a static entity that could be taught and learned alongside the target language, which was in a comparable way seen from a systematic perspective (Gil et al., 2017). L2 didactics started incorporating learning goals of "intercultural competence" (Byram, 1997, 2009). This entailed an integration of fluid, non-essentialist understandings of culture in the L2 context.

Yet, there are relatively few studies on students' and teachers' own shaping of a classroom discourse on culture, nationality, or place in spontaneous speech. This research area, however, is relevant to depict intercultural realities in L2 teaching and learning contexts holistically. Allusions to culture, nationality, and place can come up both in situations when culture is the more or less explicit class topic and in those when it is not, but when it still seems to matter for participants. Therefore, research on spontaneous interaction can help to understand how these classroom realities complement the didactic intercultural element or not, taking the full class experience into account. This is a research field this article contributes to, especially given that the existing studies in this context mainly focus on English L2 classes.

Menard-Warwick (2009) shows that learners and teachers co-construct and at times also contest categories of cultural representations in interaction. Thereby, they draw on personal experience and other discourses. In doing so, they often refer to instances of a perceived national culture in which the L2 class is embedded or that a learner identifies with. In a similar vein, Gil (2016) identifies two major patterns of cultural categories that interactants in the classroom use: Firstly, what she calls an intercultural one, in which participants engage in meaning-making through a confrontation of multiple interpretations of categories, and secondly, an essentialist one. In Campbell-Wilcox's (2007) study, this latter one seems dominant as she concludes that "common-sensical mainstream conceptions [of culture linked to nations] continue to inform how teachers and students negotiate the heteroglossic landscape of the language classroom" (p. 280).

Positionalities of L2 teachers and learners

The reviewed literature shows that the L2 classroom is about more than merely language learning as understood in a systematic way in traditional L2 scholarship, but that it is also a place in which learners and teachers engage in complex and situated processes of social sense-making and defining self and other in the diversity of the classroom. As these processes happen entangled with or alongside teaching and learning, it is important to consider what a reunification of *learning* and *use* entails for the positions of teachers and learners.

Whereas teachers draw on knowledge gained in trainings, this is not the only form of legitimate knowledge used for teaching. Instead, the scope of resources and active constructions of knowledge is much wider and contains, for example, embodied experience. In consequence, L2 teachers are positioned as users and creators of legitimate knowledge who adapt their teaching to the respective situatedness of the classroom and their learners (Johnson, 2006). As language is understood to be closely entangled with culture, such knowledge is not limited to linguistic aspects, but can include ideas about culture and the national context the class is embedded in.

Discussions around culture and nationality are societally relevant and present in daily life. Thus, it must be acknowledged that teachers also draw on knowledge gained, and experiences collected outside of teacher trainings throughout their lives. Students are often aware of such an expanded teacher cognition, especially in non-formal classrooms with voluntary teachers like the ones in focus in this study. The teacher's potential citizenship, or long-term living experience in the country in which the L2 class takes place, might then be relevant for allusions to the culture of that country, as it might serve as a reinforcement of its validity.

Traditional L2 acquisition scholarship attributes expert-qualities constituted by the provision of language learning-opportunities to the teacher, expressed for example, in repairs, replies to word searches, or feedback. Interactional research has brought to light that learners can situationally take on expert roles, too (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2003; Reichert & Liebscher, 2012). Just as teachers bring along a variety of knowledge and life experience, students do so as well, so that expertise can vary according to the topic at stake.

It results that for the research interest at hand, teachers' and learners' positionalities must be carefully investigated situationally, as these get dynamically constructed and all co-participants in the classroom bring different kinds of expertise, ideas and resources along. In the next section, I will introduce the scholarship on the analytical lenses of categorization and positioning as these can account for such dynamicity and have, therefore, been chosen as the analytic focus of this study.

Categorisation and positioning in interaction

The analysis of positioning practices is rooted in identity studies where it emerged as an opposition to the focus on bound and ritualistic elements inherent in sociological role-theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 2010). As such, it sheds light on how speakers negotiate their own and others' identity, understood as "the product rather than the source of linguistic practices" in discursive practices

in which speakers engage together (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 585). The related phenomena of categorisation and identification do not only point to the active and processual dimension of such practices but simultaneously urge scholars to make explicit who the identifiers are: Self-categorisation is in interplay with categorisation by others and both are highly context-sensitive and situationally contingent, also taking into account respective positions in a social sphere structured by power (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Hence, categorisation and positioning appear to be useful tools to take into account that classroom settings are classically endowed with hierarchy which gets constantly (re-)produced.

Conversation Analytic work has shown that categories can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly, for example, through implicatures like references to activities which are societally known to be characteristic for a specific community (Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 2007). Furthermore, categories are often implicitly or explicitly juxtaposed with other categories, which can be named in the interaction or not (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005). Therefore, it is important to identify which (potentially unnamed) categories teachers and learners allude to.

With this approach, I connect to a growing body of sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological studies which shows how interactants use ethnic, national and racial categorisation as both a tool and resource to make sense of one another in interaction (e.g., Cornips & de Rooij, 2013; Higgins, 2009; Lee, 2009; Van de Weerd, 2019, 2020). These studies are united in their take on such categorisations as simultaneously embedded in and producing social meaning. They underline that also categories of, for example, nationality and ethnicity are not static but socially dynamic objects which, from an ethnomethodological approach, "get their meanings on each occasion locally, through the contextual understandings that coparticipants assign and display" (Kasper, 2005, p. 4).

Interaction and conversation are socially structured, as Conversation Analysts have largely shown (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007). As the structuring of conversation is not the main analytic interest, it is part of the analysis only as far as it is of relevance for understanding how categories get socially constructed and negotiated. Throughout this article, I analyse the production of categories of place, nationality, and culture, in relation to positioning which I understand as the discursive practice of depicting self and others as (non-)members of a specific category (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Interaction in the Dutch L2 classrooms

Research setting and methodology

This paper is empirically grounded in ethnographic data that I collected during three months of fieldwork in two Dutch L2 classes on a weekly basis in Amsterdam East in the summer of 2018. My fieldwork entailed participant observation during classes which have mainly been documented by note-taking as well as partially audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. I furthermore conducted individual and focus-group interviews with learners, the teacher, and the coordinator of the courses.

Both classes were offered for free in a neighbourhood-community-centre and were mainly chosen by participants because they were easily accessible as they had just a low-stake placement conversation rather than a serious placement test. Another reason to choose the classes was that the commitment seemed loose since occasional non-attendance did not lead to financial consequences.

Both of the classes were facilitated by the same voluntary teacher who did not attend an official long term teacher training program but had participated in several training workshops throughout the years and has around seven years of voluntary Dutch L2 teaching experience (interview with the teacher, 15/06/18). The target group consists of so-called highly-skilled migrants and the teaching material used was mainly on an intermediate, B1 level conforming to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. However, Dutch language competence varied largely among the participants, with some participants having just started to learn the language upon moving to the Netherlands half a year ago, and others already living in the country for more than 10 years. This range in language skills also played a part in my integration in the field, as I was not the only one amongst the learners with a higher command of Dutch.

For most of the participants who had been in the Netherlands for several years, the main purpose of the Dutch class was socialising and—on the side—using and improving Dutch, as they explained in interviews. Participants with a more recent migration history to the Netherlands indicated to attend the course primarily to improve their Dutch skills while socialising played a subordinate role. The national backgrounds of the learners are as diverse as their immigration stories to the Netherlands. They include Turkish, U.S.-American, Argentinian, Canadian-Indian, Argentinian, Israeli, German, Thai, French, Hungarian, Irish, Chinese, British, Togolese and Iranian. National backgrounds as well as languages spoken were a popular topic for the learners to discuss, so that these were known to the classmates and me. For example, participants referred to my German background on several occasions when comparing our respective language levels. The participants were mainly between 20 and 45 years old.

At the time of my fieldwork, I had just recently moved to the Netherlands myself, but was able to communicate in intermediate Dutch due to previous courses and experiences. I introduced myself in the field as both a researcher interested in diversity in L2 classes, and a learner. I openly showed my insecurities with Dutch, always came prepared with completed homework assignments and participated and asked questions in class, most times sitting amongst the students. Even though my Dutch skills seemed to exceed those of the majority of learners, I was mostly treated just like a co-learner with whom the others would, for example, quickly check what the homework was before class or work on tasks in pairs and groups. However, my role changed situationally since the teacher asked me to replace her several times when she was unable to come, offering me space to discuss topics of relevance for my research with the learners. In these sessions, I mainly opted for discussion tasks, for example, based on elicitation material. This stood in contrast to the sessions carried out by the teacher, which were clearly focused on grammar. I experienced the learners as very active and willing to participate in my sessions, too. Whilst I felt accepted sitting among them in the subsequent classes as a learner again, they also confronted me with my ambiguous roles, for example, when one learner jokingly welcomed me into the classroom with *"Hello, my teacher!"* before a regular class with the original teacher (whom he greeted in Dutch and with her first name afterwards, for example, *"Goedendag Janneke!"*[2] (field notes from 8/6/2018).

Attendance in the classes varied highly, and whilst I met around 25 learners in total throughout my fieldwork, there were usually only around 7–11 learners in the classroom at once, with a small core group of around 6 in each class attending very regularly and the few remaining coming every now and then. Some learners attended both courses.

In the following analysis section, I will discuss three interactions from these classes, in which participants actively produce categorisations based on culture, nationality, and place, which creates specific positionings of self and other. My data analysis shows that participants use and orient toward categorisations in different ways: While they sometimes happen rather "on the side" and are not given much attention to by co-participants, they are actively negotiated at other times. Furthermore, it appears that participants use categorisations in rather plain ways sometimes, while they endow them with cultural and social meaning at other times. The instances discussed in the following sections have been chosen as they were found to be particularly salient and are illustrative of these different shapes that categorisations can take, and of the different processes they are often embedded in.

Analysis of categorisation and positioning in the Dutch L2 classroom

Dutch word choice as a characteristic of category members

I start the analysis with a teacher-learner interaction which occurs while the learner Adam reads out his homework assignment, a reflection about his experiences of living in the Netherlands. This interaction thus happens in a teaching context which is, amongst others, aimed at the teaching goal of intercultural competence. An English translation of the speech that is delivered in Dutch is included underneath the original. The transcription conventions can be found in the Appendix.

Extract 1. De Middellandse Zee/ The Mediterranean.

	Adam	*Wat mis ik? Ehm, ik mis mijn moeder, maar we proberen te ontmoeten*
1		**What do I miss? Ehm, I miss my mother, but we try to meet**
		twee of drie keer iedere jaar/ Ik mis de zee van de {[ENG] Mediterranean}
2		**two or three times a year/ I miss the sea of the** ***{[ENG] Mediterranean}***
		{[rit] De Middellandse Zee} noemen wij die/
3	Janneke	**{[rit] De Middellandse Zee} is how we call it/**
	Adam	*Ja,*
4		**Yes,**
	Janneke	*Wij noemen dat de Middellandse Zee/*
5		**We call it de Middellandse Zee/**
	Adam	*Ja, te koud/*
6		**Yes, too cold/**
	Janneke	*[laughter] Nee, {[ENG] Mediteranean,} noemen wij de Middellandse Zee/*
7		**[laughter] No, we call {[ENG] Mediterranean,} de Middellandse Zee/**
	Adam	*Nee, ik bedoel de {[ENG] Mediterranean/}*
8		**No, I mean the {[ENG] Mediterranean/}**
	Janneke	*Ja::/ {[f] dat noemen wij zo/}*
9		**Ye::s/ {[f] we call it this way/}**
10	Adam	**Oh, sorry,**
	Janneke	*[laughter] Wij noemen dat niet de {[ENG] Mediteranean/}*
11		**{[ENG] We don't call it the Mediterranean/}**
12	Adam	**{[HI] [ENG] Ah:, I get it, ah okay/}**
	Janneke	*Omdat het zo allemaal tussen de landen ligt/*
13		**Because it's located between all these countries/**
14	Adam	**Ah::/**
	Janneke	*Dat noemen we in Nederland de Middellandse Zee/*
15		**In the Netherlands we call it de Middellandse Zee/**
	Adam	*Goed, okay, okay/*
16		**Good, okay, okay/**
		(Transcribed from audio-recording of 25/05/2018)

This situation at hand depicts a repair sequence in which participants initiate and try or manage to solve an identified "problem" in the talk. The actions aiming to solve the problem thereby supersede other actions (Schegloff, 1997, 2000). In this case, the teacher Janneke identifies the learner Adam's use of "Mediterranean" (line 2) as a repairable and completes her repair for the first time in line 3 with a translation to "de Middellandse Zee." The repair subsequently becomes the focus of the interaction, thereby superseding Adam's reading out of his homework assignment. Whilst repair is a classical element of teacher-learner interaction in the L2 classroom (cf. e.g., Ryelander, 2009; Seedhouse, 2004), the way in which the repair sequence proceeds is striking as it entails a positioning process.

When Janneke first corrects Adam's code-switch to the English term "Mediterranean" in his utterance that is carried out in Dutch until then, she states that "de Middellandse Zee is how we call it" (line 3). Initially, Adam does not seem to understand that he is being corrected and answers with a reference to a cold temperature, which seems detached in the course of the conversation (line 6).[3] Janneke rejects Adam's out-of-context mention and repeats her translation of Mediterranean to the Dutch name, again linking the use of this respective term to a group she considers as "we" (line 7). The dynamics repeat when Adam displays a misunderstanding once more (line 8) and Janneke reinforces the connection between the naming-practice and the group again (line 9).

In her actions all linked to the initial repair (line 3) throughout this sequence (lines 5, 7, 9, 11, and 15), Janneke continuously uses "we," thereby creating a group that is characterised by its use of the Dutch term "de Middellandse Zee." The "we" depicts a form of teacher talk here, through which she marks a learning opportunity for Adam (cf. Walsh, 2002). As the first person plural can either refer to the speaker and the listener, or the speaker and others but exclude the listener, it is clear that Janneke

positions herself within the group. In relation to the extended notion of teacher cognition, this positions her, being from the Netherlands, as an expert who presents and teaches legitimate knowledge.

Janneke's positioning of Adam with regards to the group she constructs by "we," however, is blurry: Firstly, he is described as not belonging to it, resulting from line 11, where Janneke clarifies what members of this group *don't* do, namely exactly what Adam just did, that is, calling the ocean under discussion by the English term "Mediterranean." Situationally, Janneke puts him outside the "we"- group she constructs. Yet, eventually, her repair also provides him with a way into that imagined category as she carries it out in the function of a language teacher in an expert-role, offering Adam learning-opportunities.

After Adam displays his understanding (lines 12 and 14), Janneke, upon using "we" with reference to the naming practice for the 6th time, further clarifies which group she refers to with the personal pronoun: "In the Netherlands, we call it de Middellandse Zee" (line 15). Thereby, she introduces a place-category ("the Netherlands"), and links the Dutch territory to Dutch language use, more specifically to the use of "de Middellandse Zee" instead of its English equivalent.

Janneke's repair of Adam's English word which she translates to Dutch thus comes with more than just a correction. She also constructs a category, a group that speaks Dutch and uses "de Middellandse Zee" accordingly, which she links to the place of the Netherlands. She positions herself in that group of Dutch speakers and the learner Adam as holding an ambiguous position: On one hand, his use of "Mediterranean" does not fit the group characteristic but on the other hand, Janneke's correction is aimed at moving him into the group of Dutch speakers as the correction provides him with a learning opportunity.

In this interaction, the categorisation happened rather on the side, without the person who is being categorised orienting towards this. At other times, categorisations were found to be relevant enough to be made the focus of the interaction afterwards, and yielded a negotiation process. The following situation is an example thereof.

Contesting categorisation through linguistic place-making

The following extract stems from a session in which I was asked to substitute the teacher who had to cancel on a short notice on that day due to an emergency. I took the chance to ask the learners in which situations they speak Dutch in their everyday lives. The teaching context is thus informal, but again aimed at reflection on personal experiences. The learner Camilla contextualised her answer with the story of how she met her husband on a bike trip through Asia and after living in Argentina for a while, they eventually moved to Amsterdam with their children. Murat and Finn are other learners who, like Camilla, attended the classes on a regular basis. All participants thus know each other, and also know about Camilla's national Argentinian background as this had occasionally come up in previous interactions.

Extract 2. Máxima.

	Camilla	*Wij kozen in Argentina te leven, en nu, eh, andere {[ENG] circumstances,}*
1		**We chose to live in Argentina, and now, eh, different {[ENG] circumstances,}**
2		
	Me	*omstandigheden,*
3		**circumstances**
	Murat	*Heb je connectie met Máxima?*
4		**Do you have connection with Máxima?**
5	Camilla	**Mh?**
		Heb je connectie met Máxima?
6	Murat	**Do you have connection with Máxima?**
7	Camilla	**{[ENG] no,} =[laughter] =**

(*Continued*)

Extract 2. (Continued).

8	Murat	**=[laughter] =**
	Finn	=**{[ENG] Oh, this is Máxima already/} [laughter] =**
	Murat	*Ja, ja/ [laughter]*
10		**Yes, yes/**[laughter]
	Camilla	*{[ENG] No, no,} we wonen, {[ENG] like, far from, Argentina, in Argentina} Buenos Aires en Cordoba en dan, de rest/ Wij wonen in {[ENG] far away}in Patagonie, in een klein dorp/*
11		**{[ENG] No, no,} we live, {[ENG] like, far from, Argentina, in**
12		**Argentina} Buenos Aires and Cordoba {[ENG] and then, the rest/ We**
13		**live in far away} in Patagonia, in a small village/**
	Murat	*Ah, okay/ Dus drie jaar, drie jaar lang, jij en jouw vriend, per fiets, rondgereisd? Rondgefiets?*
14		**Ah, okay/ So for three, three years, you and your friend, with bikes,**
15		**travelled around? Biked around?**
		(Transcribed from audio recording of 01/06/2018)

The extract begins in the middle of Camilla's narration in Dutch, when she resorts to English, hinting at a change in her living situation due to other "circumstances" (line 1). In my role as a substituting teacher on that day, I complete a repair of her switch to English which I understand as a lack of vocabulary and give the Dutch translation of "circumstances" (line 3). Murat subsequently interjects his question if Camilla was related to Máxima (line 4), the wife of the Dutch king and a well-known person of public interest in the Netherlands. Queen Máxima grew up in the capital of Argentina and holds dual citizenship (Argentinian and Dutch). Murat's question can be understood as a joke in which he shows knowledge of the Dutch society. This joke, however, is also inference-rich (Sacks, 1972) as it entails a proposition implying a connection of some sort between Camilla and Máxima. With this implication, he alludes to Camilla's national background, and her previous stay in Argentina that she had mentioned before (line 1), and implicitly positions her as Argentinian.

After an initial questioningly humming by Camilla (line 5), which triggers Murat's repetition of the question (line 6), Camilla negates (line 7), followed by laughter which Murat joins in (line 8). The laughter could be provoked by multiple reasons here, for example, the perceived absurdity of the question, its unexpectedness, or it could be an attempt to ease the situation after her negation (Holt, 2013). The co-learner Finn starts to laugh too, after jokingly picking up on Murat's question by categorising Camilla as Máxima ("this is Máxima already," line 9). Through this comment, he confirms the connection between the two women that was previously constructed by Murat and is based on Camilla's and Queen Máxima's shared citizenship.

Next, Camilla's strong opposition against this joke and the categorisation of her being (like) Máxima follows: By means of a spatial reference, she expresses a symbolic distancing act through putting forward physical, geographical distance: "We live, {[ENG] like, far from, Argentina, in Argentina} Buenos Aires and Córdoba {[ENG] and then, the rest/ We live in far away} in Patagonia, in a small village" (lines 11–13). To further emphasise the mismatch, Camilla juxtaposes what she relates to Máxima (the urban centres Buenos Aires and Córdoba) to what she herself identifies with (a small village in Patagonia). In doing so, she diversifies the category of Argentina. On a more serious note, having stopped laughing, Murat accepts Camilla's contestation ("Ah, okay," line14), and brings the focus back to a period of her life that she had touched upon before, namely her bike travels (linen14).

In extract 2, Camilla is jokingly brought in relation to Queen Máxima by Murat and further categorised even *as* her by Finn. Her subsequent contestation challenges monolithic ideas of Argentina by highlighting a geographical stretch and an urban/rural dichotomy which suggests that it would make a difference if she came from one of the urban centres, like Máxima does, or from a small village in Patagonia, like she does.

Potentially, associations with features that are assumed to be cultural play a part in the juxtaposition of the urban centres and the rural periphery. However, Camilla does not further elaborate on the differences she sees in this regard. Therefore, this is, just like the first interaction, another example in which categorisations are handled in a rather plain format. However, categorisations do not always take such a plain form, as will be shown in the next section, where participants attach social and cultural meaning to a national category.

Interweaving categories of culture and nationality

The interaction described in the following extract is preceded by a discussion in which the learner Jules describes that he is single which leads Janneke to explain slight differences of Dutch terms all used for singles (oude vrijster [spinster], vrijgezel [bachelor/single] and alleenstaand [single, more formal expression]).

Extract 3. Cougar Town.

1	Kira raises her hand to follow up to the discussion around the terms "oude vrijster,"
2	"vrijgezel" and "alleenstaand": So, if a "vrijgezel" is a bachelor, how do you say
3	"cougar?"
4	Liam laughs out loud. Janneke asks for an explanation of "cougar."
5	Liam smiles and explains that it refers to an older woman with three younger
6	lovers. Janneke keeps looking at him. Liam: "Don't look at me! I did not ask this
7	time!"
8	Kira laughs and says that it's getting to sensitive topics.
9	Liam: "Yeah, it's Canadian. I mean you invented Cougar Town!"
10	Janneke: "I don't think that we have an expression for it. There is no Dutch word
11	for this situation."
	(Extract from field diary, 18/05/2018, no verbatim transcript, but based on notes[4]*)*

The situation starts with an explicit word search and as such a classical situation in the context of teaching and learning (cf. Reichert & Liebscher, 2012). However, with her question for a translation of "cougar" (line 2), Kira clearly moves outside of the regular content that was typically discussed in the Dutch L2 classroom in which the research has been conducted. The terms referred to by Janneke before are more conventional and established than "cougar," and—as far as I have observed—there was generally not an explicit discourse about sexuality in the classroom. In this light, Liam's initial reaction of laughter (line 3) might be caused by a sense of surprise. It is clear that he has understood Kira's question as he subsequently explains the concept of "cougar" upon Janneke's request.[5] His laughter and explanation lead Janneke to extensively look at him. These looks, in combination with Liam's verbal reference to them ("Don't look at me!", line 5), mark the situation as unconventional, and the explicit word search as potentially delicate since it might reveal something about Kira's interests.

Through pointing out that it is not him who brought up the topic (line 5), Liam implies that there is someone else (Kira) who could be attributed blame for any inappropriateness of the situation. Liam himself is known as very outgoing and unconventional by his classmates which might also have led Janneke to look at him rather than at Kira. Kira reacts with laughter and verbalises the palpable tension through commenting on the interaction on a meta-level, saying that it would be getting to sensitive topics (line 7).

Whereas it how the interactants mark the perceived unconventionality is insightful groundwork, the most interesting aspect for the focus of this article is the categorisation delivered by Liam now: He confirms Kira's meta-level observation and links her interest in the translation of "cougar" to her nationality, which he knows of from previous conversations in class ("Yeah, it's Canadian," line 9). Liam does so by presenting a cultural representation of Canadians being sexually permissive. He attempts to give evidence for this cultural representation through an example of what he thinks would be a product of Canadian popular culture, namely "Cougar Town" (line 8). "Cougar Town" is a fictive TV series revolving around a woman in her forties who navigates life and romance after her recent divorce.[6]

Liam does not only use the TV series as evidence for a cultural feature, but he also draws on it, following the essentialist logic he displays situationally, to make sense of Kira as a national citizen of Canada. In doing so, he presents the category of Canadian nationals as linked to a culturally determined openness to (talking about) sexual permissiveness. The threefold connection "Kira—Canadian—sexual permissiveness" he makes is reinforced by his use of person deictic: "I mean you invented Cougar Town!" (line 8). "You" could grammatically relate to the 2nd person singular. However, in the context of Liam referring to "Cougar Town" as an evidence for an inclination for more liberal or unconventional approaches to relationships, it is highly likely that he uses "you" in the 2nd person plural, referring to Canadians and including Kira in this category. In short, Liam positions Kira as Canadian at the same time as he links Canadianness to openness to more liberal forms of sexual relationships.

In this positioning act, he thus interlinks categories (cf. Cornips & de Rooij, 2013) so that he *does culture* entangled with *doing nationality* here. Janneke's answer, indicating that there would be no Dutch word for this "situation" (line 10), further adds to an Othering of Kira.

Based on a construction of culture linked to nationality that Liam produces here, Kira gets positioned as Canadian, and in combination with the features attached to Canadianness by Liam, she simultaneously gets positioned as different from the rest of the L2 class. This process is clearly embedded in a teaching/learning context as Kira's word search kicks off the entangled processes of *doing culture* and *doing nationality*.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has emphasised that categorisation is a powerful means that L2 teachers and learners deploy to structure the social space of the classroom by making sense of one another and mapping relations to culture, nationality, and place. Moments in which categorisation and positioning happen become sites of inscribing meanings of culture(s), nationalities, and places and their local implications for the classroom and the common learning as well as social activities. While the participants connect with one another on base of their immigration to Amsterdam and their shared experience as Dutch L2 learners, they draw the attention to their distinct backgrounds in these moments. Thereby, they manifest the diversity inherent in the class, which on a bigger scale also reflects the diversity of the city itself.

When categorising, co-participants often draw on prior knowledge about their classmates as well as (interpretations of) their identifications. Categories raised during classes are not self-evident, but they gain meaning in interaction. Sometimes, these meanings are rather plain: In extract 1, the teacher Janneke constructs a group of speakers that she links to the category of the place of the Netherlands. If the categorisation becomes central to the interaction or not also depends on the co-participants' interpretations of them: Camilla seems to understand her co-learners' construction of the category of Argentina as homogenising and contests it by diversifying it (extract 2). Co-participants can also explicitly define the meaning of a category situationally, like Liam who gives meaning to Canadianness by drawing on instances of popular culture (extract 3).

Furthermore, I illustrated that in relating categories to specific interaction partners in the classroom, learners and teachers simultaneously position themselves and others: The teacher Janneke positions herself, in contrast to the learner Adam, as a full member of the group of Dutch speakers she constructs (extract 1). Liam positions his co-learner Kira as Canadian and, with the co-constructed implications, as different from the rest of the class (extract 3). Camilla positions herself as Argentinian but simultaneously "far away" from the capital and Queen Máxima (extract 2). Through such positioning, teachers and learners thus engage with one another against the background of the class' diversity, and (re-)shape what this diversity means locally and situationally, that is, if it implies sameness or difference, and whether and how it is relevant for the class at all.

Categorisation linked to place, culture, and nationality often happens embedded in or alongside L2 learning and teaching activities. This means that *doing culture* or *doing nationality* through categorisation and positioning is, for example, performed during repairs (extract 1) or on base of word

searches (extract 3) but also during oral conversation elicited in the L2 amongst learners and teachers (extract 2). Not only teaching contexts which explicitly make the students' backgrounds the topic of the class, but also those where it is not explicitly at the forefront of the agenda, are potential sites for categorization and positioning. This underlines that when learners *learn* the L2, they simultaneously *use* it together with teachers and co-learners, which foregrounds meaning and its production and negotiation in action (cf. Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007).

The prominence of categorisation in combination with the diversity of the learner body highlights that L2 learners and teachers engage together in making sense of their own and others' cultural and national orientations in the classroom. Hence, any learning goal along the lines of "intercultural competence" (Byram, 1997, 2009) is in this sense not to be seen as a final outcome of a class which equips learners for language use *in the wild*, but rather as a phenomenon that is already at stake all along the learning process in the classroom. With an increased awareness of this, teachers could be better prepared to handle spontaneous categorisation in their classrooms sensitively and appropriately, as categorisation is a device which has the power to (re-)shape and (re-)organise social space in different ways.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, I use "language L2" (e.g., "Dutch L2") to refer to the mentioned language as a second language, not to denote a national context of the location of the classroom.
2. All names except of my own are pseudonyms.
3. Potentially Adam understood "de Nederlandse Zee" (the Dutch sea) instead of "de Middellandse Zee" (the Mediterranean), as both sound comparable and the North Sea is much colder than the Mediterranean.
4. This situation occurred during a session which was not audio-recorded but only documented with fieldnotes. Notes have been taken in class, immediately after the situation happened. The key categorisations in lines 9 and 10 have been noted as direct quotes immediately after they have been said. As I remarked right away that they match my research interest and made sure to document them fast, it can be ensured that the wording of them comes very close to verbatim. Wording in the beginning, where Kira asks for the difference, might, however, have been slightly different, but with the same intention.
5. "Cougar" is commonly used to describe a woman who is sexually active with younger men. I could not find any definition where the number of men has been determined to be three, but since the word is part of slang language which is known to be developing very fast, it is possible that the definition brought to the classroom by Liam is common amongst some speakers.
6. In contrast to what Liam claims, "Cougar Town" is a U.S.-American production.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

Based on Gumperz and Berenz (1993) with small adaptions

Symbol	Significance
/	Final fall
?	Final rise
,	Slight rise as in listing intonation (e.g., more is expected)
= =	Overlap of speakers' utterances
==	Latching
::	Lengthened segments (e.g., wha::t)
{[]}	Nonlexical phenomena/indication of language change overlaying the lexical stretch, e.g., {[ENG] speech/}-> delivered in English
[]	Nonlexical phenomena which interrupts the lexical stretch, e.g., text [laughter] text//
[rit]	Deceleration in speed of speech
[hi]	High pitch