Students' beliefs: Multimodal Texts as Pedagogical Tools in Foreign Language Learning.

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a research project the objective of which was to characterize the beliefs students have when interacting with multimodal texts and when they are involved in a foreign language learning process. The study was conducted at the Centro de lenguas of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, with advanced learners of English. The literature review intended to determine the relation between

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education, postmodern culture, multimodal texts and students' believes. To collect the data, surveys, interviews and field notes were used. Findings suggest that for the students, multimodal texts are meaningful and motivational pedagogical tools. It was also found that students believe that this type of text improves their communicative skills and helps them think critically.

Key words: learning believes, foreign language learning, multimodal texts.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados del proyecto de investigación titulado Creencias de los estudiantes acerca de los textos multimodales en el aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras. El objetivo de dicho estudio fue caracterizar las creencias que los estudiantes tienen frente a los recursos multimodales como herramienta para el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Este estudio se desarrolló en el centro de lenguas de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional con estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. La información se recolectó a través de diarios de campo y entrevistas. Se encontró que los estudiantes consideran dichos recursos como herramientas motivadoras y significativas. Además, los alumnos creen que dichos textos les permiten mejorar las competencias comunicativas y activar el pensamiento crítico.

Palabras clave: creencias de aprendizaje, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, textos multimodales.

Introduction

This research project arises from questioning the relationship between education and culture. Different authors have stated that there is a gap that divides the processes carried out in schools and daily cultural practices (Ferres, 2000, p. 52). In postmodern societies, mass media is assuming the role of educating young people since the discourses appearing in the media are more related to students' interests and preferences, than those taught in schools (Perez, 2002, p. 20). Young learners tend to prefer texts that provide pleasure and that are less abstract. However, formal education has not included this sort of discourse, especially in second language teaching, which continues to use meaningless resources for learners, such as textbooks. This is what many authors such as Beatriz Sarlo (2004, p. 35) named as the gap between the postmodern culture and Latin-American education systems.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to include different resources that emerge directly from the students' culture and examine how they are perceived. These resources are known as multimodal texts according to the social semiotics perspective, and can be defined as any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic mode (Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 40). The selection of the texts in the project was based on diagnostic surveys applied to the participants. For the students, texts that are closely related to mass media are the most relevant and significant; some examples of the discourses chosen were: advertisements, television series, songs, cartoons, etc. It is important to mention that all the texts selected have at least two semiotic codes, a verbal and a visual code. Since this study deals with the effects that the gap between education and culture has on foreign language learning, the findings can be useful in different language-teaching contexts. EFL (English as a Foreign language), ELE *(Español como lengua extranjera)*, FLE (*Français comme*

langue etrangère) teachers will find valuable results that can improve their teaching process with regard to the most suitable materials for learning languages.

In the current article, we will start by describing the research problem. Next, we will review some of the literature in the area of multimodal texts, education and teaching in postmodern times, and learners' beliefs with relation to foreign language learning. Then, we will present the pedagogical design, the type of research and the procedures used to collect the data. Finally, we will include the analysis of the data and put forward the conclusions and implications of the study.
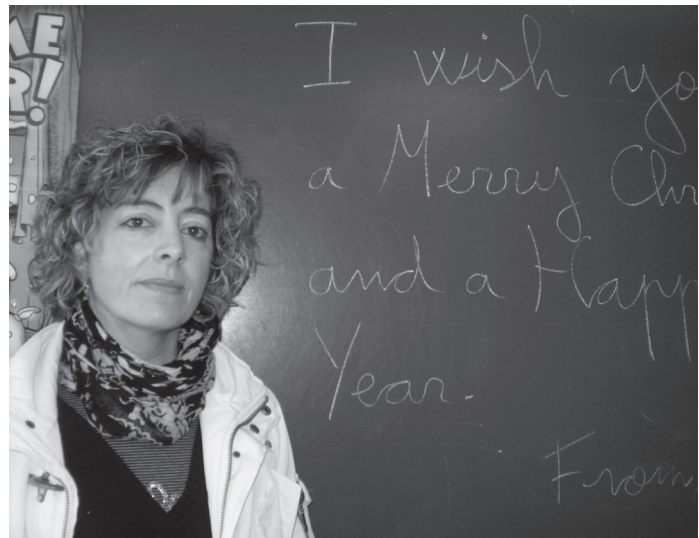
The problem

The main objective of this investigation was to characterize students' beliefs toward multimodal texts when they are used as pedagogical tools in a foreign language learning process. In order to do so, the study was developed through a series of stages that included several activities. These stages intended to achieve two goals: to familiarize students with multimodal texts, and to determine students' beliefs regarding the material used during the sessions. The main question addressed in this project was: what characterizes students' beliefs toward multimodal texts when they are used as a pedagogical tool? Also addressed was the related question: what relations do the participants establish among culture, language learning and multimodal texts?

The following sections will present a brief literature review on the central concepts that are essential to this study, as well as the description of the participants and setting. A general explanation of instruments and procedures used for data collection is also provided. The article closes with the analysis of the data and the results obtained.

Literature review

Education and Culture, a brief Consideration about the Role of Teaching in Postmodern Times

Postmodernity has generated three outstanding changes with regard to the individual, culture and economy. Gilles Lipovetsky (1990, p. 45) points out that humans are involved in an individualization process, in which pleasure is more important than reason since, according to Lyotard (2008, p.76), the metanarratives, that guided humanity in modernity, have disappeared. In his seminal work, Lipovetsky also states that the more democratic societies develop inside late capitalism, the more their individuals enter the personalization process, changing their daily practices. A clear example of this took place in the late 1970s when European countries started to establish more open societies in opposition to those in which control and regulation were the grand narratives; this new way of living was founded on two central concepts: information and hedonism. The transformation of lifestyles together

> In that sense, visual discourses are more prominent than those only made of verbal language. Nowadays, multimodal texts, defined as any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic mode (Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 45), are the kind of discourses that people have more interaction with.

with consumerism has allowed an increase in the number of rights and desires; the right of freedom, in theory unlimited, but confined to economy and politics, settles in everyday life (Lipovetsky, 1990).

To address the relationship between education and postmodern culture, it is important to take into account what Ferres (2000, p.60) has called *La cultura del espectáculo* (society of the spectacle). Ferres claims that due to television and ICTs (Information and communication technologies), citizens have access to several types of shows at any time and place. Therefore, this new culture is characterized by being narrative, sensorial, dynamic, emotive and sensational. The main duty of educators is to be aware of the way this new society functions; that is to say, he or she should know how these characteristics affect the learning processes, since only through the inclusion of these elements in the school setting, will learning be part of this new cultural change, making education a meaningful practice for the learner.

Multimodal texts, New Didactic Tools for Language Learning

This study is deeply related to recently-developed discourse analysis methodology: Social Semiotics. This theoretical perspective, founded by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2000, p. 56), states that verbal language is not the only mode of communication and representation available to humans. For these authors, there are two relevant criticisms to logocentrism[1]. According to Derrida (1978, p. 23) and Kristeva (1982, p. 35), verbal language supports patriarchy since it has naturalized the subordinated relation between man and woman[2]. The other criticism, established by semiotics, considers that in daily communication, humans not only use the verbal language, but also different semiotic codes such as images, music, gestures, among others. This diversity of codes is known as the semiotic landscape.

In that sense, visual discourses are more prominent than those only made of verbal language. Nowadays, multimodal texts, defined as any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic mode (Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 45), are the kind of discourses that people have more interaction with. An example of this is the augment of texts composed by more than one code of representation: advertisements, the Internet, television shows, magazines, etc. This is important because teenagers consider these texts meaningful and relevant to their everyday lives. Therefore, including multimodal texts in the teaching process will benefit learning since they increase students' motivation[3] and interest.

Besides, social semiotics considers that two analytic procedures should be done when analyzing multimodal texts. Firstly, it is

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[1] According to Derrida (1978), Logocentrism refers to the primacy of the verbal word which consists of an essential relationship between language and reality termed truth.

[2] Not only Kristeva (1982) but also authors like Spender (1988) consider that language has been literally man made and it is still under man control. Women have to use meanings that are not their own, since men have a monopoly on the production of meaning, and therefore on the production of our perception of reality.

[3] According to Brown (1994), motivation can be considered as the main factor in order to undertake any kind of task, especially when learning a foreign language. This author defines motivation as the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit.

necessary to examine the different modes of representations that make up a text, and secondly, since all discourses are inserted in a cultural and historical context, elements such as stereotypes, social representations, values and cultural beliefs should be analyzed (Barthes,1980). Therefore, when teaching a foreign language, it is important to use the materials not only to show linguistic models of the target language, but also to understand the culture and the social implications of those discourses.

Multimodal texts bring to the classroom, all the cultural and historical elements that are part of daily life. This feature is an important element in foreign language teaching since, according to Nuttall (2005), materials used in the classroom should fulfill two characteristics: authentic origin and authentic use. The former refers to the fact that most materials should imitate real discourses, that is to say, any text used in the classroom has to be easily recognized by the students as a text that exists in real life. On the other hand, the latter has to do with the usage of the material during the learning process. Nuttall (2005) considers that students should interact with the materials as if they were using them in everyday life. Multimodal texts fulfill these two characteristics. Their origin is authentic and they do not need to be modified to accomplish their communicative purpose. To sum it up, multimodal texts, in language education, can be useful tools since they can be interesting for the students, are based on real referents and provide natural linguistic models.

Learners' Beliefs, Language and Learning Process

Another aspect considered in the study was the importance of learners' beliefs concerning the learning process. Ferreira (2006, p. 21) argues that students' beliefs are determined by their social contexts and can influence both their attitude toward the language itself, as well as, toward language learning in general. As the author asserts, beliefs have an

essential role in teaching processes since they can modify students' attitudes and actions inside the classroom. A clear example of this is that students' motivations change when the resources used are meaningful; students tend to believe that the target language is related to their daily experiences and therefore it makes the language easier to learn.

Despite the importance of beliefs in language learning, this concept has not been clearly defined by researchers as stated by Wenden (1998). As a result, in the present study, we take what Horwitz (1988) and Richards (1995) postulate. Based on their suggestions, we construe beliefs about language learning as personal knowledge about a target language. This personal knowledge has to do with the who, the why, the how, the what, the where and the when the language is learnt. According to Horwitz (1999), learning beliefs include: "Who can learn a second language, the reasons why people learn a second language, the best way to learn a language, the learning tasks that are believed to be successful, the best place or environment and time to learn the language"(Horwitz, 1999, p. 560).

The six elements that composed language learning beliefs can be traced in Richards´ learner belief system which is composed by at least eight different kinds of perceptions (Richard, 1995). Students always have an idea

of what aspects of the language are the most difficult to learn, beliefs towards the language itself. Besides, learners have beliefs towards the speakers of a language; this type includes cultural differences and similarities between learners and native speakers of the target languages. Thirdly, students have perceptions about what communicative skills are more important for the learning process. Based on his/her particular needs the student will work harder on a specific skill rather than on the others. The fourth type has to do with the learning process. For Richards (1995), almost everybody has been involved in a learning environment making people have an idea of what meaningful learning means. Besides, this author considers that students also have beliefs with regards to learning a language; that is to say, students have an idea of how to learn a foreign language.

On top of that, students also have perceptions about how appropriate interaction between teachers and learners should be. Moreover, Students also have some knowledge about themselves as learners. That is to say, they know what their strengths and weaknesses are when learning. Finally, Richard (1995) states that learners have an idea of their learning goals. As we can see, the study of learner's beliefs is a broad area that conveys different learning aspects.

This study focuses on two of these beliefs since they provide valuable information to answer the research question. As was mentioned, learners have perceptions about which aspects of the foreign language they find difficult and about the status of the language in comparison to other languages; this is what Richards calls *beliefs about the nature of language* (1995, p 45). The other type of belief deals with the *beliefs about language learning.* Learners bring to the classroom, very specific assumptions about how to learn a language and about the kinds of activities, materials and approaches they believe to be useful. The first sort of belief is relevant given that by interacting with multimodal texts, students' perceptions toward the target language can change. If the material is deeply related to the culture of the foreign language, students can perceive cultural and linguistic differences and similarities, modifying their ideas about the status of the language and their speakers. Additionally, learners' beliefs about language learning are relevant in the sense that, depending on teaching procedures, students may find the learning process easy or difficult. If the teacher is aware of the perceptions students have toward the materials, multimodal texts in this case, he or she will able to implement them beneficially.

Instructional design

In order to answer the research questions, it was necessary to implement a series of stages. The first one was a diagnostic intervention the objective of which was to determine learners' communicative needs and general likes and dislikes in language learning. The results found in this stage were shared with the students, so that they could take part actively in the research process. The second stage was composed of three main phases: familiarization, conceptualization and inter-pretation-production. The former intended to produce a change in the way students conceive communication and its relation with culture in a foreign language learning process; concepts such as semiotic landscape and

postmodernity were addressed in this phase. In the conceptualization phase, the main goal was to familiarize students with the characteristics of multimodal texts and their potential when learning a second language. In the last phase, students were asked to interpret and produce different multimodal texts in order to improve their communicative skills. The third stage aimed to evaluate learners' improvements during the whole implementation, especially with regards to their linguistic level so that it could be determined if students consider multimodal texts useful or not in their language learning process. The stages were developed as shown in the following figure:

Table 1. Pedagogical Design

Stages	Phases	Activity	Materials
1st	Diagnostic	Survey Field notes	• Survey: "Communicative needs and likes and dislikes in language learning"
2nd	Familiarization	Cultural changes and postmodernity	• Cartoon: "Truth, justice, equality". • Videos: "Defining Moment and Family Guy undecided voters."
		The semiotic landscape	• News report: "Advice to vote" • Video: "Homer tries to vote for Obama".
	Conceptualization	Multimodal texts	• Series of ads: "Don't Vote" • Video: "Warning, don't vote."
		The target language and mass media	• Video: "Anti-Smoking Campaign". • Series of videos: "Quitting is hard not quitting is harder".
	Interpretation-Production	Analysis of some multimodal texts	• Videos: "A place of help" and "children learnt a lot from their parents."
		Analysis of some multimodal texts	• Video: "Racism, the more you apply it, the uglier you become" • Advertisements: "Benetton campaign."
		Production of some multimodal texts	• Advertisement design
3rd	Evaluation	Production of a multimodal text	• Design of a newspaper cover

Methodology
Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in a language institution in Bogotá, the Center for Language Learning at *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.* The participants were adult male and female students of English as a foreign language, one male non-native EFL teacher/researcher and two extra researchers. The total number of students in the class was four - two male and two female students, with ages ranging from 13 to 35. They live in Bogota and come from different areas; the four of them speak Spanish as their mother tongue. They are in the advanced level of English according to the classification parameters of the institution and

they attended EFL classes every weekday from two to four p.m.

Type of Research

This study is based on the principles of a qualitative research. Rodriguez (2006, p.46) states that this kind of research is an examination of a particular phenomenon. The description of its characteristics as well as its context is the main objective, given that the purpose of this type of research is to generate a general understanding of how the phenomenon being studied functions. Besides, it can be said that the study followed a qualitative case design since it was primarily descriptive. A case study is the study of the particularities and complexities of a single case coming to understand its activity within important circumstances

(Seliger & Shohamy, 2003). The fact that this study intended to describe the beliefs of four EFL students towards multimodal texts made it entirely descriptive and particularistic.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Throughout the development of the project, the researchers used different instruments to collect data: surveys, interviews and field notes. A questionnaire was designed as a survey to collect information about students' communicative needs as well as likes and dislikes in the learning process. The survey consisted of 6 questions. Four of them intended to determine the material students like to use in the language classroom, the other two focused on the methods learners consider teachers should use. It was very useful since it provided valuable information to understand students' preferences in the classroom. The interviews were taken after the three main stages of the instructional design, their transcript was not modified and students' names were changed to protect their identity. Finally, the researchers' journals were written during every session (forty in total) in order to gather records of students' beliefs toward the material implemented. The information of the instruments was analyzed individually and in relation to one another, the findings are reported in the following section.

Findings

The analysis of the information collected was conducted through the domain analysis technique proposed by Ryan & Bernard (2002). It means that pieces of information were ferreted and different categories identified. After a thorough analysis of the data gathered, some patterns emerged. They were contrasted, confirmed and classified by using the color method, that is to say a triangulation technique (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006, p. 27). As is shown in the table, the main category and its corresponding subcategories were identified so as to answer the research question and

related question (Table 2). It is important to clarify that the purpose of this research project was to identify learner's beliefs towards multimodal texts; it means that the main goal was to obtain their perceptions, as are shown in this section. Although students may state, for example, that they improved their communicative competence, more research needs to be done to evaluate this aspect since the present study was limited to obtain their beliefs. Due to space limitations, only some fragments of the information collected are shown to illustrate the findings.

Table 2. Categories found in data analysis

Main research question:	
What characterizes students' beliefs toward multimodal texts when they are used as a pedagogical tool?	
Category	**Subcategories**
Critical awareness in foreign language learning.	Evaluating multimodal texts, a motivational tool.
	Improving language skills via multimodal texts.
	Producing reflective thinking through multimodal texts.

Critical Awareness in Foreign Language Learning

After analyzing the data, it was found that students believe that when interacting with multimodal texts they developed a critical awareness. By critical awareness we mean that students were able to discover the relationship between language and social perspective (Van Dijk, 1998), that is to say, that they have a sense that language represents the world and reflects it social construction[4]. This category emerged from the beliefs expressed by the students during the pedagogical intervention. Basically, what characterizes students' beliefs toward multimodal texts is a) this sort of texts is considered a meaningful, and motivational didactic resource; b) multimodal texts are believed to be useful to enrich learners' communicative abilities; and c) students consider that the use of multimodal discourses help them to think critically.

To sum up the aforementioned ideas, these beliefs show that there is a cognitive modification in students during the learning process. Learners are more conscious of the way they learn the target language, they give more importance to the role of the materials used in

the classroom, and they are able to relate the didactic resources and the cultural context in which they are produced in order to, possibly, improve their communicative competence. This competence is understood as the set of cultural norms that a person learns in the process of socialization through language (Hymes, 1984), that is to say, the combination of the linguistic competence, the language itself, and the pragmatic competence. Therefore, by using multimodal texts, students consider that they are learning not only the language but also some of the appropriate norms according to the situation in which a language can be used. Nevertheless, this is just their perception so that it is necessary to carry out further investigations to confirm whether or not the use of these materials helps them to improve their language competence.

Evaluating Multimodal Texts, a Motivational Tool

This subcategory emerges when students evaluate the resources used during the sessions. It is important to remember that during the classes, the teacher used real discourses produced by mass media such as television series, advertisements, cartoons, etc; these discourses were composed by at least two semiotic codes and were selected based on a list of topics students wanted to work on. We found that students perceive these materials as meaningful, attractive, motivational and pleasant. Furthermore, they believe that multimodal texts are important for their learning process

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[4]   For further information about critical awareness, we suggest Fairclough postulates (1992). For this author Critical language awareness is a prerequisite for effective citizenship. It not only highlights non transparent aspects of the social function of language but also gives relevance to some linguistic aspects of educational failure and inadequacies in foreign language learning.

since this material is profoundly connected to their daily life.

This fact has some significant implications in the EFL area. As Férres (2000, p. 56) states, the first duty educators have to assume is to integrate the discourses produced by mass media into the curriculum, since students perceive there to be a gap between the discourses used inside their language learning classroom and those perceived in their everyday life. Therefore, language teachers need to determine which discourses are meaningful to their students and how they can be employed.

Following Richards' ideas (1995, p. 46), students have different assumptions about the kind of activities and materials they deem pertinent. In fact, learners distinguish between those resources that can help them to learn the language and those that may affect their process. In the following fragments, it is evident that for students, multimodal texts are beneficial to their language learning:

> A mí me gusta aprender inglés así como lo estamos haciendo actualmente, creo que el aprendizaje significativo se realiza a partir de eso, de temáticas que le interesan a uno que lo tocan y que por ser importantes en el contexto se prestan para adquirir ciertos aprendizajes. (Interview 3, question 4, participant 1).

> [I like learning English in the way we are doing it now. I think that meaningful learning is achieved by using topics that are interesting to us, topics that "touch" us; since they are relevant to our context, they are useful to acquire certain knowledge].

> It is nice [referring to the video] and it is nice that in the video famous people appear and it could make people want to vote (field note 5, lines 39-42).

> The picture is nice y remember me a movie La Momia, the picture is nice and terrible. (Field note 1, lines 48-50).

> We like them [referring to the videos], we like them, please bring more, they are nice please. (Field note 6, lines 85-86)

> Dos estudiantes afirman que no sólo lo que está escrito cuenta en la propaganda sino que las imágenes ayudan a entenderla y esto las hace atractvas, pues luego los alumnos afirman: "intercambiémoslas pues están muy bacanas". (Field note 4, lines 50-53).

> Two students state that not only the written elements are useful to understand the cartoon, but also the images and this aspect makes the cartoon attractive since then students say: "let's exchange them, they are really cool" (Field note 4, lines 50-53).

In the first excerpt, the student indicates that in order to create meaningful learning the resources must be closely related to the students' interests and contexts. The multimodal texts used in the EFL classes were attractive to the students, since, as they mentioned, they are appealing and pleasant. In that sense, we can conclude that students have two perceptions towards multimodal texts: a) they consider these materials to be enjoyable and b) students think that these discourses create a dynamic and self-motivating environment for learning.

Improving Language Skills via Multimodal Texts.

In relation to language and material, it was found that learners have two assumptions: firstly, they view multimodal texts as helpful to improve their communicative skills as a whole; secondly, they tend to believe that this sort of material provides more appropriate discourses

In relation to language and material, it was found that learners have two assumptions: firstly, they view multimodal texts as helpful to improve their communicative skills as a whole; secondly, they tend to believe that this sort of material provides more appropriate discourses to the language learning process since, in comparison with textbooks, multimodal texts are real.

to the language learning process since, in comparison with textbooks, multimodal texts are real. When asked about the effectiveness of the material used in the sessions, students provided the following answers:

> Pues con los videos siempre tenemos una guía y uno conoce palabras que aparecen en la guía o si no aparecen en el video o uno no entiende algo entonces la imagen le permite entender. (Interview 2, question 10, participant 4).

[With the videos we always have a guide, and we know the words that are in the guide. If the words are not in the video or you do not understand something then the images help you understand].

> Los videos también son a veces mejores porque uno también le ilustran lo que van diciendo, si, en cambio en la canción o con solo textos es muy difícil porque además usan mucho metáforas o yo no sé (Interview 2, question 12, participant 2).

[The videos are sometimes better because they illustrate what is being said. However, in the songs or in the textbooks, it is difficult because there are a lot of metaphors, I don't know].

> Me parece que ha sido una metodología bien chévere porque el recurso audiovisual constante en todas las clases hacen que se ejerciten todas esas áreas a la vez, entonces eso es bueno porque uno no solo aprende de manera separada y dispersa sino que uno aprende de manera conjunta y más si es un nuevo idioma, si no puedes aprenderlo por aparte cada una de las áreas sino de manera conjunta (Interview 3, question 4, participant 1).

[I think that the methodology has been really nice because the audiovisual resources in all the classes let us exercise all the skills at the same time, so that's good because we don't learn separately, but we learn in a joint way especially when learning a foreign language.]

The following information was taken from the researchers' diaries when the teacher asked one student about the material employed in a session:

> I prefer learning by this (referring to the material) because in the videos they talk with the real language, I think the book has a CD only for interviews the same thing also, sorry always. (Field note 7, lines 91-93).

The four quotations show that multimodal texts are considered to be beneficial materials to enrich learners' language skills. Maqueo (2004, p. 35) points out that in language learning it is necessary to develop a communicative competence, understood as the ability to communicate efficiently through reading, writing, listening, and speaking; students perceived that the material employed facilitates the development of the four skills, they believe that due to the type of texts used, they are working on their abilities as a whole.

Additionally, there is a perception that shows that students prefer real discourses as tools to learn the target language, essentially because these texts are easier to understand and are related to their interests. In that sense, it is possible to state that for learners, conventional resources such as textbooks are less significant

and useful since they do not emerge, directly, from the culture being studied. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2000, p. 65) claim that it is important to abandon the logocentric perspective, positioning the semiotic landscape in the center of the teaching process, as this could be one step to reduce the gap between education and culture in the postmodern era. Nonetheless, as we have mentioned, these are the students' assumptions that are important in any learning process, but they need to be evaluated with further research. Stating that this type of text improves their language skills does not necessarily mean that they do. Other studies should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of multimodal texts to enhance language skills in EFL.

Producing Reflective Thinking through Multimodal Texts

This category corresponds to the considerations learners have apropos of how multimodal texts can enhance reflective thinking. By this concept we refer to the ability to think critically as learners go through process-oriented activity (Beyer, 1995)[5] this means, students

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5   Beyer (1995) considers that Reflective thinking is a type of critical thinking. The former has been selected for this paper since this type of thinking does not necessarily involve the production of criticism. It only requires the ability to identify a judgment about a phenomenon.

are able to recognize judgments and produce reasoned opinions. Most of the students considered that the material, especially the videos, had an ideological influence; that is to say, these resources have a specific way of conceiving reality. This is relevant since Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p. 67) account for the need in education to be able to "read between the lines", in order to get a sense of what discursive/ideological position, what "interest", may have given to rise to a particular text, and maybe to at least glimpse the possibility of an alternative view. Therefore, teaching a language not only involves the acquisition of the linguistic competence, but also the ability to be critical about the discourses used to carry out the learning process. We cannot forget that when learning a foreign language we also learn how the language is used to convey power and status.

In the next fragments, we can see how students recognized some ideological positions in the videos. In one of the sessions, students had to discuss an advertisement about AIDS in which they found certain elements that, for them, transmitted negative representations about HIV-positive individuals:

The video is too shocking, I think the comparison is not good because people that have AIDS live years this ill, and in the video the women are killed. (Field note 8, lines 9-12).

I think that they try to criticize that nowadays some women and men use costumes [disguises]; they don't show us what they are. (Field Note 7, lines 19-21).

When asked to reflect upon the use of the material during the classes one student mentioned that multimodal texts seem to be beneficial to develop reflective thinking since they encourage discussions in which it is possible to debate about the information presented:

Además, no es solamente los videos, sino que es la discusión que se hace en clase entonces uno tiene la oportunidad de conocer la opinión de los compañeros entonces desde diferentes puntos de vista, desde un niño de colegio desde un egresado

de universidad y desde una señora pues que ya tiene también un contexto diferente, entonces rico es como valiosa la oportunidad de debatir en la clase (Interview 3, question 7, participant 1)

[Besides, it is not only the videos, but also the debates carried out in class. Then we have the opportunity to know our classmates' opinions: a school boy's perspective, a university graduate's point of view and a woman's perception. So this experience is rich, the opportunity to debate in class is valuable.]

As can be read in the field notes, extracts and in the interview transcript, learners believe that multimodal texts not only help them to improve their language skills, but also foster the reflective competence, understood as the ability to determine the ideological purposes of any given discourse (Maqueo, 2004, p. 37). To sum up, the data collected shows that students have certain beliefs towards multimodal texts when used inside an EFL classroom.

Conclusions and pedagogical implications

Based on the research questions proposed for this project and on all the information collected, it can be concluded that for learners, multimodal texts are perceived as meaningful and motivational resources, making the EFL environment pleasant and attractive; additionally, students consider that this sort of text is profoundly related to everyday life. The other main issue found was that multimodal texts are believed to be useful to improve communicative skills. The study also lets us conclude that by interacting with multimodal texts, students consider that they increased their reflective thinking. These conclusions show that it is important to study learners´ beliefs in language learning. Their perceptions of the material used in the classroom can help educators to select the most motivational and meaningful materials to teach. Besides, this study is a first approximation to understand the relationship between multimodal texts and English language learning; here we focused on the learners' beliefs towards this kind of material; however, we hope that new research in the area continues, specifically, in aspects such as evaluating the role of multimodal texts in improving language competence and critical thinking. If students perceive that these materials are important for their learning process, more research has to be done.

Due to time limitations, this study did not take into account the learners´ beliefs about teaching materials before the implementation of multimodal texts. It could be interesting to compare student´s beliefs in two different stages, when interacting with traditional materials and when working with multimodal texts. As evaluating the communicative competence was not the main purpose of the present study, it would be useful to assess students' language competence before and after the use of multimodal texts to determine if this type of material has a positive or negative effect on learners' language skills. Furthermore, it is necessary to carry out more detailed studies on the potential traditional materials can have when being used together with resources such as television series, advertisements, cartoons, songs, movies, etc. Finally, studying in depth the gap between education practices and culture discourses will improve the EFL teaching process.

> Most of the students considered that the material, especially the videos, had an ideological influence; that is to say, these resources have a specific way of conceiving reality.

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