Exploring English learners' Subject-Positioning: An Action Research on Multimodal Input

Analysis Through Symbolic Competence Strategies

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Research Report submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in English Language Teaching – Autonomous Learning Environments

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Chía, Colombia

August, 2020

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank to the group of tutors and professors of this master's program. Particularly, to professors Liliana Cuesta, Juliana Llanes, Laura Carreño, Carl Anderson and Jermaine Mcdougald for their insightful feedback during this process. Their guidance, support and professional attitude have been pivotal for the development of this study.

Secondly, I would sincerely express gratefulness to my parents Janeth Melo and Manuel Romero as they have always stand by my side, helping me and supporting me in every possible way expected from dedicated and loving parents. Besides, I want to thank them for embracing genuinely my subjectivity, the person I have become and, to encourage me to believe on my capacities.

Finally, I want to highlight my students' contributions and willingness to participate in this research study. I feel glad they have become more critical towards the texts that are part of their daily lives and influence their relation to other subjectivities and their context. I have always been thankful for their dedication and their empathetic attitude towards me and the project.

Abstract

The 21st-century communicative, socio-cultural, and political dynamics request language learners to take a critical position towards the flow of multimodal information. This entails analyzing discursive. linguistic and semiotic mechanisms used by multimodal texts (Stein,2001; Mestre-Mestre,2015; Danielsson and Selander,2016). However, there is a gap in educational research on the specific ways in which learners' subject position themselves (Davies and Harré, 1990) and make discourse choices after analyzing multimodal input. Thus, this qualitative action research study aimed to help learners analyze this input by using symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2015) strategies. The participants of this study were 12 eighth grade students from a private institution in Cota, Colombia, whose ages ranged from 14 to 16. The implementation allowed learners' multimodal analysis through thinking routines, socializations, and discussions based on the socio-cultural phenomena identified on the text. Data was collected through a focus group, interviews, questionnaires, artifacts, and observation, which were analyzed through grounded-theory principles (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The findings suggest that symbolic analysis leads learners to recognize the texts' connotative and ideological implications. The process challenges students to take a position towards master narratives, hegemonic discourses, (McLean and Syed, 2015) their previous discourse positions, and to examine relationships between the subject and the social order.

Key words: *Symbolic competence, Subject Positioning, Multimodal texts, Master narratives.*

Resumen

Las dinámicas comunicativas, sociales, culturales y políticas del siglo 21 demandan que los estudiantes de lenguas construyan una posición crítica frente al flujo de información multimodal a la que están expuestos. Esto implica analizar los mecanismos lingüísticos, semióticos y discursivos usados por los textos multimodales (Stein, 2001; Mestre-Mestre, 2015; Danielsson and Selander, 2016). Sin embargo, la investigación educativa no se ha ocupado de los modos específicos en los que los estudiantes se posicionan (Davies and Harré, 1990), toman sus decisiones discursivas, luego de analizar input multimodal. Por tanto, esta investigación-acción cualitativa tuvo como finalidad que los estudiantes analizaran este input utilizando estrategias de competencia simbólica (Kramsch, 2015). Los participantes del estudio fueron 12 estudiantes de grado octavo de una institución privada en Cota, Colombia, cuyas edades se encuentran entre 14 y 16 años. La implementación permitió el análisis multimodal de los estudiantes a través de rutinas de pensamiento, socializaciones y discusiones basadas en los fenómenos socioculturales identificados en el texto. La información fue recopilada a partir de grupo focal, entrevista, cuestionarios, artefactos y observación, luego, fue analizada a través de los principios de la teoría fundamentada (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Los resultados sugieren que el analisis simbólico conduce a que los estudiantes reconozcan las implicaciones ideológicas y connotativas de los textos, además, el proceso reta a los estudiante a tomar una posición frente a las narrativas master (McLean and Syed, 2015) , discursos hegemónicos, sus previas posiciones discursivas y a examinar las relaciones entre el sujeto y el orden social.

Palabras claves: *Competencia simbólico; sujeto-posicionamiento; texto multimodal; narrativas máster*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction to the Study

Current communicative processes around the world involve multiple modes of meaning making. For example, multimodal texts, which are constructed through the combination of spatial, auditory, visual, gestural, and linguistic elements (Anstey and Bull, 2010) have become a popular way in which discourses, beliefs, and myths are disseminated. Language learning classrooms need to provide learners with the tools to critically analyze the mechanisms that these texts use to communicate and the hidden discourses that underlie them (Stein, 2001; Pegrum, 2008; Dennis, Höllerer and Meyer; 2016). This would permit language learners to exert a 21st century citizenship (Cloonan, 2015) in which they are able to be more critical towards the multimodal information. As it may be inferred this would demand classroom methodologies and practices to have a linguistic, semiotic, and discursive approach to analyzing texts.

Therefore, this study explored the ways in which subject positioning occurs when using symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2015) strategies to analyze multimodal texts. This encompasses understanding the text in three symbolic dimensions: (1) representation, in which denotations and connotations can be found; (2) action as its communicative intention and, (3) power, addressing ideologies, myths, and beliefs immersed in the text. Using symbolic competence as a set of strategies offers learners a scaffolded analysis that articulates understanding literal meaning of texts as well as interpretations of its hidden ideological elements.

This exercise of text analysis in the eighth grade classroom would be incomplete without examining the ways in which the L2 language learners position themselves towards the discourses imbued within the texts (Davies and Harré, 1990). In other words, how this process of

analysis may influence learners' positioning on master narratives, hegemonic discourses, and possible counternarratives or alternative discourses identified through analysis of multimodal texts (McLean and Syed, 2015).

1.2   Rationale for the study

Considering 21st century communicative, social, cultural, and political dynamics, the language learning process must provide learners the tools to take a critical position on the diverse discourses that emerged from the multimodal texts they were presented. However, the dominant role of verbal-centered approaches can still be seen in classroom practices (Álvarez, 2016). Therefore, there is a need for new approaches that consider the articulation of linguistic, semiotic, and discursive elements (Van Lier, 2004; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010; Kramsch, 2013). This would entail training learners on how to analyze the linguistic and extralinguistic features of the text and to discover its ideological implications.

Even though there are several research studies that explore multimodal texts in the language learning classroom for developing critical literacies (Pegrum, 2008; Liu, 2013; Stone, 2017; Serafini, 2020), methodological proposals on how to approach and analyze these texts and the discursive implications on learners' perspective have not been developed. Therefore, this qualitative research study used symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2015) as a scaffolded set of strategies to facilitate 12 eighth grade students' analysis of ads, videos, memes, photographs related to gender equality, racial discrimination, and conflictive relationships between the subjects and the societies they live in. This study explored the ways in which leaners subject position (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) and made discourse choices, after analyzing the multimodal input through symbolic competence.

1.2.1   Rationale for the Problem of the Study

Even though there are considerable research studies aimed at applying symbolic competence in the language learning classroom (Vinall 2012; Kearney 2012; Kaiser, Mark and Chika Shibahara, 2014; Wei, 2014; Vinall, 2016) there is a gap regarding the relation of these strategies and subject positioning. This means that the ways in which students may subject position themselves after analyzing texts through symbolic competence have not been studied.

In addition, there are several studies that have implemented symbolic competence as a vehicle to analyze multimodal texts: films, ads, images (Kaiser, 2018; Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014) the methodology for developing text analysis consists of a general critical interpretation of the texts rather than a process. Therefore, this study intends to understand symbolic competence as a scaffolded set of strategies that may assist students on their text analysis going from the most basic aspects, what they see and understand in the text, to more complex ones, hidden ideological meanings.

1.2.1.1   Needs Analysis and Problem Statement

Participants were 12 eighth grade students from a private institution in Cota, Colombia. According to the school's curriculum learners must be at a B1 level according to CEFR standards. Besides, the school's vision to become fully bilingual by the year 2022 has led to the incorporation of subjects taught in English such as social studies, science, steam, and literature. Becoming bilingual not only implies deciphering literal meaning in the second language interactions and texts, it demands acknowledging pragmatical and ideological meanings and to adopt a critical view about them.

Nevertheless, learners faced difficulties identifying texts' intentions, beliefs, values, and myths immersed in the text. In other words, this group of learners struggled to provide critical

perspectives of the texts as demonstrated in the needs' analysis carried out through a

questionnaire (See Appendix A). The results of this instrument show how learners are able to

identify literal meanings on the multimodal text. In contrast, they cannot recognize text

intentions, connotations, and ideologies there involved. It is worth noting that when discussing

this phenomenon with the teachers who taught social studies and science to this group, they

mentioned the drawbacks they faced on lessons aiming at exerting critical thinking skills when

reading traditional texts.

1.2.1.2   Justification of Problem Significance

Language constitutes the bridge by which humans construct their reality. As stated by

Kumaravadivelu (2008) "language permeates every aspect of human experience and creates as

well as reflects images of that experience. It is almost impossible to imagine human life without

it" (p. 38). Consequently, identity seen as the multiple relationships the subject constructs with

its environment and the otherness (Norton, 1997) is mediated by language. An essential part of

these relationships is how the subjects position themselves towards the beliefs, myths, values,

and ideologies than surround them.

Taking this into account, the educational context needs to provide learners with the tools

to construct their positionings by evaluating and reflecting upon the mechanisms used by the

spectrum of discourses they encounter in their interactions with the texts. A possible contribution

may occur by mediating learners' discourse choices, subject positioning (Davies and Harré,

1990), by giving them the opportunity to analyze and interpret the textualities that are part of

their daily lives. Symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2015) is considered the medium through

which learners could gain awareness on language's symbolic dimensions, on how through

language, reality construction is interwoven by narratives (McLean and Syed, 2015) that unveil

distinct ways to comprehend social, cultural, and political phenomena. Most importantly, the ways in which the subjects, language learners, could position themselves towards these narratives by knowing their symbolic apparatus works. For instance, considering the multimodal text, why this presents certain words, what do these words reveal about the intention of the text creator (Kramsch, 2011), and how these words are related to extralinguistic choices such as colors, spaces, and kinesthetic elements.

1.2.2   *Rationale for the Strategy Selected to Address the Problem of the Study*

Symbolic competence has been defined in two ways. First, in its relation to intercultural competence (Byram, 2000) as the way in which language learners could negotiate meanings in a multicultural setting. Second, as the ability to manipulate three language symbolic dimensions: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2011). Considering the context and the needs' analysis, the second definition includes guiding the development of the project's implementation as this emphasizes on identifying diverse layers of meaning in the texts which is essential to carry out text analysis.

Consequently, this study would apply symbolic competence as a set of strategies to assist learners in the analysis of multimodal input. This could be explained by identifying how this competence would allow learners to understand literal and ideological meanings through a scaffolded procedure. First, learners will recognize denotations and connotations of the text (representation), then, its communicative intention (action), and finally, its ideological meanings (power). As stated before, the use of symbolic competence aims to explore the ways in which learners subject position after analyzing the multimodal input as this resource may influence the critical approach towards the discourses, beliefs, and myths conveyed by the texts.

1.3   Research Question(s) and Objective(s)

Considering the subjectivity of texts and the symbolic information imbued within it, this research study focused on the following question: *in what ways do eighth graders subject positioning when using symbolic competence strategies to interpret multimodal input.* The objectives of this research project were: *to explore how symbolic competence impacts learner's subject positioning, to describe how learners identify the symbolic representation and action in diverse texts, how this may affect their positioning, and to explore how learners resist or adopt master narratives within diverse texts after working with symbolic competence.*

1.4   Conclusion

This study aims at applying symbolic competence strategies (Kramsch, 2015) for learners to analyze the language symbolic dimensions imbued in multimodal texts and to explore how this exercise may have an influence over learners' positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990). This objective targets the need language learners have to become critical towards the information they are exposed to through multimodal textualities as part of their daily lives. In addition, students can learn to exert 21st century citizenship (Cloonan, 2015) by taking a more conscious position to the discourses embedded on these texts (Stein, 2001; Pegrum, 2008; Dennis et al., 2016). Similarly, considering the needs' analysis, the participants of this study require tools to enhance their critical thinking skills toward diverse texts.

Approaching symbolic competence and subject positioning in the language learning classroom requires an examination of previous research on both topics. It is pivotal to identify the conceptual, methodological paths, and didactic resources used to explore these constructs to determine the background of the present study and to recognize how this may contribute to the existing body of knowledge in these areas.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

The literature reviewed in the theoretical framework and the state of the art seeks to illustrate how existing theories and previous studies articulate this research. Therefore, some theories proposed by seminal authors and the contributions of recent studies have been considered evidence of how symbolic competence as "the ability to manipulate the three dimensions of language as symbolic system: symbolic representation, symbolic action, symbolic   power" (Kramsch, 2015) helps learners to foster a critical perspective towards the discourses embedded on the multimodal textualities (p. 3). In addition, the following studies demonstrate the importance of approaching learners' subject positioning, their adoption or resistance to dominant discourses (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), during the language learning process. Moreover, the research studies demonstrated the effectiveness of multimodal texts for learners to unveil language symbolic dimensions, denotations, and connotations (symbolic representation), intentions (symbolic action) beliefs, attitudes, ideologies (symbolic power) immersed in texts through fostering semiotic awareness and analysis of texts in the classroom.

Although studies address some possible relationships between symbolic competence, subject positioning, and multimodal textualities separately, these relationships have not been presented through concrete methodologies or procedures. Therefore, the ways in which these relationships could emerge are diffuse and merely enunciative, there is not a clear route found on how symbolic competence could have an effect on learners' text interpretation and subject positioning. Therefore, it is pertinent to make these relationships visible by articulating these

three concepts through specific methodologies and procedures in the language learning
classroom.

2.2   Theoretical Framework

2.2.1   *Symbolic Competence*

Symbolic competence consists of a recent approach to the language learning context that
advocates for a critical analysis of cultural, social, political, and discursive phenomena rooted in
language use. It has been defined as "the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for
oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned
and used" (Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008, p. 664). This ability has been explored through
research studies in multilingual contexts (Pomerantz and Bell, 2007; Hult, 2014; Wei, 2014).
These highlight the need for learners to become competent in the multicultural-multilingual
setting by being able to negotiate meaning.

However, the definition used as the backbone of this study emphasizes the identification,
use and analysis of the symbolic dimensions of language. As stated by Kramsch (2015)
Symbolic competence is "the ability to manipulate the three dimensions of language as symbolic
system: symbolic representation, symbolic action, symbolic power" (p. 3). The first dimension
recognizes the denotative and connotative meanings in lexical and grammar choices in texts. The
second, relies on communicative intentions, and the third, deals with the ideologies, myths,
beliefs, and attitudes portrayed by the text. As it can be inferred, unveiling the symbolic
dimensions of language gives learners the opportunities to see beyond literal meanings (Kaiser
and Shibahara, 2014), to gain a critical perspective of the meanings conveyed on the text
(López-Sánchez, 2009; Clark and Stratilaki, 2013; Richardson, 2017; Kelso, 2018; Vovou,

2019). This includes the skills to reframe and alter the text by adjusting the three symbolic dimensions that constitute it (Gassenbauer, 2012; Keneman, 2017).

To begin, symbolic competence has been considered as a way to exert intercultural competence (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013). This means that symbolic competence provides tools for learners to negotiate meanings within globalized and multilingual dynamics. This competence would be a concrete pathway to practice the five saviors of intercultural competence (Byram, 2000) as it demands interpretation of cultural exchange and critical cultural awareness (Kramsch, 2013). Thus, intercultural competence is a broader spectrum that contains five components, and symbolic competence could be a mechanism to facilitate learners' interaction with diverse cultures and identities. The definition selected for this study, which consists of using and manipulating the symbolic dimensions of language use, could be applied in a context where learners do not have the chance to negotiate meanings in a multilingual-multicultural setting. Instead, their cultural interactions are mediated by the multimodal texts.

Symbolic competence finds relation to performative competence to promote learners' participation and agency in communication. Performative competence means gaining access to the linguistic community by learning a new repertoire for learners to negotiate and co-construct meaning. This includes focusing on communicative practices, reconfiguring norms, and having a cooperative attitude towards intercultural encounters (Canagarajah, 2014). Research has shown how performative competence encourages learners to negotiate their identities and the possibilities of accessing new identities by learning a language (Guo and Gu, 2016). In consequence, performative and symbolic competences seek to approach learners' identities and how language use has a pivotal role on this. However, performative competence focuses on

"practice-based learning" (Canagarajah, 2014) while symbolic competence analyzes and reflects upon language use by recognizing its symbolic dimensions.

Similarly, meta-cultural competence engages with the cultural awareness of pragmatic meanings articulated in communicative practices among diverse cultures (Sharifian, 2013) its key element is the recognition of conceptual variation awareness, the possibility of using a common language to express and translate their own cultural repertoires (Sharifian, 2013) through explication and negotiation strategies (Zhichang, 2017). Its relation to symbolic competence can be found on the relevance of understanding the embedded in texts' intentionality when conveying, explaining, and negotiating meaning. However, symbolic representation (denotations and connotations) and power (ideology) are not being considered as the metacultural competence.

Recognizing the similarities and differences between intercultural, performative, metacultural, and symbolic competence it is necessary to define the dimensions that have distinguished symbolic competence from other approaches. Symbolic competence includes symbolic representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2011). The articulation of the three dimensions could be understood as an ability (Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008); however, it can also be applied as scaffolded and systematic strategies to unveil symbolic dimensions of language use to gain critical awareness towards diverse texts (López-Sánchez, 2009; Clark and Stratilaki, 2013; Richardson, 2017; Kelso, 2018; Vovou, 2019).

Symbolic representation deals with reality depiction through lexical and grammar structures (Kramsch, 2011). This representation can be understood as the conjunction of denotative or literal meanings, connotations, conceptual categories, idealized prototypes, and stereotypes. Denotations are the direct relation between the sign and its referent, while

connotations contain additional meanings based on idiosyncratic experiences and feelings (Kyŏng-nyong, 1996). Thus, linguistic signs are engrained in cultural knowledge because the meanings associated with them relate to cultural experience.

The cultural experience explains how conventional and categorical thinking occur as prototypes and stereotypes (Plous, 2003) as there is a need to label cultural roles and practices. Likely, the outcomes of categorial thinking, selection, and labelling may derive from discrimination and prejudice developed through cultural practices and reinforced in language use that legitimize specific worldviews (Kaiser and Spalding, 2013). By carrying out an analysis towards this process, the implications of language use on reality construction and power relationships come into play (Rogers, 2011) and language learners would need to critically approach them.

Symbolic action deals with "what words do and what they reveal about intentions" (Kramsch, 2015, p.12). The power words have to motivate actions was first address by the seminal author Jhon Austin, (1975) who presented through his theory of speech acts how the production of the utterance reveals the speaker's intention and the goal of the words used to effect the receiver. Seminal sociologist Erving Goffman (1956) explained how humans perform certain roles to obtain a desirable response within a communicative context. Nevertheless, Derrida (1988) points out how the performative aspect of language involves citationability, discourse repetition, language's conventional and repetitive element that can be transformed by the speakers' creativity. Symbolic action becomes key to understand how speakers or texts effect the receiver by using diverse conventional and original repertoires and roles in communication.

On the other hand, symbolic power explains how language reveals values, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies (Kramsch, 2011). As defined by Bourdieu (1979), it "is a power to

construct reality which tends to establish gnoseological order" (p. 79). In other words, symbolic power legitimizes specific discursive and social practice process. Even though it seems to be grounded in logic, it obeys discursive mechanisms such as: rarefaction, doctrine, ritual (symbolic action), and discourse societies, (Foucault, 1970). Therefore, symbolic power has a direct impact over "identities, individual and collective memories, emotions and aspirations" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 357) because the legitimization and control of discursive and social practices establishes ought to-be roles, reinforces prototypes, and stereotypes. However, symbolic power can be altered and exerted in an alternative way by reflecting upon symbolic representations, actions, and identities. For example, by creating counternarratives (Stanley, 2007; McLean and Syed, 2015) that question and dismantle conventional discourses.

2.2.1 *Subject Positioning*

By addressing language's symbolic dimensions, it has been possible to reveal the direct relationships between language, sociocultural phenomena, and identity (Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008; Vinall, 2012; Hult, 2014; Keneman, 2017). Moreover, it demonstrates that learners could understand and use these dimensions for meaning-making, communication, and embedded cultural conventions, and expectations (Kramsch, 2011) to have a more critical perspective towards discursive practices. In this theoretical framework, this perspective is understood through subject positioning as the discursive choices made by the learners (Davies and Harré, 1990) in relation to master or counternarratives (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). In fact, this study aims to explore which choices could be taken by learners after analyzing language's symbolic dimensions.

To address subject positioning, an examination of its relation to identity and how it is defined is part of this study. Identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the

world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton and Toohey, 2011 p. 45). As it can be inferred, the cornerstone or of this relationship between the subject and the world is language and the views of specific ideologies and communities that are depicted (Stibbe, 2015) through diverse narratives and storylines (Stroud and Wee, 2017). These may or may not coincide with the subjects' own reality. This explains why even though we share a socio-cultural repertoire (Kearney, 2010), our discourse choices or positionings are complex and diverse.

However, there are narratives that have become dominant discourses of how reality is constructed and perceived (McLean and Syed, 2015). These master narratives (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) are dominant discourses that are legitimized as truthful and have universal character (Lyotard, 1993). As it may be inferred, master-narratives seek to create a unified vision on the relationship between the subject and the world. For example, narratives can create binary categorization to reinforce a concrete way of approaching reality (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2019). These can be seen in gender roles, such as what is "naturally" expected from men and women's discourse practices; or race, the attributes and distinctions between black and white people. Therefore, master narratives are closely linked to stereotypical and discriminatory thinking (Plous, 2003; Wodak, 2008) seen through linguistic, semiotic (LaFrance and Vial, 2016), and discourse elements in language use.

Linguistic and extralinguistic manifestations of metanarratives and stereotypes are promoted and practiced in diverse contexts. Two of the most relevant are media and the school. The first, continues using diverse symbolic tools to perpetuate, reproduce, and disseminate stereotypical representations and practices. The popularity of social media and broadcast offer possibilities to present alternative and diverse identities because they have a broad reach across

cultures (Ross and Lester, 2011). The second, promotes normative binary behaviors that later on are consolidated into children's choices (Martin and Ruble, 2010). Thus, students, including language learners, are immersed in metanarratives and stereotypical practices the two decisive contexts to make discourse choices. In fact, binary notions of race are rarely discussed (Mikulak, 2011). Some consequences of these stereotypes have been pinpointed by research on how this immersion has an impact over students' inequity issues (Gray and Leith, 2004), career choices (McGuire et al., 2020), and the legitimization of dominant discourses (Seiter, 1986).

At this point, the question about other type of narratives that influence the subjects' discourse choices may arise. In fact, the concept of the counternarrative stands in contrast to the dominant discourses (Stanley, 2007) as they "can serve to validate the thoughts, observations, and feelings of underrepresented groups" (Behrman, 2006, p. 494). Therefore, the same symbolic system used to legitimize master narratives is used to question and deconstruct them.

A counternarrative distinguishes from the dominant discourses by engaging the subject's agency and participation and to contribute to identity construction (McLean and Syed, 2015). This process is called narrative engagement and requires subjects who are conscious about the narratives they want to foster or discard (Hammack, 2011). This entails subject positioning, the discourse choices taken by the subjects from their own agency, which leads them to construct alternative narratives for constructing reality (Davies and Harré, 1990).

The agency and participation involved in constructing counter-narratives involves taking a critical and distant position towards the dominant discourses. This is facilitated when the subject has suffered the effects of stereotyping and discrimination. This is because experience contributes to the construction of counternarratives that question race and gender master narratives without making claims of objective truth (Stoddart, 2014). However, this raises the

questions about the value of truth (Foucault, 2002) which may be undermined by alternative

discourses, as these were supposed to "provide multiple and conflictive models of understanding

social and cultural identities" (Stanley, 2007, p.14). Thus, both sides, the master narrative and its

counter position could dispute discursive territory based on what can be adopted by subject

positioning.

In fact, as stated by Smith, (2003) "alternative discourses compete to offer myths… and

horizons that organize identifications with their respective versions of popular subject positions"

(p.167). The narrative character, the master and the counter, provides space for tension between

symbolic repertories rather than determining as fully oppositional (Tore, Fine, Boudin and Clark,

2001). Therefore, the mechanisms, contexts, and historical processes vary between the master

and counter narratives, and this tension varies depending on how they are interpreted by the

learner.

As stated before, media plays a key role on the dissemination, reproduction, and adoption

of master and counternarratives (Stanley, 2007; McLean and Syed, 2015). Indeed, master

narratives are likely to be portrayed in media as these reinforce positions of cultural and

economic power (Mclean et al., 2017). However, social media has been a vehicle for

disseminating alternative positionings and identities (Curwood and Gibbons, 2014). The

potential narratives in media and the multimodal texts in news, ads, and iconography depend on

the context of how, where, and to whom it appears.

The tensions between and dissemination of both dominant and counter narratives have

been exploited for economic purposes. Alternative narratives have been tied to politically correct

discourses as these proclaim to acknowledge the rights of minorities and universal values such as

equality. However, politically correctness has become a discourse fetish (Eagleton, 2000) as

these ideas are constantly disseminated being grounded on values that are difficult to deny. As

stated by Fairclough (2003):

> It is a truism that commodities are now consumed for their cultural or 'sign' value rather
>
> than just their 'use' value, and are accordingly produced as embodiments of cultural
>
> values and discourses, targeted with ever greater precision at culturally differentiated
>
> 'niche markets' (defined in terms of generation, gender, lifestyle, etc.) (p. 19).

One way of seeing this phenomenon is a paradox in which counternarratives linked to

politically correct discourses are being spread by the same power apparatus used by their

antagonist discourses through education and media. Another perspective pinpoints the

simplification and trivialization of alternative discourses by labeling them politically correct

(Suhr and Johnson, 2003). This perspective suggests that these labels should be dismissed for

counternarratives to develop from real alternative positions (Cheatham, 1994). Whatever the

choice, this demonstrates that the symbolic dimensions and repertoires of dominant and

alternative discourses are in dispute and that they have permeated diverse aspects of social

dynamics.

That discourses permeate culture in multiple ways makes analyzing subject positioning,

the discourse choices a subject may take in relation to dominant and counter narratives,

significant and relevant. To take a position based on reflection and critical analysis involves

understanding how these narratives work on their symbolic repertoires, how these narratives

work symbolic ally (Kearney, 2010; Warriner, 2011; Corinne and Valbaelen, 2017). To

understand the denotations, connotations, intentions, and myths contained within the text and

requires making conscious decisions as to whether to believe, question, reject, or adopt the

ideological and discursive background of the text (Mckinney and Norton, 2004; Vinall, 2012;

Vovou, 2019). Linguistics, semiotics, and discourse analysis tools are essential for language learners to make conscious and critical discourse choices as these influence their relation to the cultural, social, and political world they occupy. This study aims to explore how providing these tools to learners through symbolic competence could change their subject positioning.

2.2.2   Multimodal Texts

Multimodal texts have become the most popular medium through which discourses are disseminated in a regular basis. These are defined as texts that articulate linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modes of communication (Anstey and Bull, 2010), some examples are memes, videos, broadcasts, films, and ads. These texts have an impact because they provide easily accessible information. The language learning classroom has had to acknowledge how the multimodal texts are integrated and their relationship with sociocultural practices (Pegrum, 2008). This entails knowing how these practices impact the language learning process (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) because they are essential for learners' exposure to the symbolic dimensions of language. Understanding that these discourses have sociocultural contexts, may enable learners to take critical positions on the multimodal input they receive.

However, some methodologies in the language learning classroom still present verbocentric-linguistic views that leave aside more inclusive and updated approaches to considering the impact of multimodal textualities (Álvarez, 2016). Therefore, the discourse practices in which language learners are involved outside the classroom are not considered as part of the learning process (Godhe and Magnusson, 2017). As it can be inferred, the texts that learners encounter to help them construct their own reality are not analyzed as dominant or counter narratives. Moreover, there is a lack of methodological practices that foster the semiotic power that these textualities have on the construction of political, social, and cultural dynamics

(Selg and Ventsel, 2010). This means that multimodal texts are not being identified as opportunities to develop critical perspectives among learners. Consequently, there is a need for a transformative classroom practices based on critical approaches that acknowledge how multimodal texts are constructed and their sociocultural relevance (Pegrum, 2008).

Moreover, analyzing meaning construction in the multimodal text, involves critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2000; Kearney, 2012) and meaning negotiation skills (Curwood and Gibbons, 2014; Álvarez, 2016). In fact, multimodal texts provide meanings that are not necessarily transferable from one culture to another (Kress et al., 2001). This drives learners to acquire new pragmatic knowledge. Besides, analyzing multimodal texts encourages learners to identify how these are produced within concrete social conditions that frame their meaning making process (Mickan, 2017). Therefore, they may have a sensitive and critical encounter with texts that are built upon different cultures, identities, and discursive practices (Serafini, 2020; Van Lier, 2004).

To guarantee learners' analytical and critical encounter with the multimodal texts, it becomes necessary to understand the structure through which they work. This entails that language curriculum addresses the denotative, connotative, and symbolic dimensions of the text to ensure effective learning opportunities (Dimitriadoua, Tamtelen and Tsakou, 2011). To envision this in the classroom means to approach the text as the articulation of the diverse modes of communication and its explicit and implicit values (Danielsson and Selander, 2016). In other words, to engage the text demands a specific methodology that integrates texts' representation, intentionality, and ideology. One feasible approach to critical engagement is through symbolic competence.

Symbolic representation (denotations, connotations, stereotypes), action (intentionality) and power (ideologies, myths, beliefs) can be seen on how the multimodal text conjugates its diverse modes to accomplish a powerful effect on the spectator (López-Sánchez, 2009; Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014; Kaiser, 2018). For instance, the language textbook depicts concrete gender representations and a set of values and conventions associated to them that could be seen and discussed critically by learners (Marefat and Marzban, 2014). Thus, it would be important to explore how these gender and racial representations are associated with stereotypical or alternative visions of these communities by driving learners to read between the lines of these representations.

Similarly, multimodal texts reveal cultural and social practices according to their context of production. The visual, lexicogrammar, spatial, and audio choices that constitute the text structure are arranged through conventions shared by specific social practices of certain communities (Mickan, 2017). These choices consider the accepted and reproduced values, connotations, and beliefs. For instance, if the text has the intention of reproducing and legitimizing gender stereotypes, the color choices will be coherent to the conventional representation of femininity and masculinity, pink for the girls and blue for the boys.

This leads to considering the multimodal text as an effective tool to raise awareness and critical positions among language learners and to raise questions on the construction of their identities (Stone, 2017). As stated by Strnad (2017), the teacher will need to mediate the students encounter with the text with the intention of triggering students' acknowledgement that text is not just conveying information but is directly affecting the notions of social, political, and cultural power (Archer, 2013). This includes understanding the power of master and counter narratives that are legitimized (Leeuwen, 2018) using extralinguistic and linguistic repertoires

(Pegrum, 2008; Etienne and Valbaelen, 2017). As a result, the discursive elements embedded in the text affect the positioning of the language learners (Clifton and De Mieroop, 2016; Vovou, 2019) because they are essential parts of constructing the learners' positioning, considering the supremacy multimodality has in communicative, social, cultural, and political processes nowadays.

Considering the theoretical considerations presented here, this research study aims to explore the ways in which students position themselves when using symbolic competence strategies to interpret multimodal input. That symbolic competence provides the opportunity to acknowledge the symbolic dimensions of language in relation to historicity, performativity, reframing, and subjectivities imbued in the text (Hull and Nelson, 2005; Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008). Similarly, multimodality in the language classroom would aim to foster learners' skills to understand and analyze a larger body of meaning-making constructions (Mühlhäusler, 2000). These intended to see the impact of analyzing the linguistic, semiotic and discourse elements of the text on the learners' subject positioning. Whether relations between symbolic competence, multimodal texts, and subject positioning have been suggested, no research project has aimed to integrate them by applying a concrete methodology to reveal how students' positioning may develop.

2.3   State of the Art

2.3.1   *Symbolic Competence in the Language Learning Classroom*

Symbolic competence may be defined as "the ability to manipulate the three dimensions of language as symbolic system: symbolic representation, symbolic action, symbolic power"(Kramsch, 2015). Its implementation in the language learning classroom has been developed through diverse conceptualizations, methodologies and texts as learners' speech and

conversations (Wei, 2014; Hult, 2014) literary texts (Vinall, 2016; Keneman, 2017), historical sources (Vinall, 2012) narratives (Kearney, 2010; Kelso, 2018; Vovou, 2019) literacies (López-Sánchez, 2009). Analyzing the type of texts privileged for symbolic analysis in diverse language learning contexts, it is clear that some similarities can be discovered.

Findings suggest that symbolic competence allows analysis of how interaction in multilingual settings demands that learners be able to negotiate meaning by recognizing how symbolic representation, action, and power may work in this environment. On the other hand, outcomes present how learners become more reflective and gain agency by acknowledging and analyzing the three symbolic dimensions on their language use and diverse texts. However, these studies could have been more illustrative to provide details on the classroom methodologies aimed to enhance critical thinking skills and to present the importance of symbolic competence tenets. Similarly, few research studies have shed light on how students' critical perspectives and positioning are transformed or not after interacting, interpreting, and altering the text.

2.3.1.1 Symbolic Competence as Discovering Language's Symbolic Dimensions

Language use has symbolic implications at connotative and ideological levels that go beyond ritualist and predictable communicative exchanges (Kramsch, 2006). Several studies provide evidence to support this statement based on the multicultural settings in which speakers negotiate meaning (Kramsch, 2011; Wei, 2014; Hult, 2014; Clark and Stratilaki, 2013; Vovou, 2019; López-Sánchez, 2009). Likewise, investigations have revealed the diverse conceptions and ideologies unveiled in the creation of oral and written texts within the language learning classroom (Richardson 2017; Kelso, 2018; Kern, 2000; Kearney, 2012). Most of these studies are grounded on ethnographical approaches rather than on action-research procedures. Others have a propositional and theoretical nature considering contextual needs. There are few which

reveal learners' interactions with written texts. Even though findings are crucial to understand how the symbolic dimensions of language can be seen and developed in the language learning process; aspects related to the learners' awareness about these dimensions could have been furthered developed by targeting students' perspectives on the symbolic implications of the texts.

Context has an essential role in discovering how language's symbolic dimensions develop. For instance, the ethnographic study conducted by Hult (2014) shows how native English speakers and Swedish English learners need to negotiate meanings within a shared context in which they perform insider (shared cultural repertoire) /outsider (different cultural repertoire) subject positions. Similarly, research on how meaning negotiation takes place in the context of complementary schools for Chinese learners in England (Wei, 2014) points out how the cultural values, expectations, traditions, and language proficiency levels create challenging and confrontational scenarios between the language learners and their teachers. This is because their symbolic dimensions depict opposite expectations and values. These studies did not examine learners' reflection on the symbolic representations, actions, and ideologies imbued within their language use, and the scope of both studies leaves remaining questions about contextual conditions and meaning construction.

In contrast, an ethnographic study conducted in a Spanish course in an American university (Pomerantz and Bell, 2007) provides information on ways learners explore symbolic dimensions based on regulated and non-regulated practices. The outcomes suggested that non-regulated practices, such as role-plays or natural interactions allowed students to negotiate meanings when there were communicative misunderstandings. Although the paper gives a glimpse on methodological aspects, there are still not practical procedures articulated about the

use of language's symbolic dimensions. There is emphasis on oral production, and this format

could be part of why students have difficulty keeping track of their reflections on language.

There are studies that deal with learners' interaction and symbolic analysis of the written

text. Through ethnographic observation, field notes, and conversations with instructors, the study

conducted in German language learning classrooms conducted by Kramsch (2011) describes

how symbolic dimensions are addressed from linguistic to discursive domains based on

legitimate and non- legitimate texts' connotations. The outcomes highlight how triggering

students' reflection, text's analysis and discussions that go beyond linguistics ensure Intercultural

Competence practices in the classroom. Likewise, a study based on ethnographic and discursive-

analytic methods presents how learners' cultural perceptions along with reading the symbolic

dimensions of texts and images allow students to gain access to ideological meanings (Kearney,

2012). Even though both studies present information on methods to use in the classroom, these

do not provide details on how learners could explore the texts based on the recognition of

linguistic and semiotic repertoire, understood as semiotic patterners or discursive processes.

On the other hand, several studies have developed theoretical proposals on how to

address symbolic dimensions in language within oral and written texts in the language learning

classroom (Clark and Stratilaki, 2013; López-Sánchez, 2009; Vovou, 2019; Richardson, 2017;

Kelso, 2018). Many tenets are shared by these authors such as promoting meaning negotiation

mediated by curriculum design, enhancing metacognitive practices that lead students to

acknowledge the multiple interpretations derived from texts, enhancing students' access to

counternarratives, and permitting them to take part in transformative practices in their contexts.

The studies mentioned provide pivotal elements to develop learners' awareness on the

symbolic dimensions of language proposed by symbolic competence. However, methodological

considerations aimed to foster intercultural practices and critical thinking skills could have been presented in a scaffolded process (Hammond and Gibbons, 2005) that would allow to track the process of recognizing symbolic dimensions and to construct critical attitudes towards the texts.

Furthermore, most of the analysis on learners' language use, subject positioning, and ways in which meaning is negotiated has been conducted within multilingual settings. These have also been presented in terms of national identities that do not adapt to contemporary social and historical dynamics (Chalaby, 2007). This creates a homogenization of culture by categorizing "correct" and "incorrect" practices. This binary interpretation is not effective in language learning settings aimed to foster learners' critical thinking towards the complex and diverse political and ideological natures of cultural practices (Kubota, 2003).

2.3.1.1. Symbolic Competence through Literary Texts

Literature has leaded to the analysis of connotative meanings and hidden ideological implications due to the metaphorical and descriptive language portrayed by the texts (Vinall, 2016; Gassenbauer, 2012). Also, literature has been considered to be useful when addressing language symbolic dimensions (Richardson, 2017; Keneman, 2017). Even though their research discuss ways in which literary texts are approached to explore their symbolic meanings. However, it seems that in the research available not enough attention is paid to learners' positions and their embedded cultural values, beliefs, and ideologies.

Literary language cannot be assumed to help learners on their development of the symbolic dimensions of language. As a literary creation framed through the authors' subjective perspective it is not necessary to analyze cultural, social and ideological complexities (Lazar, 1993), however, these complexities are the backbone of symbolic competence analysis. In addition, the traditional methods of teaching literature are insufficient for acknowledging and

interpreting culture and the symbolic dimensions of language, which are necessary to activate learners' cultural analysis (Schulz and Ganz, 2010).

Nevertheless, the three case studies conducted by Richardson (2017) within a German language classroom analyzed how students constructed relationships when immersed in literary and nonliterary texts: genre, perspective, and silence. Learners were exposed to the two types of texts and how these ambiguities may interfere with the conveyed meaning. Findings suggest that previous understanding of the texts can be reconfigured. For example, by acknowledging how fairytales (Gassenbauer, 2012) move beyond predictable structures, how cultural values are depicted in ads, and how learners can reach *the good feeling* of authentic text comprehension (Richardson, 2017), in other words, layered understanding of authentic texts. Even though the study provides insightful analysis of learners' tolerance to ambiguity by unveiling multiple dimensions of language, additional ways of approaching complexities in teaching text ambiguities can be developed and applied.

Keneman (2017) conducted a study within a French language learning environment based on the theatrical piece *Huis Clos* by Sartre. The class procedures allowed learners to recognize symbolic representation by analyzing the characters' dialogues, engaging with symbolic actions by arranging their own setting for the play, and interpreting power by rewriting the literary piece. Research shows that these activities allow students to learn how symbolic dimensions come into play within the text and to make more conscious and critical decisions when creating their own texts.

Similarly, research studies based on literary texts as input (Gassenbauer, 2012; Vinall, 2016) highlight how a symbolic competence approach drives learners to identify and question symbolic cultural meanings within the text. The thesis proposed by Gassenbauer (2012) offers a

didactical sequence on how to teach *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman to foster intercultural competence (Byram, 2000). This text is also used to analyze symbolic text dimensions through reader-response and dialogical learning techniques. On the other hand, Vinall (2016) conducted a study within a Spanish language learning environment based on the legend of *La Llorona* in which participants carried out project-based activities to recognize, contextualize, and question cultural implications of the literary text. Findings suggest that the text analysis allows the teacher to be more critically aware on students' subject positions. While both research studies present valuable information on methodological remarks, their findings are limited when explaining how students could transform or change their subject positioning after interpreting the texts' symbolic dimensions from teachers' points of view.

Literary texts have been shown to be an essential resource for students to explore the three language symbolic dimensions: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015). In contrast to the studies that analyzed learners' language use through ethnographic methods or students' interactions to written texts, the literary texts as main input employ ambiguity, cultural references, and layers of meaning that have offered language learners possibilities to manipulate the texts' symbolic system, and to develop intercultural competence. Nonetheless, the differences between dealing with literary and non-literary texts on the learners' discovery of the symbolic dimensions or language and the possible students' subject positionings have not been sufficiently explored.

2.3.1.2. Symbolic Competence and Developing Critical Literacies through Multimodal Texts

Considering current dynamics in communication, multimodal texts have gained a prominent role in daily interactions (Jewitt et al., 2016). This is because the meaning that is

articulated through these texts establish several codes: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and

linguistic. Multimodal texts offer valuable opportunities to present the symbolic dimensions of

language. There have been research studies and theoretical works that use them as the main input

to foster discourse analysis and intercultural competence skills (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013;

Iedema, 2003), address learners' cultural and personal identities (Van Lier, 2004; Kendrick and

Jones, 2008; Ibrahim, 1999; Stein, 2001), meaning- making semiotic analysis (Godhe and

Magnusson, 2017; Mestre-Mestre, 2015; Álvarez, 2016) and symbolic competence (Kaiser,

2018; Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014). Even though these studies show methodological procedures

enhance students critical literacy and the recognition of the symbolic dimensions embedded in

the construction of the text and social and cultural complexities immersed in the texts; their

outcomes are limited to providing evidence on how students' critical perspectives could lead

them to reconsider or continue exerting their subject positioning to the discourses within the

texts.

To begin, Iedema (2003) states that multimodal textualities can lead to processes of

resemiotization, in other words, to create new meaning negotiations by recognizing diverse

patterns in meaning making processes. Analogously, Liddicoat and Scarino, (2013) propose

semiotic analysis of authentic texts not only textbooks to guide learners toward recognizing

stereotypical understandings of culture. The author recommends exposing learners to diverse

topics to raise awareness on cultural diversity within the text. The nature of these research

studies remains theoretical, but these considerations regarding resemiotization and the use of

authentic texts targeted to explore diverse symbolic representations and ideologies, could be key

to analyzing learners' positioning.

Multimodal texts are an essential part of students' daily lives and ways in which they engage in meaning-making processes (Godhe and Magnusson, 2017) and shape their cultural perspectives and identities (Stone, 2017). In fact, research within the language classroom environment (Kendrick and Jones, 2008; Ibrahim, 1999; Stein, 2001) reveals that multimodal texts can uncover racial and gender complexities that constitute learners' identities. Kendrick and Jones (2008) conducted a study in Uganda that analyzed symbolic representations in photography to depict literacy practices from learners' daily life. Findings reveal that the students through photography presented dynamics of exclusion and possible alternatives considering their role as women in their context.

In a similar manner, other studies (Ibrahim, 1999; Stein, 2001) draw attention to how learners use representations in multimodal textualities to reconfigure their identity. By analyzing these texts' symbolic dimensions and creating alternative texts, learners construct an imagined space for their identity, *third place*, in which learners build a hybrid identity mediated by their language use and ideological awareness of the texts. Even though both studies show key remarks on the relationships between learners' identity construction and multimodal texts mediation, they are still limited to the description of how learners could become aware and critical of their hybrid identity construction.

In contrast, several works have posed a route map to guide learners to critical literacy skills by discovering the symbolic dimensions immersed on multimodal texts (Godhe and Magnusson, 2017; Mestre-Mestre, 2015; Álvarez, 2016). One of these took place in a university context with English language learners (Mestre-Mestre, 2015). The methodology used was the "Descriptive framework of multimodality" proposed by (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006) which is based on representational, interpersonal, and central meaning. Outcomes suggest that depending

on the type of input, the ways learners construct meaning relies in one of the three aspects of the framework. On the other hand, theoretical works (Godhe and Magnusson, 2017; Álvarez, 2016) involve multimodal textualities in the classroom as these are the main meaning-making practices of the learners. In the case of Álvarez (2016) there is a proposal considering the Colombian context: making students' aware of texts' structure, exposing them to diverse texts, and allowing them to create their own texts. Considering these studies' conclusions, the type of multimodal input impacts learners' analysis of its symbolic dimensions. However, the lack of details on how learners are able to reconstruct meanings leaves a space for further research.

Symbolic competence through films as the main multimodal input has been approached by several researchers (Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014; Kaiser, 2018). The first study (Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014) shows how English as a Second Language (ESL) engaged with symbolic competence strategies to discover layered meanings from movie scripts and film excerpts by acknowledging its representations and intentions. In addition, this enhanced learners' abilities to manipulate the symbolic dimensions seen in the films in their own texts' creations. The second study (Kaiser, 2018) puts into practice the theoretical considerations by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) along with symbolic competence strategies to analyze a scene from the film *Boyhood* (Linklater, 2014). The study emphasizes the richness in meaning offered by film scenes and provides access to linguistic and cultural representations. The findings of both studies validate symbolic competence strategies to identify several meanings within film excepts, nonetheless, both research studies could have been more explanatory on how to construct skills in the language learning classroom. In particular those that allow learners to identify representations, ideologies and subject positioning based on analysis. There are many remaining questions on how to scaffold these processes and the effect on learners.

2.3.2   Subject Positioning in the Language Learning Classroom

Subject positioning in the language learning classroom has been implemented in diverse

ways. According to the research and theory found, subject positioning could be explored as its

relationship with: identity (Norton,1997; Cummins, 2000; Norton and Toohey, 2011; Gómez and

Collazos, 2016; Bertau and Tures, 2019), language use (Hult, 2014; Belz, 2002; Özbakis, 2015)

and, critical literacies (Behrman, 2006; García-pastor, 2017; Dennis et al., 2016; Serafini, 2020).

These works consider the broad interpretation of subject positioning as the way learners

construct their identities within ethnical, racial, gender, language-learning, and multicultural

settings. However, it should be noted that to provide answers to the research question posed in

this study, takes subject positioning as defined by Benwell and Stokoe (2006): the resistance or

adaptation of dominant discourses, which are understood here as master narratives. In addition,

this study looks at how learners are able to understand and, replicate discourses embedded in the

multimodal input presented to them. Although all the studies included in this section offer key

factors for determining how subject positioning takes place in the language learning classroom,

further considerations are needed to clarify how methodological aspects and types of input could

facilitate learners' discourse choices.

2.3.2.1. Subject Positioning and Identity

Relationships between identity and subject positioning have been addressed in diverse

ways, and even in some cases, they have been used interchangeably. One of the most common

differentiations relies on understanding identity as the result of several subject positionings

(Whitworth, 2006). Opposing or adopting master narratives is just one of the relationships and

does not constitute the entirety of identity construction.

As seen from a postmodern perspective, identity is diverse, contradictory, changing, dynamic, and performed (Norton, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Pennycook, 2003; Pegrum, 2008; Norton and Toohey, 2011 Gómez and Collazos, 2016; García-pastor, 2017). In this definition of identity, language plays a key role as it is through language that relationships with the world are created, revisited, and reflected.

Research studies and theoretical considerations have addressed how language learners present their identities by the language they use. A key concept to understanding how this process takes place is through *imagined identities* (Norton and Toohey, 2011) in which learners' beliefs and expectations of their language learning process provide new possibilities for their future identity construction. A case study conducted by Goharimehr (2019) shows how the "imagined identities" of Japanese language learners at a university level have a positive impact on their learning process. However, the case of study does not reveal data about the symbolic dimensions: representations, actions, and ideologies in which the "imagined identities" stand. Therefore, speakers cannot position themselves critically towards their future identities.

Research studies have focused on how learners and teachers see themselves within the language learning classroom: learners' recognition that they are non-native speakers (Marshall, 2009), the future professional identities of teachers (Bertau and Tures, 2019), and learners in relation to the learning process (Gómez and Collazos, 2016). Though data analysis, the first study discovered through post-course surveys and interviews how learners constructed a *third space* (Bhabha, 1994) as an alternative beyond the polarities of native and nonnative speakers. The second study gathered data through observation and artifacts on how teachers' positions were ambivalent when they interacted with children through dialogical activities and reflected on their language use (Bertau and Tures, 2019). The third research study analyzed data from field

diaries, observations, and questionnaires about how Colombian learners created their identities

through the learning process (Gómez and Collazos, 2016), which suggests that contradictory

dimensions depend on the language use.

The studies referred to coincide as they present how learners and teachers' identities are

contradictory and ambivalent. Nonetheless, the outcomes are limited in discovering the specific

representations and discourses that would explain the presence of contradictions and

ambivalences within teachers and learners' identities.

2.3.2.2. Subject Positioning and Language Use

Relationships between the use of language and subject positioning can be found in studies

that examine how language speakers reveal their identity construction. In a study previously

referred to, it is shown through ethnographic observation how language interactions acquire a

dynamic, changing, and flowing nature depending on the context in which NNS of English are

participating (Hult, 2014). Similarly, through the analysis of multilingual learners' production

the study conducted by Belz (2002) provides data on how learners are able to conceptualize

themselves as multicompetent speakers by traditional teaching methods. Also, the studies'

observations highlight how language learners position their identities dynamically by playing

with their talks' turns, in class participation, and interactions (Özbakis, 2015). While these

studies present valuable information regarding how language and identity are interdependent, the

results are limited to the ways speakers may position themselves considering the discourses,

master narratives, and embedded communicative situations. These could have been more

illustrative of the types of topics, discussions, and inputs that inspire learners' creativity in their

language use and identity construction. Furthermore, these are focused on multilingual settings

which means a contextual limitation of the studies.

2.3.2.3. Subject Positioning and Multimodal Texts Analysis

Multimodal textualities provide meaning-making processes that learners need for semiotic, discursive, and linguistic analysis (Kress, 2010). This analysis may have an impact on students' resistance or adoption of dominant discourses within these texts. Several pedagogical proposals and research studies have explored the relationships between the multimodal texts and the development of critical literacies (Behrman, 2006; García-pastor, 2017; Denis, Holler and Meyer, 2016; Serafini, 2020).

The relationships between subject positioning and multimodal texts relationships were explored in a literature review consisting of 56 articles conducted by Behrman (2006). These present lessons or units in which multimodal texts are used to foster critical literacies. From these articles, there are 15 related to two main areas concerning subject positioning: reading from a resistant perspective and producing counter texts. On the first, common practices are to "peel the layers of meaning from the text" by allowing learners to identify author's intentionality and to reflect upon the effect, this had on them as readers (Behrman, 2006, p. 431). On the second, the texts created by students consisted of their response to a topic they learned. This review provides pivotal tools to understand relationships between multimodal texts' exposure and subject positioning. Evidence shows how learners' positioning changes when creating counternarratives and reflect on intentionality and symbolic action embedded on the text. Nonetheless, methodological and didactic aspects that rely on text analysis do not pinpoint how this analysis could be conducted in the classroom.

Similarly, a study examined 51 college students' DIT (Digital Identity Texts) to determine what subject positionings they related to competence, transitions, and silencing identities (García-pastor, 2017). The texts' analysis was made to determine learners' positionings

on three levels: thematic, structural, and dialogic (Davies and Harré, 1990). Outcomes suggested that learners' positioning was diverse. They were stereotypical when considering themselves as native or nonnative speakers, and competence-based regarding their encounter with the language. Even though this work supports the features of post-modern identities: dynamic, contradictory, and non-static, results do not reveal data on how stereotypical or alternative positionings are constructed by learners. These findings do not account for learners' reflections towards them.

On the other hand, the works of Serafini (2020) and Dennis, Höllerer and Meyer (2016) described theoretical considerations to guide pedagogical practices to approach multimodal textualities, critical literacies, and students' positionings. The first proposes text analysis at three levels: visual object, multimodal event, and sociocultural to discover the symbolic and discursive elements embedded on the multimodal texts. The second advocates for an analysis of the texts' genre by posing questions related to author's intentionality, and the texts' presentation of gender features, narratives, roles, and functions. Learners may recognize stereotypical representations to negotiate meanings regarding discursive elements of the texts. While these theoretical remarks highlight the importance of a scaffolded process in text analysis, which includes perceiving and analyzing to encourage learners' understanding of discourses and narratives, there is no hypothesis on how text analysis processes have an impact on learners' subject positioning or specificities on didactic procedures or multimodal inputs considered.

2.3.3   Justification of Research Question and Objectives

Analysis of the research studies on symbolic competence and subject positioning revealed gaps related to the specific ways in which students' subject position and the specific mechanisms in which this approach it could be applied. Therefore, this study intends to explore how learners' increase their subject positioning after using symbolic competence strategies to analyze

multimodal input. In other words, symbolic competence will be used as a scaffolded set of strategies to identify representations (denotations, connotations), actions (communicative intentions), and ideologies embedded in the texts to examine how learners' discourse choices may be influenced by it.

In contrast to the studies presented previously, the implementation of the project will use diverse multimodal texts as didactic resources to address diverse socio-cultural phenomena. This would allow learners to explore these issues through opposite perspectives and different meaning-making strategies, and to discover how these can influence learners' discourse. In addition, this study will provide information on the methodological path, in which symbolic competence will be developed through thinking routines, socializations, and discussions based on the analysis of the multimodal input.

2.4   Conclusion

Research studies above mentioned present key theoretical considerations and classroom practices to approach symbolic competence and subject positioning in the language learning process. Studies framed through symbolic competence analysis of language use, literary pieces and multimodal textualities demonstrate its validity to develop learners' agency, critical perspectives, meaning negotiation skills, and the discovery of cultural and ideological complexities in the texts. Similarly, approaching learners' subject positioning reveals how learners construct dynamic and ambivalent identities within language learning, through their relationships with language. However, these studies have left remaining questions about the methodologies that would guide students on the discovery of language dimensions in diverse types of texts. Moreover, they have not provided details on how this would impact learners' positioning and in what ways these could be seen. In addition, most of the studies have been

conducted in multilingual contexts and at university levels, leaving a gap in investigating the bilingual high school setting.

Symbolic competence studies can be seen in three groups: use of language, literary pieces and multimodal texts used as input disclose some of these questions. Even though the studies remark on how language use is a way in which learners negotiate meaning and participate in "inside" and "outside" positionings, there is no further specificities on interactions of the symbolic dimensions of language: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015). Even though the use of literary and multimodal texts provides more theoretical information in this regard there are no concrete methodological elements to address symbolic dimensions. On the other hand, subject positioning in the classroom through language use and critical literacies has focused on how learners and teachers' identities as contradictory and dynamic and how these could be transformed through the creation of counternarratives. Nonetheless, these changes in positioning do not find their origin or development in regard to types of input and strategies for analyzing texts.

As a result, the present study will examine the ways in which high school students' subject position while using scaffolded symbolic competence strategies for analyzing texts. This process will take place in a school in which English is taught intensively as a second language.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1   Introduction

This chapter intends to define the research approach and the data collection instruments of this research project. It presents detailed justification for the selected type of study and instruments. This investigation considers relevant data such as: the context, participants, ethical considerations, the role of the researcher, and the piloting and validating processes.

3.2   Context

This study was carried out at a private institution located at Cota, Colombia. Over the last two years, the school has gone through a transformative process in terms of their corporate name, vision and mission. The justification of these changes relies on the institution's goal to develop learners to be successful in 21st century societies.

As a matter of fact, the school's mission states how the pedagogical project embraces an experiential learning approach to allow students to be assertive on their personal and professional endeavors. Similarly, the school's vision consists of a bilingual school in 2023 based on three dimensions of the learning process: affective, critical, and participative. At the same time, they seek to provide the learners with tools for their pursuit of happiness.

Considering the school's objective of becoming bilingual by the year 2023, new subjects are being taught such as: DPHE (Professional, Entrepreneurial, and Human Development), social, science, digital citizenship, and English literature. In consequence, the number of English related subject hours taken by elementary and high school learners is around 47% of the institution's curriculum. In addition, this language learning process synchronizes with the Estandares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras proposed by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, the institution aims for their high school graduates to achieve a

certificate at a B2 level according to the CEFM (Common European Framework) This B2 level is above the national standards.

The nature and direction of the institutional project facilitated the current study. This research investigation envisions combining 21st century demands, a meaningful and holistic use of the foreign language, active learning, and critical thinking. All of these aspects integrated the understanding, interpretation and creation of symbolic meaning.

3.2.1   Type of Study

Consistent with the nature of the study and its objectives, the approach selected to conduct this educational research project was qualitative action research. Qualitative research was defined as "an array for attitudes towards and strategies for conducting inquiry that are aimed at discovering how human beings understand, experience, interpret and produce the social world" (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 893). This type of study considers the complexity of the construction of discursive, cultural, and political relationships that take place in a social setting. In the case of this study, an educational environment in which all participants interpret and create their realities through social and symbolic meaning.

As action research is constructivist, situational, practical, systematic, and cyclical (Efrat Efron and Ravid, 2013), it provides data for dynamic social and symbolic practices. The participants are considered creators of knowledge with a complex context in which certain social practices acquire meaning. Therefore, this type of research transforms a phenomenon within this social setting by using methods and tools that once applied, lead to new questions about the inquiry. As stated by Elliot (1991), action research has become a tendency within educational settings that have the challenging task of creating "cultural innovations" that involve an

epistemological change that focuses on the subjects and their ability to redefine their roles in the social world.

To carry out qualitative action research in an educational context requires planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Burns, 2010). This involves identifying the phenomena to be transformed, intervening through systematic practices, documenting the effects of the intervention, and reflecting upon them. In the present study, the social and academic dynamics of the group of learners revealed a problem that was addressed by using theoretical and methodological tools. The results of these strategies were interpreted to determine possible adjustments. As a result, all the stages of this process needed to be purposeful and systematic.

3.2.2   Participants

This study was conducted with a group of 12 eighth graders whose ages ranged between 12 and 14 years old. Most of the learners who attend the school are likely to belong to the upper-middle class according to the country' stratification system. Based on the institution's expected outcomes they are in a B1 CEFM level; however, based on the observation carried out by the researcher, 40% of the learners are still in the process of achieving a B1 level. This can be concluded by the basic lexicon they manage to convey information, and the difficulty they have when describing their experiences, dreams, interests, and opinions in depth.

The reasons that validate the selection of this group are their difficulties on the inferential and critical levels of reading according to the reading levels postulated by Westwood (2008). As presented in the first questionnaire (See Appendix A), they do not participate when they are asked to provide their opinion and the constantly reference cultural stereotypes. According to the dialogues held between the researcher and other teachers, these complexities are not only taking place in the language class, these occur frequently on subjects such as social science (English

and Spanish) and human development and DPHE. It became essential for the learners to exercise high order skills: interpretative and critical abilities and forming opinions through argumentative construction.

This phenomenon reveals communicative needs for the learners to participate in the educational mission that the school offers and to become critical about the values, beliefs, and ideologies implicit in different texts. First, students were required to provide meaningful input to undertake interpretative and critical process and to express their opinion. Second, they demanded to know how to perform the interpretation of diverse textualities (written, visual, and audiovisual) according to the symbolic system these belong to. This means using linguistic, semiotic, and discursive tools.

Regarding the pupils' affective needs, observation revealed that they needed to be responsible for their own learning to improve their work pace and develop study habits. These aspects could be explained by acknowledging how in some cases the teenage brain has difficulties tapping into instructional strategies and acquiring unfamiliar study skills (Feinstein, 2009). For the process of allowing learners to be active and responsible for their learning outcomes from the beginning the class methodology aimed at centered-learner activities, class discussions, socializations and collective thinking routines. These were pivotal for the development of autonomous practices and the construction of their discourse choices or subject positionings.

3.2.3 Researcher's Role

According to Wellington (2000) the researcher plays a key role in the educational context as he affects the participants through an intersubjective relation. This means that the teacher researcher must consider and reflect on possible biases when interacting with the participants. On the process itself, the teacher researcher's role is to identify areas to improve in the classroom,

plan an action to address the problem, and reflect on the impact of the intervention through a meta-thinking process (Burns, 2010). Then, the teacher-researcher implements a practical and dynamic intervention that is then reevaluated and reconsidered based on the project's objective and the learners' progress to accomplish the new goal. The researcher must be engaged with academic reform, students' learning, participants' confidentiality when using the instruments for data collection (Pappas and Raymond, 2011). Thus, the researcher's role involves recognizing how subjectivities are at play during the project, the commitment for a continuous reflective process over classroom procedures, and the identification of ethical considerations.

3.2.4   Ethical Considerations

Key elements when dealing with ethical considerations in educational action research included: the participants' rights and interests to take a proper route of action, their knowledge about the research and willingness to take part of it, and the confidentiality on their identities (BERA, 2018).To make sure that this study was built upon these principles, the school's director, the learners' parents, and the participants themselves were informed about the project, its objectives, implications, and instruments used for data collection. All the members agreed to participate with the research.

3.2.5   Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected to determine the impact of symbolic competence strategies on the learners' positioning. The researcher selected the following instruments: observation, questionnaires, interviews, artifacts, and focus group discussions. These tools are coherent with the principles of a qualitative study seeking to explore the effect of the implementation on the participants' beliefs, opinions, meanings, and perspectives (Sim and Wright, 2000). The

information gathered demanded a series of instruments to systematize and validate the insights of the research.

3.3 Descriptions and Justifications

3.3.1.1 Observation

According to Efrat and Ravid, (2013) observation in a research context is "looking at a place purposefully" (p. 86). This means being able to identify relevant data that contributes to the research question. In fact, as stated by the same authors, observation requires the systematization of the information to portray individuals and describe activities and interactions. In the case of this project, this process required the researcher to participate and influenced the classroom context and culture where the relationships between the subjects and the implementation strategies took place. Using the field diaries in certain sessions allowed the researcher to construct a narrative (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, and Namey, 2005) that could provide details of the learners' reactions (verbal and non-verbal). This was used when describing and interpreting diverse texts in their symbolic dimension and stating their positioning. This narrative made the researcher aware of the impact of the texts, the pertinence of the methodology to address them, and student's progress in constructing subject positioning based on their abilities to analyze the texts.

3.3.1.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires consist of formulating questions to gain insight into the phenomenon that is being studied (Sharp, 2012). Questionnaires allow gathering data from a considerable number of participants which makes them ideal for an educational context. To carry out effective questionnaires, it was fundamental to follow three steps: pilot testing, revision, and formatting

(Anderson and Arsenault, 2002). The ones applied in this research where tested on a similar population to the eighth graders at the target institution where the research was performed. The types of questions used were a combination of semi-structured and unstructured. In the first case, the responses were designed to collect information about a specific element. In the second, they provided details on the interviewees' ideas. Additionally, to make sure the questions were pertinent for the study's aim, the inquiries were coded based on their relation to the research constructs which are symbolic competence and subject positioning.

3.3.1.3 *Interviews*

Interviews in qualitative research provide the participants the possibility of self-expression and places them in the spotlight of the research context (Mack et al., 2005). The students were eager to provide their opinions and share their thoughts about the phenomenon, which is congruent ongoing construction of their character and identity that happens at their age. The objective of carrying out interviews was to exercise an interpretative perspective on the nuances and contradictions found in the participants discourse (Mack et al., 2005). Indeed, interviews were a valuable tool to discover how their discursive action was mediated by the master-narratives (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) stereotypes, and prejudices. Interviews were critical in establishing how reflection took place in the symbolic competence practices.

3.3.1.4 *Artifacts*

Artifacts are understood as the resulting products of the teaching and learning context (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2012). They can be analyzed more systematically to recognize student's beliefs, opinions, and assumptions. These are pivotal since they provided information on how the eighth graders were or were not able to recognize symbolic meaning using diverse

codes such as written narratives, visuals, audiovisual, and spoken language. Then, based on these products the researcher could determine if they were progressing on the identification of connotations, actions and power relations in the texts. Finally, by analyzing the learner's artifacts and establishing a probable relationship between symbolic competence strategies and subject positioning, relevant data was obtained. Through the artifacts the students' emerging voices were recognized

3.3.1.5   *Focus Groups*

Focus groups assist researchers in their understanding the social norms, perspectives, and opinions within a community (Mack et al., 2005). In an educational context, the discussions lead through this instrument allow the researcher to identify and grasp the learners' opinions, beliefs, and ideologies. For this project, it was pivotal to gain insight on how master narratives (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) and stereotypes where present in the students' discourse. This allowed the researcher to question them and to propose that the participants reconsider and maybe transform their subject positioning. As a result, the teenagers selected some controversial topics to discuss in class while applying symbolic competence interpretations.

3.3.2   *Validation and Piloting*

To validate and pilot the instruments for this research study, a set of activities were created to interpret how the learners were able to recognize symbolic meanings in diverse texts and how they constructed their subject positioning. These activities were carried out with different groups of learners to identify possible contributions and potential difficulties in terms of pertinence, reliability, practicality, and authenticity of the instruments. First, an open-question

questionnaire was conducted to identify the three levels of symbolic meaning proposed by

Kramsch (2015): symbolic representation, action, and power (See Appendix A).

Second, the researcher used a format to register the observation through field diaries (See

Appendix B). These notes were taken after applying a determined activity aimed to develop one

of the constructs from the two categories: symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2015) and subject

positioning (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). Similarly, multimodal text analysis was compiled as the

learners' artifacts were targeted to work with one of the constructs (See Appendix C). Finally,

recordings provided evidence of the interviews, which were taken during class breaks and in

class focus groups (See Appendix D).

3.4   Conclusion

This chapter has presented instruments design for action research in educational settings

to provide an answer to the research question postulated on this study. On the other hand, it has

served as a means to reflect on the researcher's role as an active participant in the process, to

revise the pertinence of using several instruments to collect specific data and to identify how this

information can provide insights into the pertinence and effectiveness of using symbolic

competence strategies to have an impact over the learners' positioning.

Chapter 4: Pedagogical intervention and implementation

4.1   Introduction

The implementation of this study aimed to uncover learners' positionings when using language symbolic competence strategies. In this chapter, the visions of language, teaching, learning, classroom, and curriculum are presented as part of this process. Details on the process of implementation such as objectives, stages, activities, and data collection instruments will be addressed to reveal evidence on the impact of the intervention among eighth grade students.

4.2   Visions of Language, Learning, and Curriculum

4.2.1   Vision of language

Language creates our reality to the construction of our personal and social identities. This phenomenon can be explained as "language permeates every aspect of human experience and creates as well as reflects images of that experience. It is almost impossible to imagine human life without it" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.1738). As a result, a reflection upon language from diverse angles was essential to understand how communities build their notions of who they are through their discourse practices in which ideological, cultural and personal aspects intervene.

Language cannot only be seen as a set of linguistic structures separated from the speakers. It involves cultural and psychological aspects (Garner, 2005) which demand other disciplines and interpretative processes. Taking an interdisciplinary scope was pertinent to understand how subject positioning was a cornerstone of discourse choices that involve linguistic, semiotic, and discursive repertoires.

For purposes of this work, the view of the transversal role of language within a culture is understood by the concept of "language ideologies:"

Those ideas which stem from the ''official culture'' of the ruling class but rather a more

ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by

speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in

communicative activity (Kroskrity, 2005, p. 497).

In other words, considering "language ideologies" allows us to recognize the key role

speakers play in communication. This is because their linguistic, semiotic, and discursive choices

reveal an intertwined ideological practice that shapes the subjective expressions, social

interactions, and psychological traits in which they participate.

Today's subjectivities take part in a diverse communicative landscape in which

multilingualism and multiliteracies have a pivotal influence. Therefore, within the articulation of

ideology and language, there are meaning-making processes in which different languages and

modes of communication emerge. The speaker acquires a dimension, "the symbolic -self as the

most sacred part of our personal and social identity (that) demands its well-being careful

positioning" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 354) In other words, the expressive and communicative

language choices, which integrate linguistic and extra-linguistic signs (images, non-verbal

behavior, and audiovisual texts), compound our identity and interaction with our social world. It

is crucial to reflect critically upon these choices through awareness of the ideological scaffold

that supports them and the effect they have.

For this study, language is seen as a main transversal aspect of human experience, which

involves the dynamic construction of knowledge, culture, and identity, which are mediated

through symbolic practices. As stated by Pennycook, (2003) "English is sedimentation of

semiotic (re)constructions" (p. 529). This means that language is part of a ritualized social

practices are modified by historical information. For example, in the 21st century the new ways

of meaning-making and communication include technology. Even though there are overlapping practices of interaction (greeting, saying goodbye, small-talk, etc.), these have been altered by the use of multimodality (videos, sounds, emoticons, images) because symbolic elements are essential. At the same time, these symbols convey ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs that need to be analyzed through an inclusive scope to analyze the linguistic and extralinguistic signs.

4.2.2   *Vision of Learning*

Learning consists of a psychological and social process in which there is a constant practice and reflection upon knowledge construction. This suggests that the participants of this process have an active role this process, as their identities, the way they perceive their realities come into play when constructing knowledge (Finch, 2011). Learning offers the possibility of interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) in which different cultural backgrounds come together to negotiate meaning and construct reality.

For the purposes of this research study, learning is seen as the possibility to understand, interpret, and critique the discursive and social practices in which students are immersed. This perspective recognizes that learning a language is more than the acquisition of linguistic structures; learning a language demands acknowledging the political nature of being an L2 user (Benson and Voller, 2013, p. 6). As a result, the learning process demands offering students tools to learn how language is tangled with social practices. Moreover, knowing that this takes place can help them rethink and act upon their role and subjectivity within their context.

Language learning offers space for the students to reconsider their subject positioning (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). Considering that language constitutes an amalgam of cultural, sociological, and ideological elements mediated through symbolic practices, learning a language requires awareness of how diverse modes of meaning-making can provide insights of socio-

cultural elements. Therefore, changing the dynamic of being a passive receptor or consumer of meaning to being able to identify and decide whether to adopt or resist the master narratives involves approaching language from a social, political and historical perspective to take a position based on these narratives.

This research implementation exposed students to multimodal input, which were texts using language with extralinguistic resources to convey meaning. Learners could participate in a scaffolded process which allowed them to identify the symbolic representations (Kramsch, 2015) (denotations and connotations) and actions (communicative intentions) of these types of texts for them to be able to take a position regarding the underlying ideas in ads, memes, political debates, quotes, and literary texts. Being conscious of the attitudes, beliefs, ideologies present in the texts, allowed students to create more critical and reflective subject positions.

4.2.3   Vision of Curriculum

Language and learning are part of and create social, cultural, and political practices through symbolic dimensions, and language curriculum aims to foster critical thinking and social change in the learning process. As stated by McLaren, (1995) "to conceptualize the curriculum as a form of cultural politics is to acknowledge the overriding goal of education as the creation of conditions for social transformation through the constitution of students as political subjects" (p. 38). In the same way, structuring curriculum through this perspective allows learners to encounter 21st-century citizenship in second language studies (Kereluik, Fahnoe, and Karr, 2013) by exerting critical literacies through the multimodal texts that are part of their daily lives.

The critical pedagogy curriculum requires including students' interests and their roles within their cultural and social spectrum into the classroom (Sarroub and Quadros, 2015). This

entails understanding the socio-cultural background knowledge that the students have and including it in the classroom. In addition, discussing and questioning the foundations of their background knowledge. From this point of view, there is the notion of hidden curriculum or "non-subject set of behaviors produced in the students" (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2003, p. 86). These social actions are essential to understand their impact on the learning process, the use of language and the social dynamics inside, and outside the school.

This study was based on the idea that by using symbolic competence strategies learners could integrate and deconstruct the multimodal texts that they encounter regularly. Critical pedagogy in language classes includes realia, authentic material, to be interpreted as diverse textualities. There is also discussion of the use of words and the meanings behind them (Monchinski, 2008). This aligns with all the material presented as input to the students during the research, which included political debates, YouTube podcasts, memes, posters, quotations, stand-up comedy shows, and advertisements.

For learners to be able to interpret these texts and the connotations immersed in them, one of the most common strategies were thinking routines. According to Mohammed and Dajani, (2016) "these series of questions open children's minds to observe, think, inquire, and delve into deeper thinking processes" (p. 2). The studies offered the required scaffolding to engage students in high order thinking skills pivotal for critical inquiry. For instance, the first step consisted of describing what they saw in the images, the denotative meanings, which lead them to identify ideological meanings and to express their own positioning. These methods not only allowed learners to take a step-by-step process on deconstructing the texts, but also made it possible for them to negotiate meanings with their classmates by working collaboratively and to identify how everything in the text was intentional.

4.2.4   Vision of Curriculum

The language learning classroom needs to be conceived as a space that ensures optimum learning conditions in which the student is motivated to interact intensively with challenging input (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This means that the learning environment must guarantee learners the possibility to develop their cognitive potential by being a place where the information presented is deciphered, interpreted, and analyzed. Instead of input being received and reproduced as is the case of traditional pedagogical practices. The critical pedagogy classroom is demanding of the learners' thinking processes. This type of intellectual development is deeply connected to the construction of their psychological and emotional character and citizenship.

The context of the classroom also informs the way the pedagogical implementation works. It is the territory where interactions between the students and the teacher unveil diverse beliefs, opinions, references, attitudes, and ideologies that the participants have constructed through their cultural background (Fajardo, 2013). The implications of this encounter and collision of different perspectives are constant discussions, debates, and socializations inspired by, in this case, multimodal textualities used as input. This demands that the critical pedagogy classroom cannot present culture as a monolithic, which is only acknowledging the pleasant aspects of social practices (Dai, 2011). Hence controversial and taboo topics must be addressed by using authentic materials for the students to be able to take a position that is supported by previous processes of meaning negotiation and analysis.

In this sense, the activities aimed to emphasize the construction of critical literacies by using diverse multimodal textualities where mostly purposed to be carried out collaboratively. This relies on developing a classroom culture where learners need to interact constantly to

achieve a common goal, which has been proven to be successful in building critical-thinking

skills (Breunig, 2015). During this process, learners recognized and responded to their peers'

opinions and perspectives using a dialogical approach, which created unity and constant

communication in the classroom.

The role of the teacher was to model questions for classroom interaction, to guide the

learners' artifact analysis, and most importantly, to provide different views of culture to the

students (Dai, 2011) and to inspire discussions that drive self-awareness. With this perspective,

the teacher is not the provider of a uniformed and unquestioned "truth" about the socio-cultural

process. Instead, the teacher remained provided space for multiple viewpoints so as not to create

bias towards the learners' positions.

4.3   Instructional Design

4.3.1   Lesson Planning

The intervention and lesson plans were applied in three phases over three weeks. In total

there were 18 hours of implementation. These cycles were structured considering the symbolic

competence steps: representation, action, and power suggested by Kramsch (2015). As stated

before, the steps consisted of a scaffolded set of strategies to analyze texts.

During the three phrases, there were some guidelines in terms of how to identify the

denotations, connotations, intentions, and ideologies of the multimodal input. However, due to

the nature of this study, most of the orientations were developed by creating questions with the

learners rather than providing them a specific procedure on how to deal with the text. It is worth

mentioning that the lessons were divided into warm-up, pre-task, task, and wrap up stages for

them to follow the institutions' curriculum and to be in line with the task-based learning

methodology the school demands.

During the process, students were exposed to linguistic and extralinguistic input in which they explored topics related to school, occupations, gender, and race imbued within the texts. These artifacts included: textbook reading (image and text articulation), newspaper videos on "pink collar jobs", memes, YouTube podcasts, advertisement, and political debate videos. This is in accordance with Critical Pedagogy tenets and techniques of offering the students authentic materials (Crookes, 2012). The methods were designed to identify denotations, connotations, and intentionality. They also provided space for opinions on the texts through learners' writing, thinking routines, use of web platforms, class debates, and discussions.

The pedagogical intervention was intended to provide learners with opportunities to understand the symbolic dimensions of the texts beyond the literal. In addition, the pedagogical implementation aimed to enable students to measure arguments, to agree or disagree with the meaning-making process that supported the texts, to create their own texts, and to share their positions with their peers and the teacher.

4.3.2   *Implementation*

The pedagogical intervention was carried out over four weeks between October and November 2019 to February 2020. In the first week, students were asked to provide literal and hidden meanings based on the following: the word school, a reading exercise on the learners' textbook called "jobs for girls," and a *New York Times* video on pink-collar jobs. The products of each session corresponded to each of the input materials mentioned. They included a paragraph describing what school meant to them, discussions over the occupations traditionally related to women and men, a written product analyzing the intentionality of the text's author, socialization about their perspective about these topics, and their possible relation to the topic.

In the second week, learners were exposed to some memes and quotes about gender from diverse perspectives. They could decide between watching one of these videos: "Gender Stereotypes "Begin in Childhood" or "Men at Work, Women at Home". Students were asked to analyze how the school offered or did not offer the possibility of questioning traditional roles. The products expected involved classroom discussion and collaborative work to carry out thinking routines, workshops, and socialization.

In the third week, pupils presented a debate about gender equality led by Sophie Walker and Jordan Peterson and some ads available through Padlet platform. They were presented a photograph based on *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and fragments of *The Joker* movie. The learners were able to carry out discussions, make posters, and use the platform to write their analysis on the multimodal input. In addition, one of these activities was selected for the interview in which learners posed relationships between the subject and socio-cultural phenomena.

Finally, the students were asked to provide their insights about the learning process during the intervention through a focus group. Their perspectives support the claims made at the beginning of this chapter which state that symbolic competence strategies inspire critical thinking skills when they are used to interpret diverse input and allow learners to expand on their views regarding social complexities.

4.4   Conclusion

This chapter has presented instrument design and action research in educational settings to provide an answer to the research question postulated on this study. It has reflected on the researcher's role as an active participant in the process, to revise the pertinence of using several instruments to collect specific data, and to identify how this information can provide insights into

the pertinence and effectiveness of using symbolic competence strategies to have an impact on the learners' positioning.

Chapter 5: Results and Data Analysis

5.1   Introduction

This study is grounded on a qualitative action researched carried out at a private institution in Cota, Colombia. For 4 weeks, 12 eighth graders analyzed diverse multimodal input through symbolic competence strategies. The methodological path taken consisted of the Cultures of Thinking (Ritchhart, 2015) using thinking routines as resource, in addition to class socialization and discussion. The main topics touched on through the textbook fragments, videos, memes, debates, and ads were gender and discrimination. The aim of this research was to explore the ways in which students' subject position after analyzing the text and discussing its embedded socio-cultural phenomena.

This chapter describes the implemented method and the procedures to analyze data that were used to answer the research question. Also, it provides information about the techniques used for data management, data reduction, data analysis, and validation processes for triangulation purposes, according to the principles of the grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) and Symbolic Competence levels for text analysis: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015). These approaches made systematic evaluating possible. The qualitative data obtained from the pedagogical intervention were based on the analysis of the different levels of students' comprehension.

In addition, it illustrates the coding processes followed to outline the categories, the subcategories, and the core category to answer the research question. The question aimed to

explore the ways in which students subject position when using symbolic competence strategies to interpret multimodal input.

5.2   Data Management Procedures

During the process of implementation data was collected using instruments such as observation, questionnaires, interviews, students' artifacts, and focus groups. First, learners were diagnosed through the questionnaire to determine their skills regarding the symbolic dimensions of language embedded in ads. As the project started, field diaries were written based on class observations and the pupils' artifacts were gathered through class procedures. These artifacts consisted of learners' written and oral production based on their analysis of the multimodal input. Finally, focus groups and interviews took place at the end of the process to analyze the outcomes of using symbolic competence strategies in students' subject positioning.

All the data collected was transcribed verbatim, which gave account through the students' exact words. The purpose was to have deeper understanding, provide evidence of students' subject positioning, and give them a voice (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006) as this study aims to present their discourse choices. In addition, the instruments were used to assess whether students could identify, symbolic dimensions of language (representation, action, and power). This was done by using blue (not identified) and red (identified). It should be noted that in case of the focus group carried out on November 15, 2019 learners used their mother tongue to answer the questions. These answers were translated by the researcher using learners' exact words. The reason for carrying this out in their native language was for them to feel less pressured to provide ideas based on the process. The translation was done to ensure the readability of this document.

This process is shown in the Excel Matrix (See Appendix E), in which all instruments were labeled and the students' oral and written artifacts transcribed by the researcher. These

were organized without edition of grammar mistakes, hesitations, and laughter as these are likely

to provide insights on the conveyed meaning (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). In addition, the

matrix presents the instruments chronologically organized and colored, which can demonstrate

the progress and the drawbacks learners had during the process. Students were assigned codes,

for instance S1 (Student 1) to keep their confidentiality.

5.2.1   *Validation*

To study the data collected from the 12 participants, depth triangulation processes

considering a variety of sources (Burns, 2010) and at different times of the intervention were

carried out. This allowed to balance out and compare the subjective views of the participants

(Flick, Kardoff, and Steinke, 2004) and recognize how and in what ways these changed. This

was facilitated by the organization and systematization of the data in the Excel Matrix (See

Appendix E).

The key elements compared in the data sources were students' ability to recognize the

three levels of symbolic competence, representation, action and power (Kramsch, 2015), within

linguistic and extralinguistic meanings in the multimodal text. At the same time, the discourse

choices or subject positionings were compared in their analytic and argumentative construction

throughout the implementation. This allowed the researcher to identify the relationship between

the symbolic competence analysis, the students' positioning, and the selected methodology.

The questionnaire completed before the implementation supported the information found

during the needs' analysis in which the students showed opportunity for improvement regarding

analysis and interpretation of the symbolic dimensions of language and critical thinking abilities.

The diary fields provided insights into the learners' responses during their exposure to symbolic

competence stages and types of multimodal input. Their artifacts allowed the researcher to see

their application of the strategies proposed by this approach and their impact on their subject positioning. Finally, the interviews and focus groups uncovered findings regarding the learners' perspectives over their process during the implementation and to analyze the application of symbolic competence strategies in diverse types of input. This provided information on their positioning regarding representations, actions, and ideologies imbued within the texts.

For the purposes of this study, the three levels of symbolic Competence representation (identification of denotations and connotations), action (recognition of author's intentionality) and power (recognition, analysis and interpretations of ideologies, values and myths) were selected to determine patterns, consistencies, relations, connections, and contradictions in the data. All of these were identified through codes, categories, and subcategories that emerged when the instruments were organized into the matrix. They were identified during the data analysis and the triangulation processes which aimed to answer the research question.

It is worth mentioning that students were asked in the first focus group about their perspective about the usefulness of the implementation for them to identify the symbolic dimensions of language and subject positioning. In addition, two research experts helped the teacher researcher during the construction of the categories and analyzing their pertinence to the research question.

5.2.2   Data Analysis Methodology

As stated at the beginning of this research report, the information's analysis took place during the three stages posed by Grounded Theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The coding process took place in three rounds: identification of the codes, reducing them to themes, and considering their frequency. At that point it was possible to see how these created categories and to identify the core category (Creswell, 2013) for answering the research question.

During the open coding stage, symbolic competence levels were taken as a priori codes (Creswell, 2013) which made it possible to identify codes and patterns during the students' comprehension of symbolic dimensions on the texts. Hand-coding using colors was used to recognize if students were able to understand the three symbolic competence levels: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015). In each of them, the information was divided into blue (students cannot apply elements from SC level to analyze the input) and red (students are able to apply elements from SC to analyze the input). In addition, purple was used when a direct relation between SC elements and subject positioning was noticed.

The creation of open codes was reviewed three times to ensure its substantial relation to the raw data (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The purpose was to create labels based on chunks of data that presented meaningful and summarized insights of the data. During this process, some of the codes were "in vivo codes" (Creswell, 2013), which means they were directly taken from the learners' contributions. These codes had a significant impact on the symbolic level of analysis or gave pertinent information about their subject positioning. This process can be seen on the Excel Matrix (See Appendix E), where all instruments were labeled, and all the instruments can be viewed.

On the second stage, the axial coding, the codes obtained during the previous stage were read several times to find similarities and connections between them. This allowed for reorganizing, refining, and describing relations between different contexts of the data (Northcutt and McCoy, 2004). This process allowed consideration of the frequency of some words and expressions and uncovered which situations produced them, and how they could be related. As a result, categories or themes emerged based on the integration of the codes to a common pattern (Creswell, 2013).

Considering the axial coding process, categories or themes emerged from the data analysis. This conclusion led to the selective coding stage in which the core category, the answer to the researched question, emerged. This depicted a higher and more abstract level of analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) in which the relations between the categories and the core category could be found through conditions, consequences, context, and strategies discovered on the axial coding (Mertens, 2005). It is worth noting, that during all the data analysis stages, the teacher researcher was assisted by the expert researchers.

The data analysis took place based on the stages of symbolic competence, representation, action and power and how learners were able to identify them on the multimodal input . As a result, the researcher was able to identify how the students reacted to each stage of the process, symbolic representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015). The data analysis determined how this could have an impact on the learners' positioning (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) related to topics such as gender, racism and discrimination that can be targeted through the multimodal texts proposed in the lessons.

5.3   Categories

During the process of reading and analyzing raw data, patterns emerged to help narrow down the scope of the research into codes. These codes were organized into categories which lead to the discovery of the core category (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), which contains the hypothesis and answer to the research question. The categories were determined based on the relationships found on the three stages of symbolic competence. These shed light on the students' skills to identify and pose relationships between the symbolic dimensions of the multimodal texts.
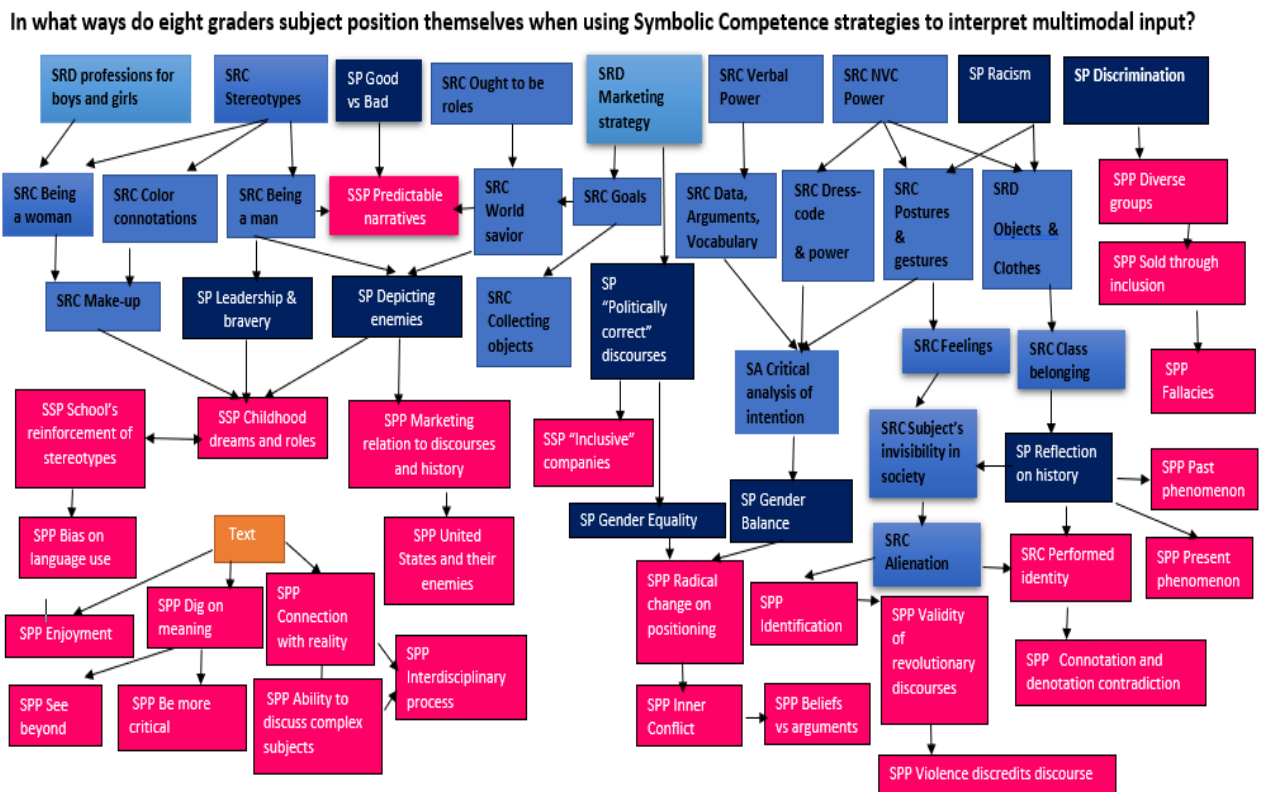
5.3.1   *Overall Category Mapping*

The first stage to classify and organize data was open coding (see Figure 1). The codes found in the figure demonstrate the interaction with the raw data through the consequential matrix strategy above referred (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) as this made possible to store information in a systematic space to recognize codes, patterns, concepts, and relations among them. These codes in blue present the information in "a priori" categories (Creswell, 2013) based on the symbolic competence levels: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015).

There are conventions for applying each level of symbolic representation Denotation (SRD), symbolic representation Connotation (SRC), symbolic action (SA) and symbolic power (SP). As the reader can see in Figure 1, symbolic representation and power were the most pertinent dimensions for learners to analyze texts. The codes that are in the upper part of the figure: professions for boys and girls, stereotypes, ought to be roles, non-verbal gestures, postures, racism, discrimination, and politically correct discourse were developed in their relation to corresponding codes.

The pink codes represent learners' interaction with the multimodal input and detail their positioning. One key element of the data is that learners'provided their perspective about stereotypes, historical and social issues, contradictions between the symbolic levels, and how they changed their positioning. It also shows that analysis of these levels modified learners' position to the text and their reading processes inside the language learning classroom.

Figure 1

Open Coding

In what ways do eight graders subject position themselves when using Symbolic Competence strategies to interpret multimodal input?

Axial coding was used to determine relationships among the diverse codes and patterns. This allowed the researcher to analyze categories and subcategories (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher found that three main categories for students' subject positioning through symbolic competence analysis. The three main categories included: 1) rejecting master-narratives, 2) reconsidering or keeping positioning based on symbolic analysis, 3) presenting diverse views on the subject-society relationship (See Figure 2). These categories were determined by looking at the relationships among the codes using both inductive and deductive reasoning (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).
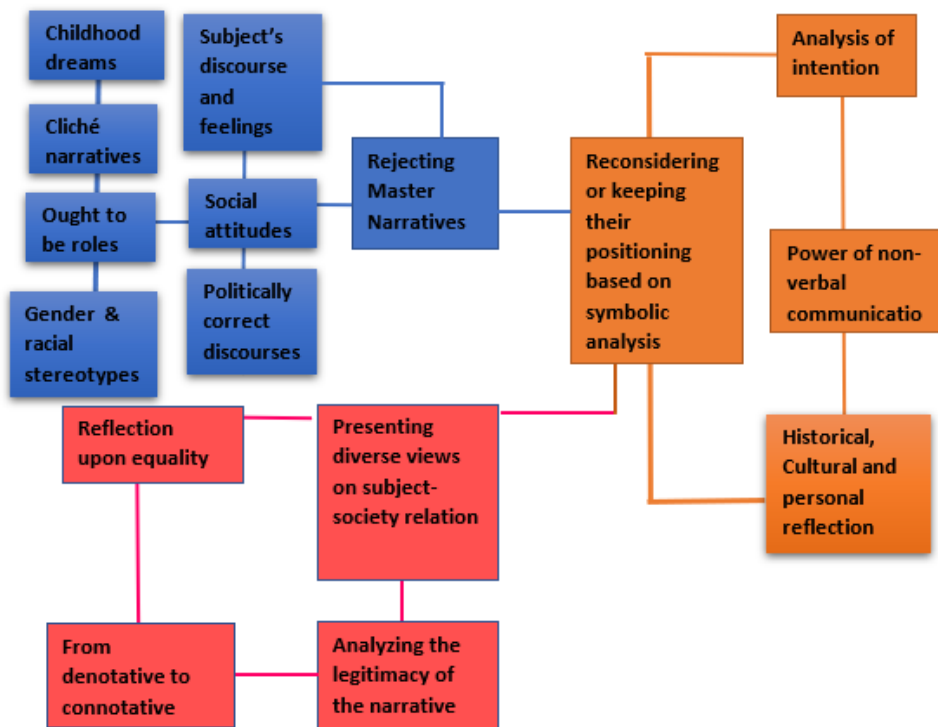
Figure 2

Axial Coding

Figure 2 presents the array of learners' positioning that was noted throughout the process of the implementation. At the beginning, learners rejected the master narratives embedded on the texts through the symbolic analysis of gender stereotypes, ought-to-be roles, and cliché narratives imbued within the textbooks, movies, and ads they were presented. The subjects' discourse and feelings opposed social attitudes, while, politically correct discourses were seen as part of a marketing strategy aimed to portrayed companies as inclusive. By reconsidering their positioning, learners' analysis went deeper into non-verbal and linguistic factors. This included their personal experience and in this category, students presented a more complex view of racial and gender phenomena.

Learners constructed a third place (Bhabha, 1994) that does not align with defined discourse choices, but acknowledges the complexities of reality construction. By reflecting on

the hidden meaning of words, the presence of racism and gender biases, the ways of opposing to

established values, and the performance of identities, the diverse identities emerged from their

awareness of subjectivity (Norton and Toohey, 2011; Özbakis, 2015; Goharimehr, 2019; García-

pastor, 2017). The details and descriptions of these categories follow in the next section.

5.3.2   Discussion of Categories

The three main categories that emerged during the open and axial coding phase include:

1) rejecting master-narratives, 2) reconsidering positioning based on symbolic analysis, and 3)

presenting diverse views on the subject-society relation.

The excerpts selected to support and explain the three categories were taken from the data

collection instruments. The tools used include a questionnaire to develop a needs' analysis, two

focus groups near the end of the intervention, an interview at the end of the project, field diaries

written by the researcher and students' artifact gathered along the process. The impact of

allowing students to use symbolic competence strategies to analyze multimodal texts were

demonstrated through field diaries, artifacts, the second focus group, and the interview. The first

focus group gave the opportunity to learners to reflect upon the learning process through

symbolic competence text analysis by asking them if their reading of multimodal material had

changed and how this had an impact on their own perspectives about gender, racism and

discrimination.

5.3.2.1. *Rejecting Master Narratives*

During the process of implementation, learners' analysis of multimodal input through

symbolic competence included ads, videos, photographs, textbook fragments, and memes. These

allowed leaners to identify the discourses embedded in the text and to present their perspectives on them.

When exposed to an image of a Coca-Cola ad that featured an image of the Avengers during the focus group, learners pinpointed that children are the main target audience of the ad. They concluded that these were roles they might want to embody, ought-to-be roles:

Usually kids are very fanatic of these types of movies as they see a reflection of what they want to be, so they need the (Coke) can (Students 2, 8, 6 in the focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

However, they stated that these roles are not reinforced by their perspectives on children:

It is something you should not teach to kids, when you are kid is typical (customary) you want to be a soldier (Students 3 and 7 in the Focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

This relates to how discourse choices and normative behavior is promoted from childhood (Martin and Ruble, 2010), and how these apparently logical relations are part of the mechanisms used by master narratives that are presented as objective truth.

They identified the values associated with these roles aligned with notions of bravery, justice, and power:

They are symbols of bravery and justice (Students 3 and 7, Focus group 2, November 25, 2019)

They also discussed how these perceptions were part of the text's extralinguistic resources:

The powers of doing what we want… the dark colors used represent power (Students 2, 10, 12, focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

The learners' statements were in line with the research that shows how buying a product means buying a discursive repertoire (Fairclough, 2003; Coyne et al., 2014). This can be understood in terms of how symbolic power can be found in multimodal texts.

Moreover, learners demonstrated that these values are associated with the endorsement of ought-to-be roles and part of cliché narratives:

It is like to be the savior of the world, like having the Avengers features, to be leaders, strong and good people (laughter) (Students 2, 8, 6, Focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

Learners' laugher may be a sign of their mockery of these values as these portray conventional representations aimed to be perpetuated and reproduced (Ross and Lester, 2011) and might affect children (Martin and Ruble, 2010) and their future life choices:

They are promoting the role of helping people by being a soldier, to do that they (children-consumers) ought to be as soldiers" (Students 2 and 4, Focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

In fact, being part of a master narrative, these choices are mediated by specific storylines and life expectancies characterized as being predictable or cliché:

It is the typical silly story of superhero movies, there are the good, the bad, first, the bad are winning but then, the good win (Students 3 and7, Focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

The implication could be that the "positive" values promoted in the ad were connected to ought-to-be roles that have historical, political, and ideological foundations. Therefore, learners' contributions coincide with recognizing how there is a symbolic repertoire that is socially, culturally, and historically reproduced from the time of childhood (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990;

Foucault, 2002) that finds a space within the text (Kearney, 2010; Kramsch, 2011). Also, by

being part of a storyline, a master narrative supported by influencing the subjects' choices and

life projections of what one should be and do.

Additionally, learners stated that life choices, including future careers which are

preconfigured by social conventions since childhood, reject alternative ways of being:

> All people are destined to be in jobs that other people selected to you (for you) because of
>
> gender and not in the job you like... In your daily life how society makes us think jobs
>
> must be directed in gender, since we are kids, someone that make(s) the difference can
>
> be mis threaten…Schools are gender divided, girls and boys pick jobs their gender should
>
> pick (them) because of the stereotypes they learn as children (Students 8 and 10, log
>
> entry, November 1, 2019).

This relates to how identities are constrained by master narratives (McLean and Syed,

2015), which categorize and separate children through gender stereotypes (Plous, 2003). It is

clear that institutions play a significant role in reinforcing these stereotypes (Foucault, 1970;

Youdell, 2005; Blaine, 2007). Equally important, it is difficult to understand counter narratives

for this position during childhood because children are still developing cognitive skills and

cultural practices reinforce what they encounter in learning institutions.

The impact of dominant discourses over identity can be seen by learners from a racial

perspective in which the sociocultural context becomes essential to understand how identity is

constructed:

> I believe he think is an invisible man because he is black and because he is black, he don't
>
> (doesn't) have rights or voice to talk to the society, anyone cares. (Student 2, Interview,
>
> February 21, 2020).

Thus, they feel that society rejects them and causes them to feel alienated because of the specific

emphasis on what the world should be (Stibbe, 2015) such as binary relations, female-men,

black-white (Csigó, 2016). This blocks the possibility of alternative views.

Indeed, by being exposed to visual input and analyzing their symbolic dimensions,

students pointed out how the subject's feelings of exclusion were part of a broader social

phenomenon:

Racism is why this guy feels lonely and rejected but also because his living conditions are

not the best (Student 3, Interview, February 21, 2020).

This suggests that the text is not merely a representation of categorization, separation, and

promotion of established values, but also reveals the preferences and privileges one community

has over other (Vanderhole, 2005). This way of thinking has a direct effect on the feelings of the

subjects in the less favored community and the exclusion that they suffer.

Nevertheless, students stated that they have difficulty overcoming socially ascribed

stereotypes. Even though they know that there are stereotypical foundations, they have

consequences on the subjects' identities:

Would you be a stylist? No, I would not but it is because I don't like it-Why don't you

like it? -Well, I don´t know. It is because of the social pressure, you know. I know it (is) a

stereotype, ok? (laughs) (Student 9, Field diaries, November 4, 2019).

This demonstrates that awareness of stereotypes does not imply alternative social and cultural

practices (Plous, 2003) and challenges building alternative identity representations (McLean and

Syed, 2015) in spaces where dominant discourses are embraced.

Nonetheless, through the discussion about pink collar jobs motivated by a video, most of

the student's voices showed that social attitudes have progressively taken a different path:

> ...like guys are more comfortable doing those jobs and they are being successful, so it is like society is changing (Student 9, Field diaries, November 4).

When analyzing the images within a textbook reading, the same idea became clear:

> The image tries to question stereotypes we see a girl that looks pretty comfortable working in a traditional man job like a lorry driver. She looks confident and makes eye-contact with the camera (Students 6 and 1, Artifact, November 6).

> Similarly, by approaching the symbolic action (text intentionality) connected to the texts' representations, learners concluded:

> She is wearing some nail polish they are trying to question stereotypes (Students 2 and 4, Artifact, November 6).

> This might be related to the construction of alternative identities that may respond to the dominant discourses (McLean and Syed, 2015), however, the qualities attributed to men and women are still in line with binary discourses.

> As a matter of fact, as the implementation continued learners related the use of narratives that may seem inclusive, politically correct discourses, as part of a marketing strategy.

> The communicative intention is that Coca-Cola is an inclusive brand that doesn't discriminate people doesn't matter what, so everybody can buy their product, but this is an (a) strategy (Students 10,11,12, Artifact, November 13).

The students mentioned that this inclusion could be part of the dominant and discriminatory discourse that it proclaims to reject even if a subtle form of them (van Dijk, 1989; Csigó, 2016):

> They use black people to make a good perspective about Coca-Cola (to make Coca-Cola look good) is a little bit racist" (Students 1, 2, 4, Artifact, November 13).

Besides, learners claimed that companies used inclusive and alternative discourses as these were being part of the social attitudes:

> Coca-Cola puts (promotes) what is fashion (able) and they patrocinan (promote) that. We are in an epoch of gender ideology, so the movie highlights the role of the heroine and…the company presents that (Student 3 and 7, Focus group, November 25, 2019).

The comments clarified that these discourses were politically correct, and that even though, these have a non-discriminatory perspective, they cannot be taken as a response to a dominant discourse. This is supported by the contributions made by Eagleton, (2000) and Fairclough (2003), in which the politically correct discourses consist of a truism and a fetish aimed to create niche markets rather than to become alternatives to dominant discourses.

By examining the symbolic dimensions of the multimodal texts, learners were able to identify how master narratives (McLean and Syed, 2015) about gender and racial stereotypes are present in the multimodal texts through linguistic and extra-linguistic resources (Wodak, 2008; Kearney, 2012; LaFrance and Vial, 2016; García-pastor, 2017). Some of their causes and consequences can be seen in Figure 2. Students pointed out that childhood dreams, the ought-to-be roles, were predictable narratives, and social attitudes were factors that reinforce and promote dominant discourses. On the other hand, the presence of counter narratives through inclusive representations are recognized as a part of a broader social change in which the promotion of equality and diversity is seen on the texts (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013). However, when these are part of ads, they are taken as politically correct discourses and seen for the students as instruments used for marketing purposes rather than inclusive ones (Eagleton, 2000; Fairclough, 2003). The rejection of master narratives shows part of the students positioning; however,, there

were some moments during the intervention that the master narratives was reconsidered through symbolic analysis. This will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.2.2. *Reconsidering or Keeping Positioning Based on Symbolic Analysis*

As demonstrated so far, learners were able to show their disagreement with master narratives depicted through gender and racial stereotypes during the implementation of multimodal text:

> The students agreed with the idea that everyone can do what they want, similarly to the authors' idea. They claim that believing on this can't or can be done by certain groups is based on stereotypes learnt through culture and the schools (Notes of dairy field, October 7, 2019).

Nevertheless, when students were exposed to specific input, Jordan Peterson and Sophie Walker's debate and the *Men at Work, Women at Home* video were significant to a number of learners and they reconsidered the ideas what they had defended previously. Others used this analysis to continue supporting previous ideas.

This process started by requesting that learners identify intentionality (symbolic action) and symbolic power in the videos. When exposed to the debate in which Peterson questioned gender equality claims made by Sophie Walker, learners that defended gender equality changed their perspectives based on the importance of data and arguments:

> Even though I like Sophie's ideas I have to support Jordan because he has arguments and data (Student 14, Artifact, November 6, 2019).

> He supports his opinion by using investigations and literal, scientific proves. He has studied a lot of this (Student 11, Artifact, November 6, 2019).

I agree with Jordan Peterson discusses whether men and women can ever be equal with arguments…(he says) 90% of the people in jail are men (Student 1, Artifact, November 6, 2019).

Consequently, it can be seen that by analyzing how the speakers use words, what these reveal about their ideas (Kramsch, 2015), and by giving learners the opportunity to analyze intentionality and the multimodal mechanisms, learners were able to understand the text and to position themselves towards the information conveyed (Dennis et al., 2016; Serafini, 2020). That learners highlighted the use of data and arguments as important for deciding which ideas to support, reveals how the use of logic, numbers, and conventions in the construction of discourse are a way of exerting symbolic power in specific speech communities (Foucault, 1970). In this case, learners have been taught the importance of reasonable data and statistics to validate the information they have been exposed to or the ideas they want to convey.

Even though it may seem that students' positioning was defined only by analyzing intentionality through arguments and data, nonverbal communication also had the power to influence their discursive choices.

She always looks to everyone's face and if they attacked her, she looks down with not much confidence… His nonverbal communication makes him look confident (Student 1, Artifacts, November 6, 2019).

He shows a compressive understanding (with) the face makes, he listens opinions (Student 4, Artifacts, November 6, 2019).

This awareness of discursive choices leads learners to interpret what meaning is constructed in a multimodal scenario (Mickan, 2017) and that the extralinguistic resources through which meaning is conveyed are part of the validation, promotion, and legitimization of specific

ideologies and values (Schoenmann, 2018). According to students' preferences, they chose which values are more important to them and how these are reflected in the speakers' non-verbal behavior.

Even in the case of students who kept their positioning defending gender equality, nonverbal behavior was pivotal to support their ideas:

> She moves her hands while talking, that is like a way to express what she's saying, she is more communicative (Student 3, Artifacts, November 6, 2019)

> She looks at the others and use her hands. (Emphasis on) Freedom and equality… and is a communicative person because she express (es) herself with her hand She expresses everything more clear (clearer). I prefer her ideas (Student 6, Artifacts, November 6, 2019).

Consequently, learners' symbolic analysis when exposed to multimodal input allowed them to acknowledge the diverse resources and investment in constructing and negotiate meaning (Iedema, 2003). Moreover, learners' contributions show that non-verbal communication is exposed through diverse mechanisms aimed to achieve the speakers' intention (Mackay, 2013) and must be considered as an essential part of language use.

After exposing learners to the texts above referred, learners' positionings, became more diverse by analyzing intentionality and acknowledging the power of non-verbal behavior. This diversity of interpretation can be seen in the historical, cultural, and personal reflections inspired by the use of videos such as *Men at Work, Women at Home*, *British Racism is Too Subtle*, visuals such as ads and images, and *The Invisible Man* photograph by Jeff Wall.

When exposed to an ad and asked about the symbolic power embedded, learners pointed out:

…Steve Rogers is an ex-soldier that fought against the Nazis on the second world war

and Toni Stark had to fight against terrorists…to help people you need to be a hero, like a

soldier but…this is not true (Students 2, 8, and 6, Focus group 2, November 25, 2019).

When exposed to Jeff Wall's photograph, other students stated how the socio-cultural

environment played a significant role on the character's representation:

I believe he think is an invisible man because he is black and because he is black, he don't

(doesn't) have rights or voice to talk to the society anyone cares" (Student 2, Interview,

February 21, 2020).

They remarked on it as representation situated in a specific historical period and class in which

black people felt invisible:

It is a scenery in the 1960's which I can think in that time there was a lot of racism, he is

someone from the low class, he is none one in the world that is shown to us (Student 10,

Interview, February 21, 2020)

Because in the Unites States discriminate black people and many like that people is poor

because of the discrimination (Student 1, Interview, February 21, 2020).

This shows that symbolic analysis of multimodal textualities triggers students' background

cultural and historical knowledge and leads them to connect it to broader ideological meanings

and social phenomena (Vinall, 2012; Kearney, 2012). Considering learners statements, they

associated the promotion of military values to historical occurrences and racial discrimination to

poverty conditions in the United States context.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that students' personal reflections towards women

being at home and men working were used to support or reject gender stereotypes.

The situation that the guy described also happened in my life and the balance the guy is describing happen in my life and it is actually so good (Student 1, Artifact, October 30, 2019).

However, other students commented on gender roles:

The women in our families are leaders or bosses in business (Students 7 and 9, artifact, November 2, 2019).

They stated the impossibility go back to women's traditional roles

they can't make women, our moms to do something they don't want, for us it is socially impossible (Students 12, 10 and 8, Artifact, November 2, 2019).

When asking learners about their positioning, personal experiences started to emerge as an argument as to whether they supported ideas in *Men at Work, Women at Home*. This is in line with the fact that symbolic analysis involves addressing learners' life experiences and autobiographical reasonings (Habermas and Bluck, 2000; Kearney, 2010; Gassenbauer, 2012), which could be seen as personal narratives (McLean and Syed, 2015). These personal contexts lead learners to take a position, which they use to explain their experiences of their native culture to their L2 use (Kramsch, 1996).

In conclusion, when the most important aspects when reconsidering or keeping their positioning included learners' analysis of intention, the power of non-verbal behavior, and historical, cultural and personal reflections (See Figure 2). This relates to conclusions by McLean and Syed (2015) about how the construction of discourse choices is filtered by personal narratives that may contrast with conventional or alternative storylines. In addition, it has been demonstrated that multimodal texts allow students to peel back layers of meaning beyond literal information and comprehension to consider symbolic aspects into their positioning (Pegrum,

2008; Kearney, 2010; LaFrance and Vial, 2016; García-Pastor, 2017). In fact, the reflection on the texts triggered by symbolic analysis may be considered to arise in diverse ways as learners understand the relation between the subject and society. This is will be detailed in the next section.

5.3.2.3 *Presenting Diverse Views on Subject-Society Relationships*

When approaching the symbolic dimensions of gender and racial phenomena through diverse multimodal input, learners were able to reconsider or keep their positioning based on their analysis of cultural, historical, and personal reflections. The most relevant outcomes were demonstrated in reflections on equality, analysis of the discourse legitimacy, and acknowledgement of performed identities (See Figure 2). All of these have in common a learners' references to the complexities of the relationship between the subject and society. Moreover, they understood that this shapes identity and their subjectivities when constructing their reality. It should be noted that symbolic analysis, extralinguistic, linguistic elements, intentions, and ideological meanings embedded in the text will continue to support learners' claims.

At the beginning of the implementation most learners stated that we are all equal, no matter what; however, through the discussions and thinking routines, learners began to reflect upon the implications of being equal:

If you really think about it gender differences are necessary to keep a balance in society…Indeed, not all of us are equal we have our differences (Students 2 and 4, Focus group, November 15, 2019).

This reflection portrays the re-positioning students underwent during the implementation:

These are complex issues and there are reasons from each side, we are equal but

different, and these perspectives influence us in our society…these are controversial

topics, one might think we are all just equal and that's it but there many arguments that

support the opposite idea and we need to consider them…I used to think we were equal,

but no matter the principle of equality and opportunity women chose what they would

normally choose (Students 5, 6, 7, Focus group, November 15, 2019).

Thus, learners realized the complexity of these issues and how diverse perspectives must

be addressed in order to take a position that cannot longer be a repeated through abstraction

stated like "we are all equal," but needs to be altered (Derrida, 1988). Moreover, they must

advance beyond justifications towards examining social phenomena from diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, students' opinions reveal how addressing multimodal texts from a critical

perspective can help learners discover how racial and gender complexities are part of their

subjective constructions (Ibrahim, 1999; Stein, 2001; Kendrick and Jones, 2008). This discovery

is mediated by the juxtaposition of diverse texts (Vinall, 2012) that hold multiple positions on the

same issues for learners to develop their own voices through critical exposure of the texts

(Sánchez et al., 2013; Clark and Stratilaki, 2013; Richardson, 2017; Kelso, 2018; Vovou, 2019)

A pivotal element that allowed learners to carry out these reflections through critical

analysis was going from the denotative to the connotative aspects (symbolic representation) of

the text. They mentioned how this process allows them to comprehend and enjoy the text:

One goes beyond the denotative part and can understand more, enjoy more the text

(Student 2, Focus group 1, November 15, 2019).

This consideration coincides with statements made by Richardson's (2017) about using Symbolic competence to develop into the "good feeling" of understanding the text. Moreover, it highlights the relationship to the process of intentionality (symbolic action):

One can understand what is behind the image, what it really means and that this is not only literally to entertain you or make you laugh, there is something more (Student 9, focus group 1, November 15, 2019).

The statements demonstrate how symbolic action can be useful for developing critical positioning:

I had these words on my vocabulary (denotative -connotative) but I have never seen them in a practical way…Now it is impossible for me not to see what is behind (literal meaning) (Student 3, Focus group 1, November 15, 2019).

When you learn to differentiate between something connotative and denotative it becomes more about critical analysis and how you can see beyond (Student 6, Focus group 1, November 15, 2019).

These contributions relate to conclusions by Godhe and Magnusson (2017) about how critical approaches to multimodal texts allow learners to engage in the meaning-making process. In addition, those noted by Behrman, (2006) that by "peeling the layers of meaning from the text" (p. 431) learners encounter language beyond ritualist and predictable exchanges (Kramsch, 2006). As a result, they do not reflect on diverse ways of understanding complex issues such as race or gender. Instead they change their interaction with the texts going from comprehension to analysis to enjoyment.

Moreover, learners were able to discuss the legitimacy of the discourses they were exposed to through the multimodal input. For instance, when commenting on standup comedy on

racism they mentioned how discrimination is a phenomenon not only associated with black

people, but also that addressing this phenomenon could fall into stereotypical thinking:

> His communicative intention that he shows is that we have the stereotype that the black
>
> are "slaves" and white "kings" but also the whites can be in the position of blacks and
>
> feel the inequality they have (Student 7, Artifact, November 14, 2019).

Similarly, they mention how racism is an issue that needs to be taken seriously or it will be

accepted and perpetuated:

> I disagree with him because the racism and discrimination are an important topic and if
>
> he does this jokes the public don't care about the topic it promotes more bullying in
>
> society Student 12, Artifact, November 14, 2019).

In addition, students stated that racist actions could be carried out by the same community that

suffers discrimination and mentioned that laughing at racist jokes was part of the dynamic:

> Even the black people discriminate themselves, is what society have make them feel,
>
> even myself I have made jokes or make fun of this kind of people, so I believe we need to
>
> stop making fun of this" (Student 6, Artifact, November 14, 2019).

However, in this case the terminology used "this kind of people" reflects stereotypical thinking,

as stated by Plous, (2003) that being aware of stereotypes does not lead to their complete

rejection.

As it might be inferred, multimodal texts are part of the discursive struggle between

diverse narratives that aim to expand their ideas to the public (Archer, 2013). Nevertheless, if

students are involved in critically approaching texts in a scaffolded process, they may go from

identifying to understanding to analyzing cultural representations (Kaiser, 2018). Doing so

would allow them to position themselves critically towards articulated discourse repertoires

aimed to be believable (Kearney, 2012). In this case, learners found that it was not legitimate to address racism through humor. They found that the comedy video they involved falling into the stereotypes that they wanted to be question. Moreover, it perpetuated acceptance towards racist jokes based on stereotypical representations.

When learners were exposed to a fragment of *The Joker* (2019), they sympathized with the main character, but they did not legitimize the actions he undertook to be heard. One student explained:

> He has an understandable and a revolutionary point of view, I think, and a violent way to develop it. It doesn't fit very well if you match this (these) two ideas because it can become a massive murdering, inspiring other people to commit those acts (Student 9, Field diary, February 4, 2020).

This statement reveals that learners measure the implications of the character's discourse and how the consequences could contradict the text's original intentions.

In addition, how this contradiction is part of the social dynamic and in some ways demystifies the character's intentions because he becomes part of the society he aimed to critique. As one student noted:

> The problem is that he is violent and falls in the same game of society. (Student 1, Field diary, February 4, 2020).

Nevertheless, some learners stated that society provoked these violent and disruptive behaviors:

> I think that the actions he do (does) are a product of the society he live(s) (Student 5, Field diary, February 4, 2020).

He acts like a disturbed man because of what society has treat him badly. I think that I

cannot kill someone because is "awful" but at the same time, society acts like a virus.

(Student 11, Field diary, February 4, 2020).

Learners acknowledge nonverbal representation as part of the character's expression and

discourse. As one student wrote:

He looks deteriorated. He looks rotten, damaged, abused. I think that the make-up is a

way to represent society like presenting everything is fine but there are scars (Student 10,

Field diary, February 4, 2020).

Therefore, learners managed to consider two different perspectives on the character's discourse,

one validating that he was affected by the society he lives in, and the other that his response used

the same mechanisms he is trying to question.

This data reveals that social practices depicted through diverse modes of signification are

subject to legitimization and critique (Leeuwen, 2018) and are part of a broader discourse

repertoire aiming to exert power over the receptor. Moreover, the receptor must be aware of

these mechanisms and be able to recognize that there are nuances in discourses that can be

oppositional at first glance (Tore et al., 2001). As pointed out by learners, the mechanisms

between the main character and society, which seem antagonistic, look for expanding their

ideological influence.

To conclude, the last part of the intervention concerned learners' positioning towards the

subject-society relationship. This relationship is nuanced and allows diverse views based on a

reflection upon equality. Thus, they went from denotative and connotative aspects and to

analyzing discourse legitimacy (See Figure 2). Learners were able to show a critical agency

towards the texts (López-Sánchez, 2009 Clark and Stratilaki, 2013 Richardson, 2017 Kelso, 2018

Vovou, 2019) as they are not only identifying how stereotypes, social attitudes, and roles are part of a master narrative, they were inquiring about how opposing discourses could be articulated in the mechanisms they use and how legitimate these are or could be. In addition, they found themselves in tension with conclusions on equality. Many of them decided to reconsider the "we are all equal no matter what" motto. Indeed, diverse discourse choices have emerged as a new space that cannot be categorized in terms of master or counter narratives.

5.3.3   Core Category

Considering the data three categories emerged: rejecting master-narratives, reconsidering or keeping positioning through symbolic analysis, and presenting diverse views on subject-society relationships. The selective coding stage established relationships between them, the dataset, and the research participants process, which concluded the purpose of the core category. This can be seen in purple in Figure 3.

The core category: "learners position themselves through the rejection of master narratives, performative positioning, and dynamic positioning." This core category allowed the researcher to identify the specific subject positioning students take when using symbolic competence strategies to interpret multimodal texts. The first, refers on learners' rejection of dominant discourses that are triggered by cliché narratives, ought-to-be roles, stereotypes, and childhood dreams. This illustrates how they consider consequences to social attitudes and subjects' feelings. In addition, when exposed to inclusive discourses, politically correct discourses, that could be considered as counternarratives learners recognized them as part of marketing strategies rather than real alternatives to dominant discourses (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

Selective Coding
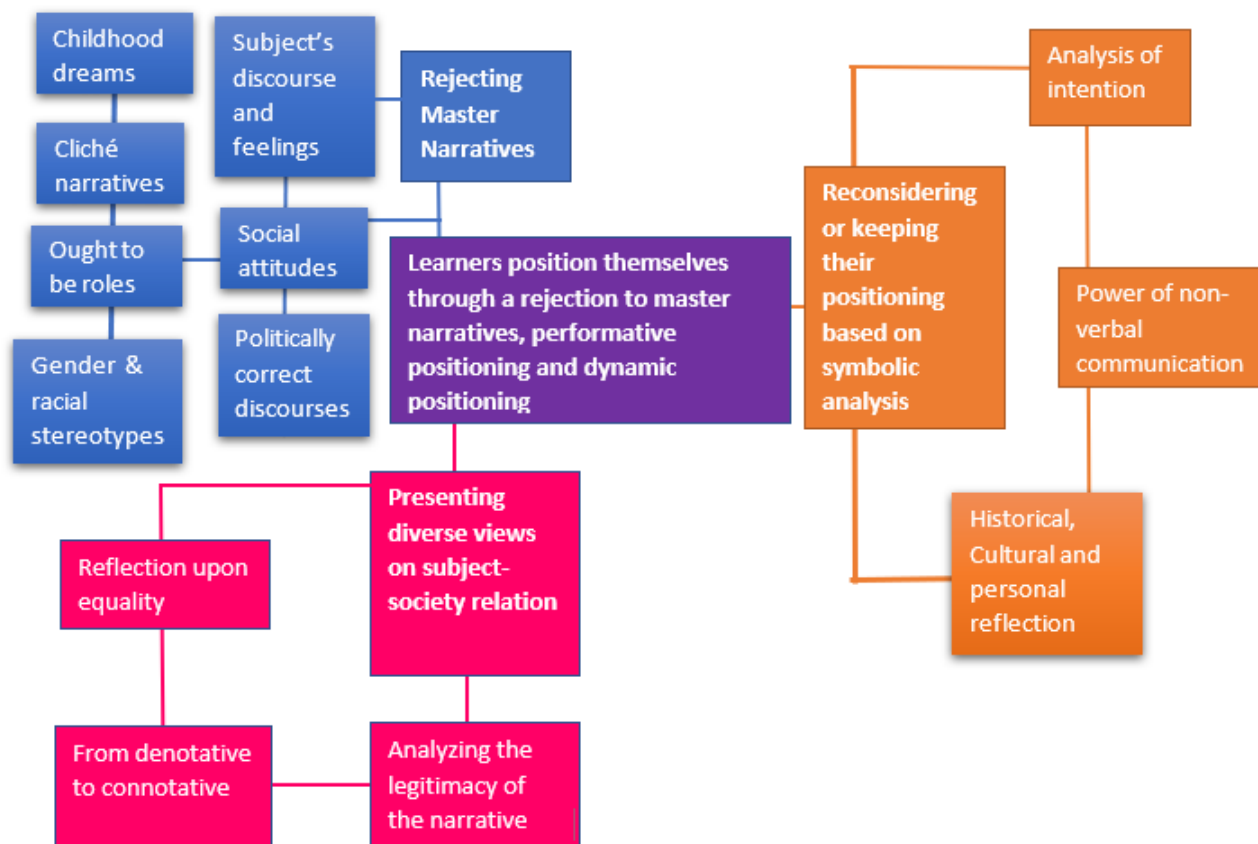
Performative positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990), refers to challenging or revising

previous positioning acts as some of the learners did when carrying out the symbolic analysis of

intentions, acknowledge the power of nonverbal communication, and reflected upon cultural,

historical and personal phenomena (See Figure 3). As stated in Chapter 1, the term performative

refers to the relationship between citationability (repetition) and alteration in discourse (Derrida,

1988). In this case, learners' choices altered from their previous positioning. For instance, the

repetition of the idea of how equality needed to be right for everyone, they stated that there were

arguments on the opposite side and that these were pivotal to revisit to change previous beliefs.

Dynamic positioning refers to how learners questioned the validity from their own perspectives

the mechanisms used by the discourses they were exposed to. They did so by questioning the

implications of equality and identifying connotative meanings. This related to the idea of identity

in which the subjects construct their relationships to reality through dynamic, contradictory, and

in-process processes (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Dynamic positioning also relates to the

construction of a third place (Bhabha, 1994) in which contradictory, dynamic, and opposing

world views contribute to learners subjectivity. As seen in the description of the categories,

learners related their personal experiences and their previous historical and cultural knowlegde of

subjects such as gender or race in different ways. For instance, being part of a school reinforces

awareness of gender bias or being in a family where the conclusions presented of *Men at Work,*

Women at Home are reiterated. Also, by stating how the communities that suffered racial

discrimination were also exerting it.

5.4 Conclusion

The findings of this study validate that Symbolic competence and intercultural practice

exposed learners to diverse textualities, which provided them the opportunity to express their

personal narratives, perspectives, and opinions towards social phenomena (Gassenbauer, 2012).

In addition, the implementation allowed learners to connect their mother tongue experiences to

their L2 practice (Kramsch, 1996). As a result, students were able to reject master narratives,

change their positioning, and show dynamic discourse choices (Davies and Harré, 1990). In other

words, they were able to present diverse positionings according to their interaction with the

multimodal input through symbolic analysis and their personal, cultural, and historical

reflections. This was possible because they used thinking routines, class discussions, and debates as methodology.

Moreover, the findings of this study were concluded based on analyzing data from a qualitative approach, triangulating information, and transcribing verbatim learners' contributions. This was fundamental to understanding learners' positioning and how their own narratives were constructed through symbolic analysis of texts. These narratives revealed that learners rejected certain discourses, transformations, and dynamics that what would have been difficult to comprehend without listening, recording, and comparing learners' voices during the process.

Finally, this study confirms that identity is the broader scope of subject positioning and cannot be static. The changing character of identity was also reflected in the learners' perspectives towards master and counternarratives, which were motivated by the repeated reflection on the texts' symbolic dimensions and the socio-cultural phenomena involved.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

6.1   Introduction

This research study explored ways in which students' subject positioning (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) changed when using symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2015) to interpret multimodal input. Data analysis that was collected during the action research implementation showed that students' positionings developed by rejecting master narratives, reconsidering or keeping positioning, and presenting diverse views on the subject-society relationship. In other words, the ways in which students attain subject position consists of rejection of master narratives, performative positioning and dynamic positioning. This involves acknowledging discursive contradictions present on the texts, the possibility to change opinions, or to discover ways to keep previous positioning by examining historical, cultural, and personal narratives towards controversial issues.

The relevance of this study to language learning research is it contribution of data on specific ways in which language learners' subject position in the language classroom. The methodological practices were centered on the use of symbolic competence related to multimodal texts' interpretation. However, this research has some limitations regarding the difficulties learners faced when exploring the symbolic dimensions of language, the articulation of the three levels, and the repetition of opinions on a topic. Similarly, based on these findings, further research could consider the creation of multimodal texts by the learners by expanding the themes covered, approaching different methodologies from cultures of thinking (Ritchhart, 2015) in which thinking routines are the main strategy, and including multimodal texts selected by learners. These considerations may contribute to further research into the impact on multimodal input analysis on students' positioning.

6.2   Comparison of Results with Previous Studies' Results

During the project implementation and data analysis stage, conclusions were drawn about how multimodal texts provide the opportunity to approach complex social, political, and cultural phenomena. Due to the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic nature of these texts; connotations, and ideological positions shown through extralinguistic features could be identified by the learners. Moreover, authentic multimodal texts, political debates, memes, YouTube' videos, movie scenes, and photographs, lead learners to provide their perspectives and opinions about relevant issues within the current context. These include gender or racism analyzed in texts through repeated negotiating of meaning.

These findings are line with the theoretical proposals determined by using multimodal textualities in the classroom to increase discourse analysis (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013) and to examine learners' cultural, historical, and political postures (van Lier, 2004; Kendrick and Jones, 2008; Ibrahim, 1999; Stein, 2001). In addition, this research demonstrates the validity of multimodal texts to discover symbolic power relations through the articulation of verbal and non-verbal elements and data driven information (Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014; Mestre-Mestre, 2015; Godhe and Magnusson, 2017; Kaiser, 2018) within the language learning classroom. All of these coincide with the utility these texts have as they are part of the learners' daily lives and students have developed abilities to read them. Nevertheless, educational contexts need to guide learners to approach texts critically by through further analysis and interpretation.

On the other hand, this research study reveals how Symbolic competence, taken as a set of strategies for text analysis, ensures learners' interpretation of the symbolic dimensions of language: representation, action, and power (Kramsch, 2015). By "digging text's meaning"

(Student 1, 2019), learners changed their perspectives towards the texts that commonly circulate on their environment. They examined literary pieces, by looking at them as part of larger discursive practices related to complex topics. In fact, students stated that this had an impact on their interaction with the text as they were able to see beyond literal information and to enjoy the text by comprehending it more.

These discoveries are in line with previous research studies in which the role of Symbolic competence on the development of critical literacy is demonstrated through pedagogical intervention (López-Sánchez, 2009; Kearney, 2012). In addition to this, it supports the use of Symbolic competence as an approach to address and reflect upon historical phenomena (Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008; Vinall, 2012). Symbolic competence' importance regarding understanding how meaning-making processes take place in movie scenes and literary texts (Kaiser and Shibahara, 2014; Vinall, 2016; Kaiser, 2018). Therefore, this process may lead learners to arrive at "the good feeling of understanding" (Richardson, 2017, p. 23) or as disclosed by this study, to enjoy the texts as mechanisms the constructing meaning. The implementation helped them reconsider their relationship to the text's main topic.

The findings of this study emphasize that using the three dimensions of symbolic competence as a scaffolded group of strategies through multimodal text' analysis can facilitate multilayered understanding of the texts' meaning. As seen through data analysis, students were able to discover texts' denotative, connotative meanings, intentionality, and ideology based on a step by step process. The implementation engaged them with critiquing representations and ideologies immersed on the text.

Regarding subject positioning, this study's findings demonstrate that discourse choices such as the rejection of master narratives, performative, and dynamic positioning were a

consequence of the learners' social, historical, and cultural reflection on their established beliefs and analysis of intentions and arguments in texts. Through thinking routines, classroom socialization, and debates, learners negotiated previous positioning regarding gender equality and racism and posed diverse views on the relationships between the subject and society. Acknowledging that learners' discourse choices (Davies and Harré, 1990) and their identities are dynamic, contradictory, and in progress (Norton and Toohey, 2011) demonstrates how they construct themselves in relation to their reality.

Findings also revealed a relationship between learners interaction with the multimodal text and their impact on subject positioning through the development of critical literacies, which is similar to findings in previous studies (Behrman, 2006; García-Pastor, 2017; Dennis et al., 2016; Serafini, 2020). Nevertheless, the contributions of the present study focus on the exposure of specific ways in which students find subject positioning during the process of analyzing symbolic dimensions of the text. Moreover, how this involves an inner struggle, seen in performative and dynamic positionings between what learners believed, their discursive practices, and their analysis of social issues through the texts.

6.2.1   *Significance of the Results*

Considering the need to develop critical thinking skills in bilingual classroom, this study has had an impact on the learners' critical thinking and their level of interaction with the text. As stated in the first focus group, the interviews (See Appendix D), and the intervention, learners have been able to be more critical towards the content of videos, ads, and photos, among texts. This allowed them to establish relationships between this critical approach and their historical, cultural, and political background knowledge. This entailed recognizing discriminatory and stereotypical biases in text through language use. This awareness is fundamental to constructing

the learners' identities and the relationships they build with their social environment and other

subjectivities (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Although this is an important achievement, further

work needs to be done to strengthen these skills, especially in the creation of multimodal texts by

the students aimed to develop 21st-century citizenship.

On the other hand, considering the literature review and the state of the art presented on

Chapter 2, this study is the first in Colombia to use symbolic competence as an approach for

pedagogical intervention in the language learning classroom. This is the starting point for further

research on how to raise awareness on the symbolic dimensions of language. Learners need to

acknowledge this dimension and how it can be useful for gaining a critical perspective towards

the texts that are part of their daily lives and their identity construction (Ibrahim, 1999; Stein,

2001; Kendrick and Jones, 2008). In addition to this, the present research study contributes to

answering how to develop critical thinking skills in the language learning settings in the country

(Baez, 2004; Fandiño, 2013). Also, the study demonstrates ways to approach intercultural

competence practices (Barletta, 2009; Álvarez, 2014), by exerting subject position by discussing,

interpreting, and reflecting on gender and racial issues.

This study contributes to the global English Learning and Teaching (ELT) community in

three ways: methodological practices to unveil texts' connotations and ideological meanings,

providing specific ways in which students assume subject positioning (Benwell and Stokoe,

2006) through text analysis, and giving insights into how Symbolic competence could work as a

set of strategies for this analysis. These aspects relate to conclusion in Chapter 2 about missing

elements identified in action research studies dealing with symbolic competence and subject

positioning. The present study encourages the use of authentic multimodal material, individual

and collective thinking routines (Ritchhart, 2015), and building a class environment that promotes permanent meaning negotiation and discussion based on relevant social phenomena.

Looking at texts' representations (denotative-connotative levels), actions (communicative intentions), and power (ideologies) offers a scaffolded approach that could be used also as assessment tool during the intervention period. In other words, the methodology can start from basic levels of text comprehension to more complex ones by addressing the three levels. Therefore, the process can be tracked and revisited when necessary.

6.3   Pedagogical Challenges and Recommendations

To explore symbolic dimensions of the texts through this approach, teachers may face several difficulties. To begin, these types of exercises are new for learners as the tasks in the language learning classroom are focused on communicative practices (Kramsch, 2006; van Lier, 2010). Therefore, students need to be guided to understand connotative and ideological meanings in the texts which may take a considerable amount of time. Moreover, dealing with these topics in a language that is not their mother tongue can contribute to the problem. This could be overcome by displaying active learning strategies from day one, to expose learners to the text through questions, and to provide them with essential vocabulary to carry out the task. Lecturing learners on text analysis is not recommended, instead, a careful design of questions and classroom methodology are essential.

Even though dealing with the three dimensions through scaffolded practices is advisable, the relationship between the three levels must be targeted as the implementation advances. Learners may have difficulties pinpointing beliefs, myths, and ideologies in the text if they have not made the associations to the previous dimensions: representation and action. Not relating explicitly the three dimensions makes the process time consuming as the will need to go

back to revisit their comprehension. Moreover, learners' may repeatedly state their positioning at the beginning of the process based on their background beliefs. It is recommended to have students question their beliefs from the begging of the process. This entails helping learners to work with diverse input and topics, beyond gender and race that allow learners to realize the connections between them and the discursive contradictions imbued within the text and their own language use.

It would be interesting to understand how learners could become text creators after the symbolic analysis. How knowing these symbolic mechanisms could have an impact on the way learners communicate and express the relationships they build with the world.

6.4   Research Limitations of the Present Study

Even though this research explored learners' subject positioning after using symbolic competence to analyze multimodal input, this study has some limitations. These include the length of time for the implementation, methodology, the topics of discussion, and the sample population.

Teachers may face difficulties when approaching symbolic dimensions of language as students may be not familiar with connotative, ideological, or cultural meanings embedded in texts. Consequently, time spent for each of the activities must be planned to take into consideration drawbacks that require revisiting these meanings and their differences. This is particularly the case if the texts are based on foreign culture references.

Examining subject positioning in a deeper way, the researcher advises approaching other issues beyond race and gender such as mass surveillance, animal testing, death penalty, social credit system, and democratic governments. This allows a broader spectrum to analyze variations in students' positioning according to the topic developed. This could help the teacher recognize

other possible ways in which students make discourse choices. Similarly, the classroom

methodology could include other approaches different from cultures of thinking such as project-

based or dialogic pedagogy. This could make facilitate measuring how classroom practices may

have an impact on learners' positioning.

Finally, it is recommended that further research examine how learners from diverse social

and cultural backgrounds assume subject positioning when exposed to critical text analysis. Even

though the participants in this research study present differences regarding their subjective

experiences, it would be interesting to see how differences in class, age, gender, and race could

mediate learners' positioning. This would allow the researcher to compare learners' discourse

choices with these variables. Therefore, it is important to be aware of complexity and possible

unrecognized identities among the multiplicity of research participants' profiles. More "creative

methodologies such as personal narratives, diaries, popular culture, and media" (Holliday, 2011,

p. xi) need to be employed in future studies to understand and create an account of how complex

the participants' cultural affiliations are, and how this complexity is presented in the results.

6.5   Further Research

Although this research study presented the ways in which learners' subject position when

using symbolic competence as an approach to interpret multimodal input, further research should

investigate how positioning could be reflected through artifacts created by learners. It would be

pertinent to see how dialogic subjectivity, the encounter of several discourses on learners'

language use through text's analysis and interpretation of the three dimensions, could be

portrayed in learners' multimodal production.

In addition to this, it would be interesting to see learners conceptions and practices

regarding master narratives (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Stanley, 2007) and counternarratives

(Andrews, 2002; Stanley, 2007). In other words, for students to pinpoint the nuances between these two types of narratives and how these could be used to influence peoples' attitudes, myths, and beliefs. Moreover, how these texts can be modified through processes of resignification (Butler, 1997). This could be engrained within learners' creation of multimodal texts.

Finally, further research could consider other types of methodologies beyond cultures of thinking, class discussions, and debates. In addition, authentic multimodal input could be gathered from the students' local context or proposed by them. These two elements could shed light on possible differences in students' text analysis, their interactions, and their positioning regarding the texts they have selected.

6.6 Conclusion

Although this was a small-scale research study, it has demonstrated specific ways in which students assume subject positioning roles when using symbolic competence to interpret multimodal input. Subject positioning took place from their critical approximation to the three symbolic dimensions of the multimodal texts and their interpretation of social, historical, and cultural phenomena. Furthermore, through this process learners were able to change their interaction with the texts from not understanding their hidden meanings to comprehending them and enjoy reading them. As a result, the purpose of developing critical thinking skills and interpretative reading were accomplished.

Research findings allowed the researcher to validate and encourage the use of symbolic competence as an approach to enhance learners' discovery of connotative and ideological meanings imbued within the multimodal texts. Moreover, authentic multimodal material has proved to be useful to trigger students' opinions, perceptions, and analysis of social phenomena. Individual and collective thinking routines, discussions, and debates led learners to propose

origins and outcomes of prejudice and discrimination and a dialogical attitude towards their beliefs and positionings regarding gender equality and racial discrimination.

However, it is recommended that teachers rethink how to guide learners to become aware of the symbolic dimensions of the texts. This is because learners may not be familiar with them and they will take longer than expected to identify them. This research shows that it is necessary to trigger correlations between the three dimensions: representation, action and power for students to interpret ideological meanings.

Ways of fostering learners' abilities to create texts based on an awareness of symbolic dimensions, the extension of topics, the inclusion of texts chosen by learners, and other classroom procedures beyond cultures of thinking (Ritchhart, 2015) and socializations could be considered for further research. This could provide valuable data on how subject positioning can be seen through students' text creation and how the complexities related to discursive contradictions or changes in their perspective could be observed and interpreted.

Finally, the general aim of approaching subject positioning and symbolic competence in the language learning classroom is to advocate for the development of critical thinking skills and fostering of 21st-century citizenship. Language learners need to see in language as a way to participate in globalized societies by digging into the multiple perspectives within a text and being aware on how diverse ideologies are believed and consumed through diverse texts. Language learners need to recognize the language creates the reality we are living in.

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Appendix A: Needs' analysis questionnaire

English Department

Name: Daniela Henao H

Date: October 4, 1019

QUESTIONNAIRE # 1 NA

Look at the image and answer the following questions

1. What are the denotative meanings on the ad?

There are coke cans with a design of the avengers.
and they are in pidfile.
The cake cans are black and red, and are large.

2. Are there connotative meanings? Which ones?

The company put the avengers to appeal and make
the people/interested to buy because of the design.
Also the avengers are known and a lot of people like
them and the movies.

3. Can you identify actions within the image? If yes, which ones?

I don't identify actions

4. What do think "Avengers on Coke cans" is communicating?

Is communicating the people to buy the coke cans
because there are the avengers on it and that
make the coke can "better" than a normal
one.

5. Are there any historical myths, values or ideologies on the ad? If yes, which ones?

No, I don't know

Appendix B: Field Diary

| 17/10 | Symbolic Representation CON: SR (DEN-CON) | Aim: Comprende las representaciones simbólicas presentes en textos de diversos formatos .
 1. When the students stated to classify the occupations between female and male Jobs they participated actively, all of them wanted to talk at the same time so they were given the Word only when they were able to raise their hands. The discussion stated at once, the students
 2,5, 9,12 claimed that there were occupations they would not do because it is strange for them
 9 "Would you be a stylist? No, I would not but it is because I don't like it-Why don't you like it?-Well, I don´t know"
 7 " Look teacher, these conservative people and stereotypes tell us we need to be this or that if you are a man si no pues eres marica y no es verdad son solo estereotipos
 4 But there are some Jobs men can do and women can´t for the physical force
 6 No because if a woman trains can do what she wants

 2. Task:Text analysis
 The students were able to understand the connotative elements of the image on the text

  | Learners discussions on gender makes them participate more.
 Frequently they mention stereotypes as part of gender biases.
 They are able to identify some connotations regarding the image that goes with the text.
 The connotative elements relied on the non-verbal elements shown by the girl in the photo.
 They agreed with the idea of a woman having a non-traditional job, however, the representation of what is correspondent to "femininity" are still part of conventional ways of portraying women. "she is still feminine because of her nailpolisth" . |
| | | The students 8, 11, 10: The image of the girl shows us a secure woman, and independent woman. They use us to tell us that everything is possible if we want to do itl.
 The students 15, 6,1, The body's position means that she feels empowered, even though, she still has somethings like the nailpolish that emphasizes that she is a woman, but feels powerful"
 The students 13, 14,12: The text wants to send a message for girls telling them that everything they want to do is possible to accomplish. The image tries to question stereotypes we see a girl that looks pretty confortable working in a traditional man job like a lorry driver. She looks confident and makes eye-contact witht the cámara
 Students 7, 4,3, They wanna tell us is like she feels really confident with the uniform and she feels like a woman because she is wearing some nail polish they are trying to question stereotypes
 Students 16, 5,2,9 She looks confortable in the uniform and in the job, the image denotes a woman with a lorry driver uniform. But it connotates that the woman feels really empoderada with the uniform she feels secure and ready to do the job.
 Student 15: Yes but the text is falling in the same thing like the "Jobs for girls" is saying like hay some Jobs for girls and other for man but that's changing so? They are talking about gender differences.
 Most of the students agreed with the idea that everyone can do what they want, similarly to the authors' idea. However, students 4 and 7 insisted that there are some Jobs that require a lot of muscular strenght that men have and women don't that it was not the case of the lorry driver but they were other Jobs that were like that
 4 "There are Jobs that demand a lot of physical streght that women can't do, it is not about stereotypes but biology and that is not something bad for society"
 7 "Yes it is true. I mean a woman cannot lift the same weight as a man even on sports competitions I think thats the only difference!"

 The task carried out in the groups allowed them to share ideas and feel confortable doing the task, although, sometimes they talked about different things to the class. | |

Appendix C: Student Artifacts

ACTIVITY
A C T I V I t y

TASK: Identify 3 aspects on the listening.

1. First aspect: Denotation: A black guy From southafriza making racist jokes
connotation: Is a black guy that when he come to london he get surprised because of te equality, and how did he feel seen how a white women clean his room, so he make fun of it, but actually he is trying that people realise how because of his color or because of his procedence they including black people make prejudice about them thinking they are poor, drogadicts or criminals.

2. Second aspect: comunicative intention: His comunicative intention in first instance Is making people for laugh, but the real intention is making people realise how we still live in a racist society and the predijace we make of black people, and promote equality

3. Third aspect: agree or disagree: I agree with him because actually I have lived situations in real live were people discriminate black people even the black people discriminate them selfs because is what society have make them feel even my self have make jokes or make fun of this kind of people, so I believe we need to stop making fun of this because actually there only exist one race, the human race.

1 we can see that the video is mostly focus in women, & that they can be what they want, also the topic is the stereotypes in children, like what they want to be.

2 why do we live in a discriminative society? why do little girls chose "female" jobs when they're young?

3 The video is really about the stereotypes that childre learn about jobs for each gender

6. schools are gender divided, girls and boys pick jobs their gender shall pick. Because of the stereotypes they learn as children.

5. In your daily life how society makes us think jobs must be divided in gender, since we are kids, how someone that make the difference can be missthreaten.

4 All people are destinated to be in jobs that other people selected to you (because of the gender) & not in the job you like

Video 2

1. Describe the space where he is. How old do you think he is he? He is in his room of a retired militar, and he is about 39 years old. a very patriotic p

2. What words does he commonly use to convince us about his ideas? balance, equilibrium, better place, etc.

3. What arguments does he use to convince us about his ideas? America is going to be a better place, the world was better when women stay at home

4. Are there any stereotypes on his ideas? Which ones? I believe that yes because he is saying that women function or destination is been at home an not woking.

5. Which do ideas do you agree with?
· I'm agree with the idea that things would be better if one of the two women or men stay at home and the other work, but not necesarily that the women is the one that should not work, because if things work like that we would Find the equilibrium or balance this guy is talking in the video.

1.	He constantly says the words "equality", "women", "countries", "gender", "data", "male", "female"	At the beginning before saying a phrase or a word, she says "am..." in a way of thinking. Also she says "you know". In a part she says repeatedly "And I think". She says many times "interested"
2.	He points at the woman when he says "you". He counts the ideas that he says with his fingers. He is always serious like to keep his posture	She moves her hands while talking, that is like a way to express what is she saying. She blinks many times. She is always looking down because it seems that all what she says is on a paper
3.	"Men and women are more the same than different" "Male are more aggressive" "Men work more hours, more dangerous works"	"Phsycological society's conclusion is that man and women are alike in terms of personality, habilities, leadership"
4.	I agree with Sophie Walker because she talks about equality and freedom and she says that men and women are basically alike, in terms of personality, of habilities and leadership. And I think the same.	

→ "The reason why men and women make different amounts of money it's because of the gender"

Appendix D: Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus group 1: Measuring learners' insights on the process

Example 1: https://soundcloud.com/jenn-romero-804723127/aud-4-focus-group-1

Example 2: https://soundcloud.com/jenn-romero-804723127/aud-3-focus-group-2

Focus group 2: Using needs' analysis questionnaire to measure the impact of the

process

Example 1: https://soundcloud.com/jenn-romero-804723127/focus-group-numero-2-ex-1

Example 2: https://soundcloud.com/jenn-romero-804723127/focus-group-numero-2-ex-2

Interview: Allowing learners to carry out a Symbolic competence analysis

Example 1: https://soundcloud.com/jenn-romero-804723127/interview-example-s-9-21-

feb-2020

Example 2: https://soundcloud.com/jenn-romero-804723127/interview-s2-21-feb-2020

Appendix E : Matrix

file:///C:/Users/Jenny/Desktop/Matrix/Matrix%20%20Jenny%20Esperanza%20Romero%20%20.htm