

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of three Mexican national English Textbooks

by Laura Nayeli Mendez Perez

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Mexican national English Textbooks

By

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Abstract

This research is a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of three English textbooks used within the Proni, a national English program in Mexico targeted to children studying in schools administrated by the Federal government throughout the country. Drawing on previous research related to the Proni in terms of methodology and goals, the aim of this work is to give a critical perspective of the material that Mexican secondary school children use in their everyday classes and reveal some of the underlying discourses found in them.

The research answers to a quantitative nature and draws on the tenets of the Critical Theory, specifically those of the Critical Discourse Analysis focusing on language as a system of semiotic resources (Halliday, 1978). As aforementioned, three textbooks were used to obtain the data analysed. All of them belong to different publishing houses. Data was analysed using the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012), which allowed me to thoroughly analyse both visual and lexical resources.

Through the analysis it was found that the textbooks reflected particular identity constructs that promoted particular ways of being a Mexican EFL teenage student and seeing the foreigner, native and non-native. Constructs that by the end of the day differed greatly from the realities found in the Mexican context and diminished huge concepts such as multiculturalism and ethnicity to quite simple representations.

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Thanks to my supervisor Dr. Matt Kedzierski for patiently guiding and supporting me through this process even with the difficulties posed by a global pandemic.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

This dissertation has not been presented to any other university for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signature: **Laura Nayeli Mendez Perez**

Date: September 23rd, 2020

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

In 2012, Mexican president Peña Nieto announced the implementation of unprecedented and ambitious reforms to the national education system. Coordinated by the Secretary of Public Education (SEP), all basic level institutions throughout the country were required to make significant modifications to their curriculum and methodology. Amongst the changes, the inclusion of the *Programa Nacional de Inglés* (Proni) or National English Program in Basic Education (PNIEB), a National English Program spanning from the 3rd grade of preschool to the 3rd grade of middle school, became the centre of critique and even clash between sections of the National Teachers' Union (Sección XXII) and the government; arguing that the compulsory inclusion of an EFL curriculum was a direct attack against local cultures and languages (Bracho, 2019).

According to the SEP's *Program of study* (SEP, 2011), the Proni is an adaptation of the benchmarks and communicative practices proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). By the end of their 10-year English course, Mexican middle schoolers are expected to reach the B1 level, which requires that students understand and produce texts about everyday situations and communicate with people in case of traveling to a foreign country. Even though the documents related to the national English program do not make explicit reference to the concept of *Intercultural Competence* (Byram, 1997), there are frequent mentions of three 'savoirs' referred by Byram as the methodological foundation: know how to be, know how to learn, and how to do. Furthermore, in their *Guide of work*, teachers are repeatedly reminded that "the NEPBE requires that teachers are capable of appreciating both the relationship between

the English Language and social context, as well as the functions and social/cultural meanings involved in the processes and behaviours inherent to various communication situations” (SEP, 2012, p.99).

As part of the introductory words in *Aprendizajes Clave* (Key Learnings), Aurelio Nuño, former Ministry of Education, states that the Education Reform was prompted by a great desire to give Mexican children the “tools they need to succeed” to create a “more prosperous, fairer and freer” country, and that the new educative model was the result of a collaborative work between the SEP and a group of “teachers and highly distinguished specialists of our country” (SEP, 2017, p.7) (author’s translation). Yet, none of the documents related to the Proni makes any reference to previous work or experience of those “highly distinguished specialists”, except for mentioning that the University of Cambridge was the authority in charge of revising and approving the program.

Since the announcement of the Proni, scholars began warning about the government’s decision of leaving the curriculum design and most of the textbook production at the hands of international companies, particularly from the USA and the UK (Escudero et, al. 2012). Instead of carefully planned steps to enrich the education of Mexican children, ensuing research indicated that the Proni appeared as a quick-fix solution to more deeply rooted issues at a time where Mexico’s Secretary of Education was being fiercely criticized for the poor results shown internationally in the 2009 Pisa Examination (Márquez, 2017). Further analyses of the *Programs of study, Guides of work* and textbooks distributed by the federal government proved that curriculum and textbooks do not complement each other in terms of methodology nor do they suit the Mexican context (Lopez, Lobatos and Gálvez, 2019; Pamplón and Ramirez, 2018; Ministry of Education of Baja California, 2017); thus contemptuously overlooking the

realities and identities of the targeted communities and putting English teachers in a vulnerable situation where they have to improvise and adapt the materials as best as they can (Bricaire, et.al. 2014).

For a country deeply marked by social differences, where 40% of the population lives in poverty and extreme poverty (CONEVAL, 2018), and where national programs such as the Proni claim to work for social equality under the slogan of “English opens doors” (Sayer, 2017, p 58), it becomes imperative to critically analyse the contents of the material given to teachers and students and problematise them. If research has demonstrated that the Proni is not fit for the current context of Mexican public schools in terms of methodology and learning goals, the question that remains to be explored is who, then, does the Proni material portray and why. Otherwise, “we will be doomed to become the proletariat tool of the new economic situation, which benefits very few people while negatively affecting most” (López-Gopar and Sughrua, 2014, p. 109).

1.2 Author’s positionality within the research

My interest to carry out a critical research project related to the Proni comes from two main points: my identity as oaxaqueña, and my professional experience as an EFL teacher in Mexico and abroad. Before being a researcher and a teacher, I am a woman who comes from Oaxaca, the third (economically) poorest state in Mexico (CONEVAL, 2018), and the second richest in linguistic and cultural diversity (GOB, 2019); making it a place where demonstrations of resistance towards hegemonic ideologies are more tangible than in many other parts of Mexico. Throughout my studies, I acquired the awareness that discourses have the potential to shape social structures and power relationships amongst individuals. Though I am a living example of the popular belief that by working hard one will eventually escalate in the social ladder no matter from how low (I graduated from one of the lowest-ranked high-schools and

universities in Mexico); my experience as an English teacher in different parts of Oaxaca and abroad taught me that behind the effort (or lack of) of a student there are social constructs which can be hard or almost impossible to escape from.

More recently, I became involved in the design of curricula and English textbooks at a small language centre in China. This experience opened my eyes about how learning material, particularly textbooks, convey ideological values that producers expect students to embrace. Observing how Chinese kids are encouraged to learn English to become global leaders ignited in me a great interest to know more how foreign language education is connected to social and political values. From the start I was sure that the way Mexican students were positioned in relation to EFL largely differed from the Chinese, but which way was it and why, I had to study more to grasp. The more I read, the more I realise that since education is not neutral nor does it favour everyone, one must learn to see underneath taken-for-granted discourses and challenge them.

1.3 Research aims and research questions

Based on the rationale in combination with my experience, this research aims to unveil underlying ideologies related to identity constructs implicit in three English textbooks used in public middle schools. By doing so, my purpose is to offer critical insights into how the National English Program (Proni) positions people inside and outside of the classroom and how this relates to specific ideological stances. Research questions are:

RQ1: What national and international identities are constructed semiotically in the selected textbooks?

RQ2: What value systems are implicit in those identity constructions?

Both questions have been formulated to explore the topic as if it were composed of layers. Peeling the first layer makes it possible to create a clear image of the people introduced in the material; what they look like, the things they regard and disregard, the contexts attached to them and their relation to English. Considering that behind their every characteristic lay specific beliefs; the second question dives deeper into the values that those characters latently transmit which can explain the reasons for those specific choices.

1.4 Dissertation overview

Following the introduction to the study, Chapter Two reports on the literature review underpinning the topics discussed in the research. The review begins with the discussion of language as social practice and its role in the construction of ideological discourses that can shape a person's identity. Once stating how languages are related to social beliefs and interactions, I focus my attention on the role of textbooks as mediums of ideological dissemination. Chapter Three approaches the epistemological and methodological approaches to the study. I describe the main tenets of the chosen research tradition and then I present the sources of data with more detail and explain the framework of data analysis. Chapter Four discusses the results of the data analysis and how they answer the research questions. Finally, Chapter Five gives the concluding insights of the research and offers some recommendations for EFL teachers and researchers.

Chapter two

Literature Review

This chapter draws on the relevant literature related to this research. It begins with the discussion of language as a social semiotic, then it moves on to explaining how semiotic resources take the form of discourses and how they influence relations of power amongst different groups of people, ultimately reaching the identity construct of individuals. Finally, it covers the discussion of textbooks as covert disseminators of discourses.

2.1 Language as a social semiotic

The nature of my work parts from the theory that ideologies shaping social relationships are constructed through language. The idea of language intrinsically related to human nature and society was a concept that first began to be developed from the works of two important figures almost a hundred years ago: Saussure (1916) and Peirce (1935). While Saussure first saw language as a conjunction of signs that have a signifier (the phonological element used to represent something) and a signified (the mental image related to that specific word); Peirce argued that semiosis, the meaning making of the signs, was a process that involved three components: the sign, the object referred to by the sign and the person interpreting them. In conjunction, both theorists marked a critical point in stating that the meaning of a sign was not static, but that it depended on the context and the people using it.

Years later, linguistic Halliday (1978) continued to develop Saussure's and Peirce's ideas and coined the term *social semiotics*, where he defined language as a "resource for making meanings" (p. 192). By calling it a resource, Halliday elevated the notion of language from a system of signs into a tool for accomplishing things. To group

the wide array of purposes that people have when communicating, Halliday recognized three metafunctions of language (Halliday, 1994). The first one, known as ideational, refers to how language enables humans to put into words the abstract ideas we make of the world. The second metafunction is called interpersonal, it alludes to how humans use language to build relationships with others through communication. Finally, the textual metafunction defines how the language itself helps people communicate coherently and successfully.

Expanding on Peirce's original idea of semiosis, Halliday also considered that the process of sign interpretation was directly influenced by the specific situation where those signs were used and ultimately, by the bigger background of the communicators. In line with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the individual mind being shaped by the sociocultural context where it is engrained; the social semiotic theory considers that meanings are also shaped by the social conditions of people.

Based on those theories, a key turn in social semiotics came after the works of Hodge and Kress (1988) who stated that anything used to communicate something; be it pictures, music, the color of one's clothes and even posture could be considered a semiotic resource. As van Leeuwen put it "Semiotic resources are not restricted to speech and writing and picture making. Almost everything we do or make can be done or made in different ways and therefore allows, at least in principle, the articulation of different social and cultural meanings" (2005, p. 4). Once understanding how semiotic resources are shaped by society and vice versa, the next step in the discussion is to see how these signs come together into bigger constructs named discourses and the role they play in the constructs that shape individual identities.

2.2 Discourses and how they influence society

Depending on the perspective from which semiotic resources are analysed, *discourse* can be defined in different ways. In simple terms, it is “an analytical category describing the vast array of meaning-making resources available to us” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 357). At the same time, discourse also refers to “associated practices of textual production, transmission and consumption, located in a historical and social context” emphasizing that ‘texts’ are not limited to written words, but also include “cultural artefacts, visual representations, buildings, clothes, etc” (Grant, et al., 2004, p. 302). Putting both definitions together, it is possible to say that discourses are conjunctions of semiotic resources that take the form of structured messages and all the processes that surround them at the same time. Fairclough (2013), pioneer in discourse analysis, further comments that discourses are not entities by themselves, but rather dialectical relations between semiosis and people, serving as a bridge between the abstract and material world by attaching concepts, values, and ideologies to objects, situations, and even people.

Such dialectical nature is what grants discourses the power to define what is acceptable in society and guide how people should think and behave (Fairclough, 1994; Stoddart, 2007). According to French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972), discourses have the potential to shape what can be considered truth. In one way or another, these discourses or “truths” have the potential to influence broad areas of human life, such as the concept of democracy, up to more personal and intimate as in the case of sexuality.

One instance of discourses shaping identities goes around the ideal of “being good” displayed through a set of acceptable behaviours involving appearance, speech, the values that measure the quality of one’s work and aspirations. As reported by

Wouters (1995) and Arditì (1999), the origin of most of the criteria that determine what is good can be traced back to dominant classes using them to “draw and maintain social dividing lines, to include new groups that have ‘the necessary qualification’ and to exclude the ‘rude’ -that is, all other lower down the social ladder” (Wouters, 1995 p.108). In ancient China, for instance, women demonstrated their nobility through their skin tone; having pale skin denoted beauty and wealth because it meant that the person did not have the necessity to work under the sun in the fields; standard that still prevails amongst Chinese women who commonly associate beauty with being pale (Johansson, 1998).

On a different scope, Kasper (2005) discusses that values of appropriateness reach the linguistic field when groups of people, usually those in higher status, determine which lexicon is “polite” and “rude” according to their specific values; and adds that since “being “polite” is attributable only to speakers, not to language” (p. 375), the way a person talks can account him either as a polite or rude person. The color of one’s skin and the words one utters have no connotations by themselves; yet, as can be seen through those examples, discourses built around semiotic resources can dramatically mold the perception we may have of a person with tanned skin saying “What a fucking good beer!” at a bar.

Consequently, discourses are able to push the balance in favour of some and put others in disadvantage. As Bourdieu (1977, 1984) explained, although discourses can be reproduced by anyone; not everyone has the privilege to be accepted because the development of the linguistic habitus, the ability to use semiotic resources competently, is subjected to the context of every individual. Linguistic and politic activist Noam Chomsky talking about anarchism, therefore, has more opportunities to be listened by the public than a teenage punk coming from a poor city in Mexico protesting on the

streets. In this way, the possibility to influence people and modify certain structures remains at the hands of those with power that discourse analyst van Dijk (2008) says “is *based* on privileged access to valued social resources, such as wealth, jobs, status, or indeed a preferential access to public discourse and communication” (p. 66).

2.3 Common discourses in TESOL

Either to maintain or create new social dynamics, discourses exist in all areas of human interaction. In the field of teaching English, discourses diverge when discussing the nature of English. Some regard English as a *lingua franca* (Jenkins, 2007), a language merely “for communication, that is, a useful instrument for making oneself understood in international encounters [...] with others who do not speak one’s own L1” (House, 2003, p. 559). From this perspective, English does not convey connotations beyond its usefulness to bridge people with different mother languages in actions that may benefit both. Opposing this idea, other scholars have pointed out that English is now a product sold as part of the globalization process (Block, 2008) which not only has linguistic implications, but also cultural and political (Pennycook, 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

One of those implications have positioned what Kachru (1988), labelled “inner circle countries” (USA, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) as the owners and role models of English, attaching their particular political and cultural values to the language and transmitting them to the learners. Concerning this topic, Canagarajah (1999) discusses that the relationship between English and inner circle countries can be distressing for EFL students. On one hand, it is often considered that mastering English will grant entrance to first world economies such as the USA or Europe. On the other, the colonialist background and the values of consumerism and individualism coming from those same countries come in conflict with the learning communities.

As described in section 1.1, Mexico experienced that with the insertion of the Proni. First, the government advertised the incorporation of an English program promoting it as a tool of empowerment; later, the methodology and contents clashed against the realities of the contexts. Teachers with limited resources attending large numbers of students of quite disparate socioeconomic backgrounds; from poor neighbourhoods in central Mexico who do not have access to internet at school, let alone their houses, to children whose parents pay expensive monthly tuitions at their learning centres (Sayer, 2017); or teachers working in communities fighting to keep alive indigenous languages being pressured to prioritise the teaching of English (Bracho, 2019). Adding that Mexico and the USA share a long and troubled history of political and economic manipulation, speaking English in Mexico is sometimes considered a treason to the country, making it hard for Mexican students to feel identified with the language (López-Gopar, 2016).

Closely related to issues of ownership of English, other common discourses within TESOL are those related to concepts of race, culture, and cultural differences. Although these terms are used for the promotion of global diversity and to highlight how an international language such as English can solve issues of communication amongst the numerous nations (Guilherme, 2007), many of those discourses portray the culture of people in outer and expanding circle countries (Kachru, 1988)¹ in “an oversimplified manner, lumping cultural differences into exaggerated categories” (Brown, 2000, p. 178). Also, they have been used to delimit boundaries between races which quite often puts some groups as the protagonists and some as the “Others”, the ones that do not fit into what is desirable due to their language, religious ideas or even eating habits

¹ Outer circle countries refer to those who have English as their language due to colonization or political reasons; for e.g. India, Philippines, and Nigeria. Expanding circle refers to those who are now learning English as a foreign language: Latin America, China, Korea, Russia; etc.

(Staszak, 2008; Kubota and Lin, 2012). To exemplify this phenomenon, Kumaravadivelu (2013) describes how Asian students are usually portrayed in EFL material as passive, uncritical and blindly obedient to authority while westerns are shown as critical, creative, and quite independent.

In one way or another, English is undoubtedly a double-edged sword. It does contribute to having a world more connected and its mastering provides access to significant resources; however, speaking English alone does not guarantee that everybody will obtain the same opportunities as a citizen of a first-world country (Guilherme, 2007). Issues of race, culture and even gender are still attached to the world of EFL. For this reason, one cannot overlook the underlying discourses of things apparently neutral such as learning resources.

2.4 School textbooks as covert disseminators of discourses

Amongst the vast array of learning resources, school textbooks are key objects to be analysed because they are assumed to be made by intellectuals and scholars working to fulfil the social and academic formation of younger generations (Ide, 2017). Furthermore, they contain the knowledge considered necessary according to the national curricula (Apple, 2004); and most importantly, because the true nature of their contents is not always explicit. According to Giroux (2001), textbooks contents' have salient and *hidden curriculums* that cover not only purely academic topics, but also the dynamics that stablish routines and structures inside and outside of the classroom (for e.g. wearing an uniform, sitting quietly while listening, repeating after the teacher; etc) Through textbooks, students are taught ideas of how society works and the role they play in it.

In Mexican elementary schools, for instance, textbooks began to strengthen colonial discourses around mestizaje since 1970, claiming that all contemporary Mexicans were a mixture of Spanish and indigenous people and that only minorities living in faraway villages were truly indigenous (Gutiérrez, 2012). As a consequence, whole generations were detached from their indigenous roots and the idea that people who call themselves indigenous belong to a lower category from the rest was strengthened. Discourses that still reflect in indigenous communities being discriminated in their access to health services, education, jobs, and even criminal justice (Carnoy, et al. 2002; Pombo, 2003; Ortiz, et al., 2018).

In foreign language textbooks, semiotic resources go beyond the learner's immediate context and attempt to create discourses around people from inner and outer circle countries. Appropriately stated by Gray (2013), textbooks "are cultural artefacts from which meanings emerge about the language being taught, associating it with particular ways of being, particular varieties of language and ways of using language, and particular sets of values" (p.3). In the case of English as a foreign language, researchers have found stereotypes that go beyond grammatical aspects. Analysing school textbooks in Argentina, Basabe (2006) found that passages tended to favour the lifestyles of people from the USA and the UK and used Poland and China to exemplify the negative aspects of communism. On a large analysis of ESL textbooks used in the USA, Ndura (2004) reported that the material contained gender and racial bias; portraying men in leading positions and continuously depicting people from Africa or south Asian countries as backward and exotic.

2.5 Conclusion

So far, it has been discussed how semiotic resources converge into discourses that have the capacity to influence many (if not all) the areas in a person's life through

different institutions and practices, including those seemingly apolitical such as the teaching of foreign languages. Although some may convey quite biased messages, it is important to consider that not all discourses are explicit. In the following chapter, I will discuss more on the approaches and methods related to the analysis of semiotic resources.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter approaches topics related to the methodology of my research. It begins explaining the chosen research approach and then moves on to describe the data used for the analysis; its sources, how it was collected, and the analytical framework applied to it. After that it goes over issues of validity and knowledge claims to finally address the ethical aspects of the study.

3.1 Critical theory as a research approach

Given that the nature of my research inquiries target topics related to language, ideologies and identity constructs, the approach I adopt in my study aligns with the tenets of the critical theory as developed by scholars at the School of Frankfurt. Established in the decade of the 1920's, their thought parted from the Marxist premise that socioeconomic and political contexts shape human psyche and lifestyle; wholly rejecting the idea that ideologies come purely from human consciousness (Held,1980). Convinced that the human condition is inherently attached to the material and historical world surrounding it, critical research attempts to understand and problematize the relationships between power, economy and politics involved in the different social interactions as the ones found in foreign language classes.

The movement of the Frankfurt School gave rise to unprecedented approaches in the study of different fields including linguistics; resulting in language being studied as a social semiotic (Halliday 1978), concept explained in the preceding chapter. Drawing on the theories set by Halliday; Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew developed the principles of Critical Linguistics, discipline concerned with how "language usage is not merely an

effect or reflex of social organization and processes, it is a *part* of social process. It constitutes social meanings and thus social practices” (Fowler, et al., 1979, p. ii).

Although the broader aspects of my study are supported by Critical Linguistics, my research focuses on the branch of CL known as Critical Discourse Analysis which targets semiotic resources as part of discourses. In CDA, researchers pay particular attention to “the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). In analysing EFL textbooks distributed by the Mexican government, my interest is not only on describing the meanings (salient and latent) found in the data, but also on positioning and problematizing them in relation to their broader socioeconomic and cultural context. Further information on the CDA analytical framework applied to the data will be discussed in section 3.3.

3.2 Sources of data and means of data collection

The sources of data for this research come from three EFL textbooks used in Mexican middle schools as part of the National English Program. To compare some of the information found in them, two Proni documents mentioned in section 1 are also referred to when necessary: the Teacher’s guide of work (SEP, 2012), a 86-pages handbook that offers teachers working with the Proni general guidelines and examples of how to apply a sociocultural teaching approach in their classes; and the Program of study for middle school (2011), a 72-pages document explaining the teaching approach, the goals of the program, evaluation criteria and the topics for every unit and grade. Both documents repeat their contents in versions in Spanish and English.

Printed copies of both the textbooks and the Proni documents are distributed free of charge by the federal government upon teacher’s request. However, being part of a larger collection of national basic education material, I was able to download digital copies of the textbooks available to the general public through the government website: <https://www.conaliteg.sep.gob.mx/secundaria.html> . Similarly, I downloaded the two Proni documents through a Secretary of Education website: https://www.dgdc.sep.gob.mx/dgdc2016/progfederales/dgdc_prog_fed_PRONI.htm. Images below correspond to the covers of the textbooks and detailed information of the sources can be found on Table 1.

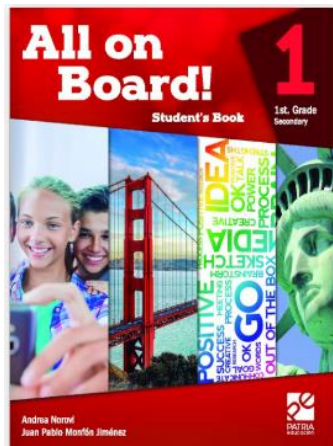


Figure 1. Grade 1 textbook



Figure 2. Grade 2 textbook

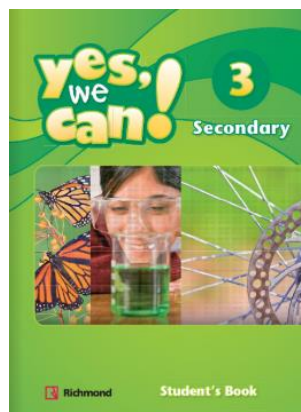


Figure 3. Grade 3 textbook

Title	All on Board! 1	Crossover 2	Yes, we can! 3	Guide of work	Program of study for middle school
Publisher	Patria Educación (Mexico)	University of Dayton Press (USA)	Richmond Publications (UK)	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education
Year	2018	2019 (Second edition)	2012 (Eight reprint)	2012 (Second Edition)	2011
Author(s)	Andrea Norovi and Juan Pablo Monfón Jiménez	Hilda Curwen and Susana Pontón	Griselda Cacho, Miroslava Guerra and Dominic Wright	Maria Vargas, Israel Figueroa and Alejandro Velázquez	Maria Vargas, Israel Figueroa and Alejandro Velázquez
Units	10	10	10		

Table 1. Data sources bibliography

Although the textbooks were supposed to be designed according to the Proni's lineaments, it was not possible to find information about the authors' previous works in EFL education or how they came to be related to the national program. Nevertheless, series of *Crossover* and *Yes, I can!* are found throughout the three grades that comprise the middle school level. Contrastingly, authors of the Proni documents appeared to be

Mexican people with postgraduate degrees in foreign language teaching and learning working in collaboration with the SEP. However, the documents themselves do not mention the background of these authors and there were no references of collaboration with larger professional bodies in TESOL existing in Mexico.

All the material belongs to the middle school level which equals years 7-9 in the UK and grades 6-8 in the USA; targeting children around 12 to 15 years old. I decided to focus on this particular school level because children at that age are at a critical stage both in their cognitive and social development (Berenbaum, Beltz and Corley, 2015). According to the National Institution for the Evaluation of Education, of the more than six million students enrolled in public² middle schools, 36% live in conditions of marked and very marked poverty, while the rest 64% find themselves amongst medium, low and very low states of economic vulnerability (CONEVAL, 2018); making it a point where a considerable amount of students abandon their studies. Taking those aspects into account, I expected to find those realities and conflicts reflected in the material given to them. Moreover, the Proni's curriculum states that in this phase, students should be able to use the foreign language to engage in discussions expressing and negotiating points of view and information; remarkable goals in a study which purpose is to unveil sociocultural discourses.

3.2 MCDA as the data analysis framework

Amongst the different analytical frameworks within CDA, I decided to apply a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework because the textbooks that I selected contain both visual and lexical semiotic resources which can only be fully understood in

² ²The term of **public** school here refers to all the education centres managed by the federal government. Unlike private schools in Mexico, students are not required to pay monthly tuitions nor the textbooks. All of them follow the same curriculum stated by the SEP. Teachers are not allowed to decide over the topics, but they are able to choose the textbooks they want to use from the digital catalogue already mentioned.

relation to one another (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). I applied the lexical and visual framework proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012), which I consider strongly grounded on the main CDA tenets and quite convenient to follow. To create this framework, Machin and Mayr put together the different ideas that other critical discourse analysts have developed from their own approaches during the last decades.

For the lexical analysis, the authors guide researchers to pay attention to the word choices embedded in the discourse. Considering that the textbooks I chose are promoted by the federal government and used as official learning material, it was quite relevant to me that Machin and Mayr draw on Fairclough's (2001) claim that a great part of mainstream and official rhetoric is used to conceal or disguise the true roots of inequality and other social issues. They mention that it is crucial to study how specific words transmit stronger or lighter connotations and the reactions they are most likely to produce on the readers.

In line with my RQ2 of the value systems, the framework also draws our attention to cases of suppression and/or over-lexicalisation used to erase information that could be considered bothersome and to highlight either positively or negatively something. In both cases, they serve to bias the reader to take specific positions. Concept denominated by van Dijk (1998) as ideological squaring. Critical discourse analysts such as Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2011), and Teo (2000) have explored this phenomenon researching political discourses that suppress the Nazi's past in Austria by avoiding references related to Jews; and revealing concealed racism towards a foreign gang expressed by an Australian newspaper that made continuous emphasis on the relationship between their immigrant status and their illegal actions respectively.

Regarding the analysis of visual components of the Proni textbooks, I adopted Machin and Mayr recommendations that images can express ideas explicitly and

implicitly and that their meanings are subjected to the culture and context because for me it was of outmost importance to study how images and texts combined openly and covertly to construct specific characters through the narrative of a Mexican teenage student learning English. It was also useful to remember what Royce (2002) expressed about the interpretation of images, that it “must include a means of analyzing the role of the image vis-à-vis language: Does it entice, decorate, or merely please? Does it perform a full communicational role in which it either reproduces language meanings, complements them, or realizes new meanings?” (p. 192).

3.3 Research process

The first step in my research process was to download digital copies of the three books and Proni documents and save them in separate folders. Since MCDA requires a throughout familiarisation and review of the data (Bezemer and Jewitt,2010); the first readings that I made were aimed to getting to know very well how the books were structured and identifying their main components. Noticing that that I ended up with a significant amount of data (379 pages in total for the textbooks and 158 for the Proni documents), I considered appropriate to follow Sigrid Norris’ s (2019) scheme of work designed to be used with medium and large datasets that aims to focus the researcher only on the major topics approached by the data. As I continued to re-read through the pages, I took notes and highlighted sections that indicated significant and frequently common patterns within the three books and the key relations they had with the Guide of work and Program of study. This process threw two main themes with their subthemes:

1. References and depictions of EFL learners: pictures of children/teenagers posing as students, examples of students’ dialogues; discussion questions and sample sentences related to students’ lives and ideas.

2. References to foreigners: pictures of places and people, passages related to the history and culture of other countries.

I created specific folders for each candidate theme and saved the books' digital excerpts in the corresponding folders. To apply Machin and Mayr (2012) analytical criteria more efficiently, I subdivided each theme's material in visual and lexical elements; something that helped me to confirm that every section was allocated in the right place.

To analyse the visual elements I first looked at their denoting attributes: mode (was it a cartoon or a photograph?), characteristics of the people (age, gender, skin and hair color, clothes, pose), features of the settings (is it a school, a landscape, a house? How is it?). Next, I sought for underlying messages: what does the skin color, the clothes and the setting of the people connote? Is there a predominance of a certain type of people and settings? Is it possible to find patterns of people with common physical characteristics appearing in favourable and unfavourable situations? Questions that threw quite interesting results such as the one shown in Figure 4.



	<p style="text-align: center;">Denotations</p> <p>The pictures show two women using water for different purposes. The first one is kneeling by a riverbank washing clothes with plastic buckets around her. The woman has tanned skin and dark hair. Her face is facing away from the photo. She is wearing a sleeveless and simple dress color beige with red lines , and wears no shoes.</p> <p>The second woman is apparently watering plants with a hose. She is standing and her smiling face can be appreciated. She has fair skin and hair and is dressed in a plain shirt and trousers color white and a light blue jacket. At the background there is a house with large windows and tile roof.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Connotations</p> <p>Modern life can be translated as wearing western style clothing and disposing of natural resources, such as water, from the comfort of ones' house. Going straight to the source to get it and having direct physical contact with it are signs of underdevelopment.</p> <p>From the first glance, the woman holding the hose and the house at the background do not fit into common Mexican features (contrary to the woman by the river) but rather to the ones from the USA or Europe.</p>

Figure 4. Sample analysis of two pictures found in *Crossroad 2*, p. 101.

For the analysis of lexical data, I separated the lexis according to the prevalence of vocabulary (what are the terms that the books repeat over and over and how does such lexical choices shape the meaning of the discourses?), the positive and negative approach to things or people; and finally, the lack of references to concepts that would otherwise shift the meaning of the text. To do that I went back and forth highlighting words and making notes. Finally, I put the visual and lexical items together to see how they combined to create more nuanced meanings.

6 Share your comic strip. Take turns to say which elements you decided to include and how you developed the story.

7 Choose the best two comic strips. Give your opinion politely and justify your ideas.

5 Join two more pairs. Perform your role-plays and discuss the questions below.

a. Which role-play was the funniest? Why?
 b. Which one was the most realistic? Why?
 c. Who were the best actors? Why?

10 Discuss these questions.

Which pair...

- presented the most interesting topic?
- had the most attractive visual support?
- presented the information with a clear voice?
- had an acceptable volume of voice?
- used appropriate body language?
- used formal language?
- kept eye contact with the audience?

Constant mention of being or producing the "best/the most" as the ultimate goal of the activity.

Evaluation criteria goes around speaking clearly, politely, formally and with body language that connotes confidence.

Such mode reminds of politicians or businessmen giving a speech or presenting their ideas with ideas going one way from speaker to listener.

There are no signs of discussion questions aimed to evaluate the significance of the content in the students' work nor questions aimed to negotiate ideas.

Figure 5. Textual analysis of samples from All on Board!1

3.4 Validity of the knowledge claims

Addressing issues of validity, it is necessary to begin with the ineludible fact that since this research is positioned within a critical and interpretative tradition, it was impossible for me to separate myself from the data analysis and findings. Yet, as O'Halloran (2011) discussed, multimodal analysis cannot be approached from a neutral point of view as if the data itself was not value-laden. Otherwise, it would contradict the

fundamental tenet of social semiotics that meaning-making is subjected to the social and cultural context where it is applied. Therefore, regarding my own subjectivity in relation to the research, I maintained a reflective position throughout the process by engaging “in rigorous, continual reflection and work to disrupt our [my] own sense of expertise” (Low and Pandya, 2019, p.16). More than once, I found myself tempted to rush into the analysis of the data, particularly when comparing the Mexican reality showed in the textbooks to the reality, I have experienced myself. Still, the analytical framework and the literature review constantly guided me to back all my claims on reliable sources.

On the part that corresponds to the chosen methodology, I took into account that CMDA is still on the stage of development in terms of theoretical basis and methodology (Bezemer and Jewitt, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2015); making it earn criticisms regarding the gaps that some data analysis methods leave, how those gaps can lead to partiality (Widdowson, 1998; Blommaert, et al., 2001), and to the lack of a fully established systematic approach to the handling of samples by some frameworks (Low and Pandya, 2019). Despite the validity of those critiques, the CMDA framework that I chose suit my goals because my research was specifically aimed to find identity constructs and the possible value systems implicit in them through the analysis of semiotic resources; not to generalise school textbooks or explain a particular student behaviour in class. Machin and Mayr (2012) are quite specific and detailed when explaining how to analyse semiotic resources and back all their points on foregrounding research supported by empirical research. Furthermore, CDA methodologies bound discourse analysts to keep rigorous handling of the data even if they continuously maintain their position against signs of social injustice (Norris, 2019).

3.5 Ethical considerations

As I already mentioned in point 3.1, the textbooks and documents that I used have been put to the public disposition by the federal Secretary of Education through the digital catalogue of national basic education textbooks. Hence, I was not required to involve any participant. To avoid any mislabeling I have ensured to credit the corresponding authors and publishing houses throughout the study. Finally, I highlight that more than an evaluation of the textbooks in terms of the validity of their methodology and usefulness, this research aims to offer a critical insight of the material that Mexican English teachers and students use in their everyday classes.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained that my research falls into the principles of the critical theory. Following the idea that language and discourses can contribute to the creation of social structures that benefit some and disadvantage others; critical linguistics and specifically critical discourse analysis, has developed frameworks to examine semiotic resources which can evidence hidden discourses within mainstream material such as the textbooks introduced in this chapter. Results on their semiotic analysis will be presented in the ensuing chapter.

Chapter 4

Data analysis and findings

This chapter reports on the outcomes of the data analysis, its implications and relation to my research inquiries. After the visual and lexical analysis of the textbooks, three figures emerged as the main characters: a) the Mexican middle school EFL learner and the foreigner b) native and c) non-native speaker of English. Answers to the research questions will therefore circle around them. First, I will introduce the three protagonists of the study and discuss their characteristics. Later, I will present the value systems behind those characters and their implications.

4.1 RQ1: What national and international identities are semiotically constructed in the selected textbooks?

4.1.1 The Mexican middle school EFL learner

Firstly, it was found that the main figure constructed in the three textbooks was that of the Mexican EFL student. Such construct was done mainly through the continuous use of visuals and sample dialogues that attempted to show examples of what the students using the material would look like, think, and do. Of the 154 pictures of children posing as students, 81 were girls and 73 boys. Thus, slightly favouring female presence. 80% children with fair skin and light-coloured hair; physical features typically associated with people from the USA, Canada, or Europe.

Juxtaposing, only 20% had darker shades of skin and hair tones; children with whom the majority of Mexican children would feel more related to. Only two kids (boys) had physical features akin to Mexican indigenous people: almond-shaped dark eyes, broad noses, and tanned skin. Depending on the textbook, students appeared in

different backgrounds. While *All on Board!1* and *Yes, we can!3* showed students surrounded by school settings commonly shown in USA tv shows or movies: modern classrooms in charge of a foreign looking teacher, hallways with rows of lockers, well illuminated and stocked libraries, and parks with bright green grass and trees; *Crossover 2* presented children in white empty backgrounds.



Figure 6. A group of students in *Yes, we can! 3* p. 107

Regardless of their location or physical features, students shared common patterns. Like the group in the image above, all the pictures denoted students who wore casual clothes of simplistic designs and colors and had similar hairstyles: short and well-trimmed for the boys, and long and sleek for the girls. Usually appearing with their books at arm's length and always smiling while discussing schoolwork. The exception to this rule were only 9 pages that showed cartoon characters who could be easily regarded as a simplistic representation of the average Mexican middle schooler. The cartoons had tanned skin tones, dark eyes and wore uniforms in the same way Mexican students are asked to wear by federal law: green/ dark beige sweaters, white shirts, gray trousers for boys and grey skirts for girls; colors associated to a huge number of real middle school centres. These cartoons also differed from the others in that some were used to show examples of scepticism and worry; emotions that contrasted with the smiling and

concentrated faces shown on all the other pictures. These emotions, however, appeared within conversations related to the students' performance in a task (see Figure 4), and not because of a situation outside of the students' control.



Figure 7. "Mexican students" on *All on board!* p. 115

Despite the presence of these Mexican-looking cartoon children, the salient image throughout the textbooks was that of the fair-skinned child smilingly engaged in a book activity whose pose and clothing style denotes good economic condition, happiness, good behaviour, and dedication to school. In sum, a child that performs according to a collective identity where everyone aims to behave "well" and look the same. Even though in real life middle schoolers begin their quest to find ways of standing out and showing their uniqueness (Berenbaum, Beltz and Corley, 2015), the EFL student in the textbooks neglects the fact that contrasts, deviance and even clashing of ideas and behaviour play a key role in the development of any teenager.

The construct of the child naturally adhered to the rules was also strongly reflected in the way students in the textbooks used language, fitting the characteristics of what the people described by Kasper (2005) would consider "proper" speech. As shown in Figure 7, lexical choices commonly found in academic writing and formal

talking were taken as examples of students' normal communication. For instance: "I am **afraid that...**", (All on board! 1,p. 115), "We eat hamburgers in Mexico the same as lots of other countries **due to** American hamburger restaurants opening..." (Crossover 2, p. 25), and "**On one hand** that was rude, and **on the other** it was **negligent** too! **Furthermore**, I had to wait for almost three hours..." (Yes, we can! 3, p. 8).

Interestingly, there was a suppression of colloquial language. None of the 154 students in the textbooks spoke with slangs or informal contractions such as *gonna*, *wanna*, *gotta*; none formulated questions without the use of auxiliars much less mixed Spanish and English. Though the Proni boasts of teaching English as a social practice (Program of study 2011 and Guide of work, 2012), textbooks demonstrate an obvious inclination towards discourses that promote the use of formal and academic language; associating the image of the EFL speaker to the specific linguistic habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984) of a person with access to education high enough to teach conditionals and connectors of advanced level (Yule, 2015).

Careful look at the list of sources cited by the textbooks indicated that any used authentic pictures of Mexican middle schoolers. According to the information in the covers, most of the images came from *Stockphotos* and *Getty Images*; both USA companies dedicated to sell businesses and media agents generic illustrations of all sort of topics for publicity. The editors' decision of using pictures of children like the ones appearing in advertisements reflects the view that English as foreign language is considered as an imported goods sold to Mexico through the Secretary of Education.

Within this perspective the Mexican middle schooler is positioned not in the role of learner, but in the one of the consumer of a product that not only sells the English language per se, but also the model of an ideal teenager whose looks and socioeconomic conditions differ greatly from the great majority of Mexican students. This teenager

looks more like a model than a real student, her way of talking and the sceneries where she appears can be related to a person with medium to high economic status and easy access to academic resources. In this way, she represents the aspirations that Canagarajah (1999) and Sayer (2017) mentioned of English as a resource used to obtain better life conditions; but at the same time, she indirectly expresses that those “better conditions” usually do not emerge from people with brown skin or limited resources.



Figure 8. Salient image of the EFL student. Found in *Yes, we can!*3 p.42

4.1.2 The foreigner: Native and non-native English speaker

The second most prominent figure was that of the foreigner, native and non-native English speaker. Of the 61 pictures depicting foreigners including cartoons and photographs, 22 were women and 39 were men: 57 adults and four children (cartoons). 24 people belonged to inner circle (Kachru, 1988) countries and 37 to outer and expanding. Of the 18 flags shown, 5 were of the USA, 4 of the UK and 1 of Canada and 5 out of 9 landmarks showed places in the USA (3) and the UK (2). Although these numbers suggest that the textbooks attempted to include diversity of people and places;

analysis on how each element was presented pointed out that the books were biased in showing native English speaker countries as powerful and relevant in the world's development. Other countries were used to promote a superficial sense of multiculturalism.

Shown in Table 2, inner circle countries had presence in almost all the topics approached by the books excluding natural disasters and tourism. Unsurprisingly, the USA and the UK monopolized themes related to English, reinforcing the discourse of a canon English language that belongs exclusively to them (Milroy, 2002; Pennycook, 2008). Although *All on board! 1* briefly mentions that English is the official language in Papua New Guinea, Nigeria, and India; examples of English speakers from those countries are nowhere to be seen nor in that book or in others. Besides, while Papua New Guinea is described as "one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. With a population of approximately just over 8 million", Nigeria as "the most populated country in Africa", and India as "the seventh-largest country of the world and the second most populated"; the semiotic resources used to describe the USA are "one of the most developed countries; it is the world's largest economy on the planet" (p. 147).

Lexical choices around the USA mark a divisory line with the other English speaker countries appearing on the list, positioning it not as the country with the largest population in America, but as a well established power that influences the whole world which value lays not on things such as language or culture (as in the case of Papua New Guinea), or even its people (Nigeria and India); but on its and economy and political influence.

Category	Inner	Outer	Expanding (Kachru, 1988)
History	Australia UK USA (2) ³		
Literature	UK (3) USA (Native American tale)		Greece (2) Germany, Denmark, Turkey
National values (cultural aspects)	USA (2) UK		Mexico
Celebrations	UK		Mexico
Linguistic diversity	USA	Papua New Guinea Nigeria, India	Indonesia
Entertainment (References to movies and series)	USA (3)		France (2) Russia
Tourism			Mexico (3) Brazil
References relating it to the English language	USA (3), UK (3)		
Natural disasters		India	Japan (2)
Stories of success/ achievements	USA Australia UK	South Africa	Portugal

Table 2. Categorization of topics and countries

³ Numbers in brackets indicate in how many books they appeared.

Another good example of the contrasting ways that inner circle and outer circle countries are portrayed can be found in Crossover 2 pages 55 and 66 where two different representations of the USA and Brazil are given. In the figure below we are shown a set of three pictures related to the moon landing in 1969. The USA flag standing out from the rocket next to the picture of an astronaut standing on lunar surface stresses that sending men to the moon was accomplished solely by the USA. The three male astronauts wearing their uniforms with sober expressions and postures that allow the reader to see the USA flags on their upper arms reinforces that impression. Altogether, the three panels, their icons and elegant and solid colors transmit the image of a country leader in technological advancements that has achieved what is seen only in science fiction movies. Ultimately connoting power, wealth, and intelligence.

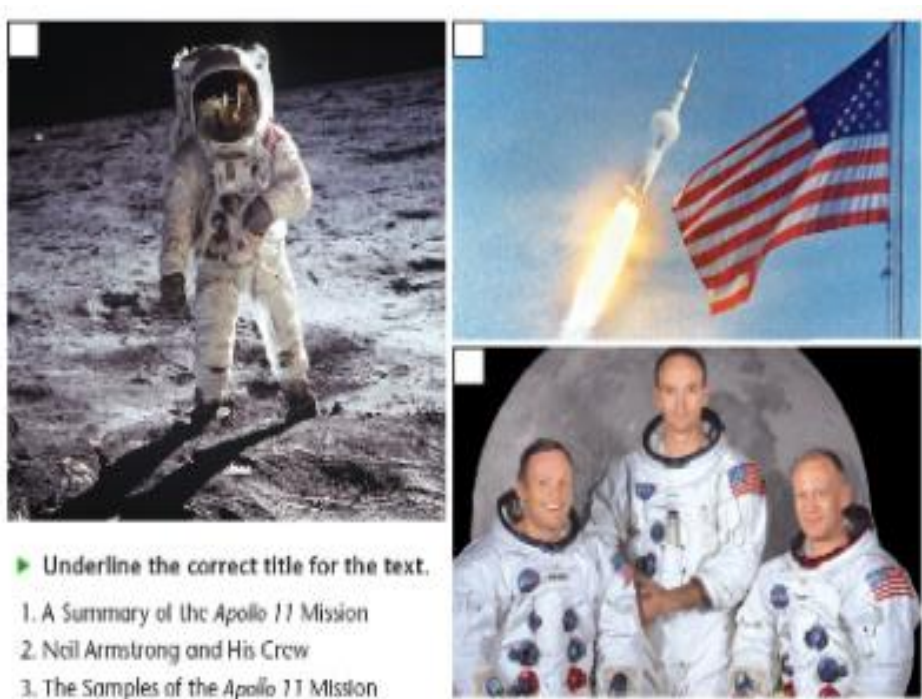


Figure 9. Crossover 2 p. 55

On the other hand, the chosen way to include Brazil in the book is related to vacation, leisure, and fun. The background of the ocean water and the landscape of a light-blue, not so populated beach with green mountains at the back are invitations to have rest and a good time. Contrary to the three uniformed men shown in page 55, page 66 shows a slender woman whose costume covers only her breasts and lap; leaving her limbs and belly exposed. By the joyful expression on her face and pose, it is possible to assume that she is a dancer from the famous Carnival held every year in Rio. What these images ultimately say is that Brazil is a good vacation option for a rich male in search of adventure because it has warm and nice weather, clear-water beaches, and most importantly, beautiful and exotic women who know how to have fun.



Figure 10. Crossover 2 p. 66

Just like the Brazilian woman was shown wearing what many people might consider a traditional dress, other people from outer and expanding circles appeared wearing iconic clothes that could relate them to the mainstream representation of certain cultures. Unlike the three astronauts, Martin Luther King, ex-USA president Truman (Yes, we can!3 p. 57) a teenage computer programmer from New York

(Crossover 2, p. 12) a white south African doctor (Yes, we can!3 p. 56) and scientists Humphry Davy, Joseph Wilson and Alba Edison about whom the last remarks are “Some people think [they] were responsible for creating the modern world. Think about that the next time you turn on a light” (Crossover 2, p.70); the individuality of the other foreigners blurred as they were used to represent a superficial icon of multiculturalism or marginalisation as in the sample image shown in Chapter 3, Figure 1.

At the end of the analysis, the identity constructs of both native and non-native speakers of English diverge in opposite directions. While the textbooks present remarkable individuals from the USA and the UK whose traces can be found in the students’ everyday lives, other foreigners are positioned as a collective figure representing the “Other” (Kubota and Lin, 2012). A figure out there worth of respect, but whose name, accomplishments and ideological first-hand accounts are nowhere to be found.



Figure 11. A lesson on “multiculturalism” shown in Crossover 2 p. 27

4.2 RQ2: What value systems are implicit in those identity constructions?

Addressing the second research question, deeper analysis inside the image of the EFL learner already described displayed two main values: self-regulation aimed to become better version of themselves and respect towards differences. The identity construct of the foreigner reflected particular values around ethnicity and multiculturalism. Although relatively new in Mexican foreign language textbooks, such value-laden content goes according to the Proni's *savoir know how to be through language*, which means that both teachers and students should be capable to identify "attitudes and values implied in oral and written interactions" (Guide of work, p. 125) and to "recognize the role of language and culture in the construction of the knowledge, the construct of identity, as well as the regulation of behaviour, the experience and the values" (Program of study, p. 166). In concordance to this, the three textbooks bombed students with moral and ethical guides throughout the books both explicitly and implicitly.

4.2.1 Self-regulation to become "better"

The first thing that came out quite notoriously was that semiotic resources continuously prompted students to self-evaluate and modify their own behaviour. Although the Proni's Guide of work mentions that teachers are the ones required to guide students in the appreciation of social values that improve the students behaviour; the textbooks offered their own defined measure of what it means to be good in such a way that students apparently do not require the assistance of the teacher to know what is expected of them.

To do that, *All on board! 1* used small popping bubbles called "Compass", "Travel-log" and "Spyglasses" that appeared 38 times throughout the textbook.

Crossover 2 had special pages for self-evaluation every 10 pages; and *Yes, we can! 3* contained small boxes with questions for group reflection and self-evaluation at the end of each of its 10 lessons. Putting these sections together, the most repeated words and combinations were:

Achieve


Goals

Listen (respectfully, attentively)

Work (promptly, well, efficiently, collaboratively)

Help (others)

Speak (politely, clearly)



8 Look back at the activities in this lesson. Read the descriptions and give yourself a score for each point in the chart below.

Lesson 3: Exchange information about community services	
a. Choose an appropriate level of formality depending on my audience.	
b. Think of questions to ask for information.	
c. Answer questions with important information and relevant details.	

5 I can almost always do the activities correctly, easily and rapidly.	2 I can sometimes do the activities correctly but with some difficulties.
4 I can generally do the activities correctly and quite easily.	1 I can rarely do the activities correctly and have lots of difficulties.
3 I can frequently do the activities correctly with little difficulty.	

9 Ask a classmate to evaluate your performance, giving you a score for each point in the chart.




Figure 12. Travel log on *All on Board! 1* p. 136

In the sample above one student is asked to score herself according to the statements that reflect the ideal of work quality which is measured by the relevance of the information used, appropriateness of the vocabulary choices; and time

management. Peculiarly, *All on Board!*¹ chooses to use “correctly”, “easily” and “rapidly” to describe an ideal performance; thus, relating good work to the concept of doing things in the shortest time possible without mistakes.

Similarly, self-evaluation sections in the other two textbooks guided students to reflect whether they had completed all their work on time and if it had been easy or difficult for them to understand something. The question “*How can I achieve a better grade next time?*” preceded by the statement “*I did my best effort*” repeated ten times in *Crossover 2*, and “Was it easy to...? Asked in *Yes, we can!*³ at the end of 7 units reinforces the view that success and effort in learning equals to reaching a high grade and moving swiftly through the topics.

Although encouraging oneself to be more organized at work and setting specific goals does not have negative connotations in themselves, the way lexical choices define good work in the textbooks suppresses time for reflection and critical thinking. In the same way that EFL students were shown adhering to a standard look, values measuring students’ work lead to standardization. Subtly, this type of discourse squares students ideologically (van Dijk, 1998) into believing that mistakes and difficulties in the process of learning are signs of deficiency and that they should aim to work mechanically: fast, well and without straying from the already marked line.

4.2.2 Respect and empathy towards what is different

The second most highlighted value within the textbooks goes around the concept of respect, being aware and empathic about the things that happen outside one’s personal circle. In page 102, the *Proni’s Guide of work* states that the *Proni’s* goal is to “Promote collective commitments oriented to the defence of human rights, the respect for diversity, the rejection of violence and the strengthening of values directed

to coexistence in spite of differences". Human rights, diversity, rejection of violence and coexistence in *in spite of differences* are words that convey quite strong connotations. They acknowledge that there are ways of living that some people need to fight for and that respecting and supporting them is a valuable thing. Yet not one of the textbooks attempted to touch on topics related to religion, sexuality, racial or gender discrimination or even socioeconomic imbalances. As already mentioned in section 4.1, the textbooks present a student who lives in a world where everyone has all necessities covered, consequently, the concept of respect and empathy that the textbooks use is that of a person who only glimpses struggle and difference from a place of commodity.

Throughout the ten lessons, the books addressed the following topics related to social phenomena:

- History: How immigration changed food through time/*All on Board!1*. Passage about the fight against discrimination towards people of color in the USA and women's rights/*Yes, we can! 3*.
- Foreign and national culture: Linguistic diversity in Mexico, Asian and African countries/*All on board!1*. Common stereotypes related to the personality of Mexicans and some foreigners/*Crossover 2*.
- Teenage problems: Depression and weight-related illnesses/*Crossover 2*.
- Environment: Water shortage and pollution/*Crossover 2*.
- Topics for debating: The use of uniforms at schools, the consumption of junk food in school cafeterias, the use of bicycles/*Yes, we can! 3*.

Throughout these topics the textbooks completely avoided asking students about their personal judgement or experience. Instead, they posed texts in such a way that the student was detached from the situation. Common opening sentences were: "Have

you ever thought that you did not have enough water to live? Well, this is a reality for one-third of the world's population" (*Crossover 2*, p. 104), "How many languages are there in the world? There are approximately 7000 languages worldwide" (*All on board!*1 p.143), "It is hard to imagine just how different the world was for women just fifty years ago" (*Yes, we can!* 3 p. 63). In those three starting sentences, third-person pronouns give students the sense that even though realities described there do exist, they do it somewhere in the past or in faraway places of the world. By saying "Have you ever thought?" or "It is hard to imagine", the texts also assume that the students most likely have never experienced not having enough water at home, seen or lived manifestations of gender imbalance. Impressive claims if one takes into account that in Mexico around 8 million people do not have continuous access to water in their homes (INEGI, 2018) and that it is one of the countries with the highest rates of violence against women in Latin America (CEPAL, 2019).

Contrastingly, the textbooks used different lexical choices to talk about topics that would be considered non-controversial. For instance, vacations; "When planning your trip to Yucatán, don't forget to organize a day visit to a cenote" (*All on Board!* 1, p. 93), health advice: "Take the stairs. Avoid the elevator and take the stairs whenever you can. Even if just for a floor a two, your heart rate will increase". (*Crossover 2*, p. 120), or telling a personal experience that changed one's perspective for the better: "On Saturday my dad took me to a farm and there it was-a beautiful, black and white cow with little calves, grazing on the field. I watched them for hours and decided never to eat meat again" (*Yes, we can!* 3. p. 48). Unlike controversial topics, personal pronouns in those passages address the reader personally, making the topic feel closer to the reality of the students.

Apart from that, the books abided to traditional archetypes related to family and gender. Families constituted of a dad, mom, and children. Men dressed in shirts and trousers with short hair; girls with long hair and clothes commonly associated to women: skirts, accessories, and warm-colors clothes. In none of the books there were images of gay couples or single-parent families, girls with short hair or women showed in what could be considered strong leading roles: police officer, construction worker or scientist.



Figure 13. Parents shown in *Yes, we can!* 3p. 11

The complete visual and lexical omission of this type of diversity demonstrates that being different according to the textbooks relates to linguistic or national differences and neglects the diversity that exists within people with apparently the same language and culture. The fact that these are foreign language textbooks may perhaps explain this particular position; however, if the Proni mentions that one of the key goals of the national English Program for middle school is to “Participate successfully in interactions that involve production and interpretation of oral and written texts in the English language within different social learning environments (Familiar and community, Literary and Ludic, Academic and educational)” (Program of study, 2011, p. 99), the way textbooks portray differences reflect the perspectives of someone that looks for them in resources, but not in ideologies.

Based on that, the value of respect behind the identity construct of the student is that of the kid who is entitled to give opinions about topics which will most likely not cause controversy (for e.g. health) and avoids clashes that come with bigger social issues such as inequality. In sum, a teenage uncritically tolerant (Brown, 2009) who believes in respect and diversity but ignores that differences in sexuality, language, resources, and gender can be used to exert injustice. The dangerous side of this seemingly gentle discourse is that it swiftly erases decades of social movements in Mexico fighting for the rights of women, indigenous people, and natural resources during the last decades (Bizberg and Zapata, 2010). Additionally, it takes away the possibility to learn about similar fights taking place in other countries.

4.2.3 Ethnicity and respect for cultural differences

Since the presentation of the national English program, the Secretary of education mentioned that the Proni was created

with the goal of developing the multilingual and multicultural competences required to successfully overcome the challenges of a globalised world, build a wide perspective of the linguistic and cultural diversity in a global level, respect their own culture and that of the others (Program of study, p. 9).

For this reason, it was important to analyse how the textbooks portrayed ethnicity and promoted respect for the culture of people in other countries. According to Banks and Banks (1996) ethnicity can be defined as an identity socially constructed that involves different aspects of a person's life that identifies her with others. Aspects that span from race, nationality, religion, language, traditions, sexuality and even myths of a common origin Eriksen (2002). Analysis on the textbooks' semiotic resources, however, demonstrated that their discourses valued simplified aspects of ethnicity and

promoted respect for things that could be considered oversimplified and stereotyped portrayals of ethnic groups (Brown, 2000).

In the figure below, for instance, a group of men belonging to a tribe in Papua New Guinea is used to illustrate a passage about linguistic diversity around the world. At first glance the photograph seems to be the perfect example of racial and cultural differences; seven adults wearing what seems to be traditional attires posing with lush vegetation in the background. However, the name of the tribe or even the exact geographical location where they come from are not included; thus, the huge cultural and linguistic diversity of those islands is enclosed into one nameless photograph.



Figure 14. A group of men from Papua New Guinea in All on Board! 1 p. 143

Another example of stereotyping and respect for cultural differences appears in a passage about “British manners” found in Crossover 2 p. 28. Throughout the five paragraphs, behaviours associated to good manners: ways of greeting, order when queuing and punctuality are said to be necessary things a foreigner should know when visiting the country. As if they were exclusive practices of British people, lexical resources position British people as more civilised in comparison to the Mexican student planning to visit Great Britain. The phrase: “This may make it sound like it is difficult

to travel to Britain. However, if you observe how people behave and remember your manners, you won't have any problems", confirms this perspective.

In the same book only one page before, Japanese and "westerners" (again, generalising numerous ethnic groups from Europe and America into one single concept) are compared. Repeating the pattern of Asians being considered quiet while westerners expressive (Kumaravadivelu, 2013), the textbook uses the words "secretive" and "direct" to describe each of them even when one of the starting sentences of the text mentions that one should "avoid getting stuck in the trap of stereotypes".

This construct of ethnicity and consequently of respect towards cultural differences of the three textbooks coincide with the concepts of respect discussed in the previous point. They teach that ethnicity circles around looks, language, clothing, food, celebrations, and character traits associated to some nationalities. Respect, therefore, is to maintain oneself at a safe distance from others while emulating their behaviours. This position avoids touching on the cultural clashes that people experience when they voluntarily or involuntarily immerse themselves in a foreign language, and the social phenomena that causes intercultural meetings besides studying and vacationing (for e.g. wars, famine, business; etc).

They also do not take into account that ethnicity is a complex concept that involves always evolving social dynamics that affect all areas of a person's life, and that even people within an apparently same context may identify themselves in many different ways (Kubota and Lin, 2012). Something surprising considering that Mexico possesses a long history of migration with generations of people who find themselves moving between Mexico and the USA; two geographically close, but socioeconomically and culturally contrasting countries.

4.3 Conclusion

Through this chapter I have answered both of my research questions. First, data showed that the national identity semiotically constructed belonged to the Mexican EFL student. Visually and lexically, this student represents a person with a well established socioeconomic position that values achieving success according to the school system: working efficiently to obtain good grades. Although this person is aware of some of the struggles that may differentiate some people from others, she is uncritical about it and sees issues of inequality as something far away from her.

The international identity was associated to foreigners. Identities between native and non-native English speakers differed in that people from the USA and UK were given international importance while non-native appeared decorating a superficial discourse of multiculturalism and how students may get involved in it through English. Hence suppressing valuable and complex aspects that compose the ethnic identity of a person.

Both identity constructs and the values attached to them have implications in the way practitioners and students that seek for trustworthy information in these textbooks perceive their immediate realities and the outside world. In the following and concluding chapter I will proceed to expand the discussion on those implications.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This work of research approached the topic of identity constructs and hegemonic values within three Mexican national textbooks belonging to the Proni (National English Program) through the use of the MCDA framework proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012). The purpose of the study was to expose and problematise national and foreign discourses embedded in lexical and visual semiotic resources. The relevance of the study lays in the influence that discourses exert in the formation of ideologies that have the potential to set the “truths” of the status quo (Foucault, 1972), which many times are used to covertly maintain social structures of inequality others under a discourse of empowerment and personal growth (van Dijk, 2008).

5.1 Limitations

Given the subjective nature of social research, my study found two main limitations. The first limitation was that it was not possible to compare the contents of the students’ textbooks with the teacher’s versions. This limitation, however, it was due to their inexistence in the governments’ digital catalogue at the time of my research. The second limitation regards to the claims and findings coming from my personal judgement and knowledge supported by the research, possibly making them unsuitable for generalisations.

Despite both limitations, this study still complements very well with relevant research already done about Proni’s material mentioned in Chapter 1. By focusing on the analysis of semiotic resources as tools used to build identities with specific characteristics and values, my research also marks an excellent starting point for future

research on discourses found within government's material in the area of EFL and others from the perspective of the critical theory.

5.2 Relevance of findings for practitioners and students

Even though policy documents claim that the goal of the Proni is to provide Mexican students the tools they need to immerse themselves in a global dynamic; the contents of the textbooks suppress many of the harsh realities that an overwhelming amount of Mexicans experience in one way or another, ultimately suppressing the students themselves. The textbooks also offer a discourse of the learning of English from a place of privilege where English is seen as a tool that grants anyone access to good experiences, but directly supporting common international stereotypes.

Living in a country rich in ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in itself, witnesses of a controversial history of international migration with a native English speaker nation, Mexican practitioners and students should be aware of how these subtle discourses silence the voices of people in unfavourable situations inside and outside of their immediate contexts. Above all, they should be aware of how textbooks may keep them from developing their critical thinking by introducing role models that attach themselves to conventional ideals of kindness, hard work and respect while creating the illusion of being part of a global community that supposedly respects and understands cultural differences.

5.3 Final remarks and recommendations

The identity constructions revealed by this research demonstrate that despite the existence of local (López-Gopar and Sughrua, 2014; Sayer, 2017; Lopez, Lobatos and Gálvez, 2019) and international (Guilherme, 2007; Block, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2013) research that exposes how discourses distort and bias important concepts related

to the teaching of English and the identities of people; official institutions continue to distribute hegemonic ideologies within their material. Discourses that for people unaccustomed to problematising what they read can pass as truths, contributing to the limitation of practices that promote real social changes.

Holding onto the idea that textbooks while official are not the absolute authorities in the classroom, further research should be aimed to critically explore the contingency of teachers already using these type of material with the purpose of contributing to the development of critical literacy in Mexico and abroad.

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