READING GENDERED MEDIA TEXTS CRITICALLY: CHALLENGES AND

POSSIBILITIES OF USING CLA PRINCIPLES IN AN EFL CLASS

A Thesis Presented by

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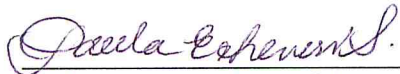Master's in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

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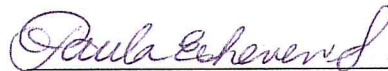Approved as to style and content by:

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DEDICATION

To my beloved Paulina: You are and always will be my greatest accomplishment.

To my partner Raul, whose love and constant support gave me strength.

To God: The light that illuminated this path.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

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March 2019

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Learning a foreign language goes far beyond becoming a proficient user of some grammatical structures and vocabulary. It should serve a greater purpose: One that expands learners' horizons, and as Paulo Freire (1970) suggests, enables them to *read the world* through language. Critical Language Awareness (CLA) is an approach that can help them fulfill this purpose. The present study explored the challenges and possibilities of incorporating CLA principles to foster a critical reading of gendered media texts in an EFL course. Data included video-recorded sessions during scaffolding activities with learners, students' responses to CLA-based materials designed by the teacher, a teachers' journal, and a final questionnaire. Results from the study suggest that despite students' difficulty to

cope with language in some media texts, CLA activities helped them to not only enhance oral communication, but also develop skills to identify gendered discourses in media texts and question the ways these positioned them as readers. Data also evidenced that fostering CLA in a FL classroom requires teachers' self-awareness of what a *critical reading* of texts implies, not only as to how these principles could be fostered by means of different class activities, but in terms of one's own understanding of personal biases when confronted with issues such as *race, gender, age,* and *social status*. Such understanding could also lead to a better informed selection of texts and materials for the tasks to be carried out in the sense that they would accomplish the purpose of helping students with the bettering of their communicative skills while raising awareness of the non-neutral nature of texts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDIXES

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

Living in a media-saturated world has brought about significant changes in the way literacies should be taught in schools (Kellner, 2004a; Kellner & Share, 2007; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). Rapidly, the print-dominated texts that once supported teachers' educational practices have been taken over by far more complex combinations of audiovisual and multimedia resources, which have transformed the way reading and writing was taught in schools in the former era (Kress, 2003). Kress states that the world that is *told*, and the world that is *shown* are different, and this has generated new dynamics in power relationships which, as he estimates, will result in profound economic, social, and political struggles that upcoming generations should prepare for (p.1). Because technological advances have entirely reshaped the way people communicate, dealing with *literacy* in the contemporary world, implies embracing a whole new logic in educational paradigms as to how readers and writers interact with a new array of visual texts (Albers, Vasquez & Harste, 2008; Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996).

Unlike before, learners these days are constantly exposed to information that reaches them in multiple manners: *the internet, music, television, the radio, magazines* also known as *media* (Macedo & Steinberg, 2007; Morrel, 2002). Briggs and Cobley (2002) refer to *media texts* as constantly evolving texts, which people produce in different formats (print and visual) with the purposes of *conveying meaning, engaging an audience a*nd *causing reactions* that continue to justify their production (p. 5). Because these texts are not neutral, they foster ideologies, values and beliefs that represent the interests of some at the expense of others, making it imperative for educators to engage in raising awareness

about this amongst their learners (Kellner, 2004a; Kellner & Share, 2005). Gerbner (2003) argues that television, for instance, plays a major role in children's education, and T.V shows' producers are more interested in delivering what "sells" (e.g. violence and crime) to increase their ratings, than in creating programs which spread and promote positive values in family households (as cited in Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). Additionally, Macedo and Steinberg claim that in fact, media play a bigger role in educating people than schools and teachers do themselves.

Therefore, scholars concerned with the impact that media can have in people's own beliefs and values (Ferguson 1998, 2004; Kellner, 1995; Kellner & Share, 2005; Luke & Freebody, 1997), advocate for a language teaching approach that helps learners to develop an understanding as to *how* media is connected to issues of *power* and *ideology*. They all call for a reconstruction of educational practices that enable people to be both: critical readers of possible hegemonic discourses embedded in media texts, and also producers of counter hegemonic discourses to challenge mainstream misrepresentations of people in terms of their *race, sexual preferences, social status, age* and *gender*. To these scholars, such approach to teaching would empower learners to become more informed texts readers, and active participants of a democratic society (Kellner, 1995; Kellner & Share, 2005). An active social participation in the view of Henry Giroux (2009), entails leading learners to "critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for granted assumptions about the way we live" (as cited in Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009, p. 448).

As a parent, teacher, and future researcher in the field of Critical Literacy, I have been profoundly touched by many of the relevant ideas that inform research on critical work particularly on issues of gender and gender stereotypes (Cameron, 2003; Sunderland, 2004, 2006; Talbot, 2003). Living in a still very patriarchal-dominated society, in which gender-related discrimination acts affect people's lives and *access* to different opportunities is an undeniable reality that started to concern me more than ever before in the course of the Master's program. I began to question myself as to how much relevance I gave to the way I spoke to my own daughter about her place in such an unequal society; her rights as a human being and as a woman, and the respect she should have towards other people's rights _especially her classmates'; and how values such as respect, compassion and tolerance, which I wanted to foster in her, were materialized through the language she was exposed to on a daily basis.

At the same time, I wondered whether I was doing enough to replicate my new-gained awareness amongst my own language learners about how one could be more of a critical reader and less of a passive consumer of information. These ideas made me wonder whether while teaching a foreign language I could also find spaces for the analysis, questioning, and critique of some of the teaching materials I brought to support my pedagogic practices with my students, which had hitherto served only a linguistic purpose in my lessons. But choosing the best alternative to foster *critical thinking* in class among the many approaches I had been presented with during the Master's program: critical literacy (CLs), critical media literacy (CML), critical language awareness (CLA), critical discourse analysis (CDA) was not an easy task. They all sounded interesting, pertinent to the needs of our educational context, and I had a clear idea in mind that, regardless the path

I selected to embark on a research project of this nature, the aim would be the same: the search for a more emancipatory and democratic kind of pedagogy. In the end, my own views to foreign language teaching and learning resonated with the ideas of scholars in the line of texts analysis (e.g., Clark, Fairclough, Ivanic & Jones, 1990; Fairclough, 1992; Janks, 1993, 2010, 2014; Wallace, 1992) who agree on the fact that *critical* and *analytical* perspectives about language teaching are not mutually exclusive and being critical should encompass a command of the language that grants learners access to a variety of genres.

Among the many spaces where constructions of gender may occur, the school is one where individuals begin to shape their own identities through all the interactions that take place there, including *linguistic* interactions. Since language is the vehicle through which people learn and build their own understanding of the world, it is also the means for ideas to be produced and reproduced in the manner of discourses. Jane Sunderland (2004) describes a discourse as a "way of seeing the world" (p. 28). She affirms that *gender* is constructed through linguistic utterances and questions the extent to which gendered discursive practices might even affect the construction of a person's self or identity. To the author, making generalizations such as, "*Women are good at…*" or "*Men are bad at…*" is the result of positioning people in certain ways according to their sex, which results in what is known as "sexism". This is often the cause of discrimination of men and women in different social contexts and situations (see also Foucault's ideas on *subject positioning*, 1984). It is statements like these which have become naturalized in media texts. The naturalization of gender norms leads people to reproduce common-sense ideas about men and women that often results in stereotyping, discrimination, and marginalization (see Cameron, 2003; Sunderland, 2004, 2006; Talbot, 2003).

Although a good amount of research has been conducted to document gendered discourses in the classrooms in international contexts (Boersma et al., 1981; Dart & Clark, 1988; Francis, 2000; Jelly, 1988; Jule, 2001; Skelton, 2001; Vandrick, 1999; Warrington & Younger, 2000, as cited in Sunderland, 2004) and in Colombian educational contexts (Castañeda, 2008; Castañeda, 2012; Duran, 2006; Mendieta, 2009; Pongutá, 2013; Rojas 2012), scholars interested in this field (Cameron, 2003; Sunderland, 2004, 2006; Talbot, 2003) continue to urge schools and language teachers to play a more *active role* in the observation of gender construction in teaching-learning environments. Having the possibility to incorporate media texts as a means to not only teach the foreign language, but also raise awareness about gendered language present in those texts, I found a strong motivation to conduct a study about the *challenges and possibilities of reading gendered discourses in media texts*, and (as advocates of critical work propose) try to contribute to the construction of a more *emancipatory* type of education from this perspective.

A pedagogical approach that offers teachers tools to analyze issues of *race, ethnicity, class* and *gender* embedded in language is CLA (Critical Language Awareness). Grounded on Critical Literacy (CL) theories, which advocate for teaching students how to read from a more critical stance as opposed to simply decode words in texts (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p.19), CLA "offers linguistic tools for the critical analysis of texts" (Janks, 2010, p.15) and encourages language learners to assume more critical positions towards texts and even challenge them. The aim is to have *true critical readers* who can "resist the power of print and do not believe everything they read" (Janks, 1993, p. III). In order to achieve this goal, learners become aware of how texts, which have been purposefully constructed by someone, position them as readers, entice them to see the world from the

producer's perspective and exert power over their choices after interacting with them. Janks (2010) states that it is "difficult to resist a text that speaks a discourse we are comfortable with" (p.71). Unless readers learn how to take distance from the discursive practices that have become *common sense* in their context, they will continue to be affected by the ideas of those who are in control. CLA then offers readers strategies to analyze and deconstruct written and visual texts in order to read against them.

In recent decades in Colombia, studying the effects of integrating media in the FL classroom as a means to enhance linguistic competence has become a focus of interest among scholars (Carrero, 2012; Casallas & Londoño, 2000; Castro & Navarro, 2014; Cuestas, 2006; Duarte, Tinjacá & Sarmiento, 2010; Pérez, 2010). There are also several studies that inform the exploration of issues of gender and its impact on students' learning process (Castañeda, 2008; Castañeda, 2012; Duran, 2006; Mendieta, 2009; Pongutá, 2013; Rojas, 2012). However, none of the studies published by the major Colombian EFL/ESL journals such as *Ikala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura; Profile; Revista Lenguaje; Revista Matices; CALJ (Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal),* and *Revista How*, report the use of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) principles in an EFL class as a tool to foster the identification of *gendered* discourses in media texts.

Some articles in the above-cited studies inform the effects of media texts (e.g., video, songs, audiovisual aids, movies, television advertisements) being used to enhance students' linguistic skills, yet they do not refer to the use of media-based activities to empower students to challenge issues of power embedded in language. Cuestas (2006), for example, reported a significant improvement of a group of secondary school students' attitudes towards English through the use of songs. Similarly, Pérez (2010), Duarte, Tinjacá

and Carrero (2012) and Castro and Navarro (2014), explored the effects of using songs to increase motivation and foster a better development of oral production in the target language. Casallas and Londoño (2000) analyzed the effects of using audiovisual and play activities for the enhancement of oral proficiency in a group of young learners at a bilingual school and, Sarmiento (2010) reported the results of an experience with a guided program for the reading of images. This program was carried out with young learners from a public school and aimed at fostering the development of critical thinking and communicative skills.

Some other studies that I found in the literature discuss how issues of gender and positioning affect students' learning of a foreign language. For instance, Pongutá (2013) and Duran (2006) studied the role that discourses of gender and power played among learners, and how language positioning affected their confidence to use the language in positive or negative ways. Castañeda (2008) explored gender positioning with preschoolers in order to learn how language learners' identities relate to FL learning. Castañeda (2012) developed a CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis)-based project among FL learners through an online-talk-interaction in order to observe how students used the language as a tool to negotiate relationships of power while developing linguistic skills. Rojas (2012) conducted a study with adult female learners to foster egalitarian discourses and to raise awareness of how discourses of power could silence some voices in the learning environment, and Mendieta (2009) reported a research experience in a female private school where critical thinking was fostered among learners by questioning issues of gender discrimination through literature.

As seen, some of these studies tackle media uses in the language classroom while others report experiences where gender issues in class interactions are addressed; however, they are not concerned with *how* learners themselves can identify gendered discourses in the media texts they use as a means to learn the foreign language. Although this literature evidences an increasing interest in learning the effects of fostering critical thinking practices among language learners, it does not provide evidence of studies carried out in our contexts similar to the one this paper reports.

Findings in the review of the literature coincide with baseline data I collected in the language center where this research was conducted. In September 4th, 2012, I gathered some preliminary data with the purpose of exploring how teachers in this center used media texts to support their lessons. Data revealed that the English instructors used media texts mostly to: a) enhance the development of language skills such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; b) entertain students in class; and c) reinforce class contents covered in previous lessons. These conclusions were supported by class observations, some teacher interviews, and a researcher's journal. After analyzing the information collected, I also arrived at the conclusion that, although a few instructors asked questions about the content of the media texts they were presenting, none of them addressed the analysis of how language in the media may perpetuate problematic power relations through their teaching practices, let alone how grammatical choices in those texts were geared towards manipulating people's ways of thinking and acting, just as Janks (2010) and Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville and Newfield (2013) and other CLA scholars have suggested.

Following CLA principles, the present qualitative study intended to answer this question: *What are the challenges and possibilities of using Critical Language Awareness*

principles to foster a critical reading of gendered media texts among EFL students? In

order to find an answer for this question, I prepared and implemented a unit incorporating

CLA-based activities, including different types of media texts and in-class scaffolding

activities. I carried out my observations during a *listening-speaking*-based English course at

a language center in Medellin among learners whose ages ranged from 16 to 25 years old.

In order to provide detailed information of this qualitative research, first, I discuss

the theories that framed this study. Second, I describe the setting where the study took

place, and present relevant information about its participants; then I give insight into the

scaffolding activities carried out along the implementation phase of the unit and explain

other activities that aimed at raising CLA among learners; subsequently, I report the main

findings and interpretations of the data I collected, and lastly, I draw some conclusions and

discuss the relevance of this study along with its limitations for further similar studies.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws mainly on Critical Literacy (CL) theories and more specifically on Critical Language Awareness (CLA). Critical Literacy entails going beyond the obvious in the content of texts to infer what purposes the authors had in writing them and how those texts intend to position the reader (Farralelli, 2009; Luke & Woods, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Shor, 1999; Vasquez, 2001).This implies monitoring students' engagement with texts, to the point that they can go from being passive readers, to play a role of "text critiques" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, as cited in McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 16), and produce knowledge; for instance, in the creation of counter-narratives that challenge misrepresentations of their own lives experiences (Goodman & Cocca, 2014, p. 212). Thus, Critical Literacy entails "to disrupt the common place, to interrogate multiple viewpoints, to focus on sociopolitical issues and, to take action to promote social justice", which Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002) have described as the four main principles of CL (pp. 382-384). In contexts where the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has traditionally been focused on developing language proficiency, Critical Literacy has proved to have positive effects in helping learners to, not only develop better reading and writing skills in the target language, but also understand the relevance of reading from a critical stand despite cultural differences in regards to FL teaching and learning practices (Ko, 2013; Ko & Wang, 2009, 2013).

A line of Critical Literacy concerned with the above-mentioned principles and with the power that texts exert on readers' choices is *Critical Language Awareness* (CLA). CLA, which draws on CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) theories, proposes an in-depth analysis of the role that language plays in the constitution of power and access (Janks,

2010). This scholar who has taken special interest in exploring the implications of teaching from this perspective, affirms that, "CLA, which offers linguistic tools for the critical analysis of texts, fits easily under the broader umbrella of Critical Literacy" (2010, p.15). In other words, CLA is a pedagogical application of discourse analysis that allows learners to become aware of the fact that, as relevant as being able to use a FL language in a functional manner (Language Awareness), it is also important to be "critical" as to how language itself contributes to maintain issues of domination in our society. As Clark, Fairclough, Ivanic, and Martin-Jones (1990) state,

> The purpose of CLA is to help students develop not only operational and descriptive knowledge of linguistic practices of their world, but also a critical awareness of how these practices are shaped by, and shape, social relationships and relationships of power. (p. 249)

Building on this idea, Fairclough (1992) argues that not raising such awareness in education, prevents learners from becoming active participants in a democratic society:

> People cannot be effective citizens in a democratic society if their education cuts them off from critical consciousness of key elements within their physical and social environment. If we are committed to education establishing resources for citizenship, critical awareness of the language practices of one's speech community is an entitlement. (p.6)

Such language practices can be materialized in the manner of *discourses*, which this author defines as a "process of social interaction that includes verbal and visuaL language" (2001, p.22), and "constitute ideologically determined ways to talk about people, places, and phenomena in general" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 68).

It is mainly in acts of discourses that the transmission of ideologies, the teaching and

learning of values and meanings, and the perpetuation of traditions and ideas are passed on in social contexts (2010, p.531). Citing Jarowsky and Coupland (1999), Sunderland (2004), who has devoted a significant part of her work to the analysis of *gendered discourses* in different contexts, points out that discourses exist if they are socially accepted, and this can only occur when they are "recognizable", yet in order to identify and recognize a discourse there needs to be a co-construction between the language user and a given text (p.28). In other words, realizing that some ideology is being perpetuated through a given discourse is not something that readers normally do in their interactions with texts. However, the author recalls that discourses are not always easy to "spot" and most of them escape the naked eye if readers are not properly trained to identify and recognize them (p.28).

Such purpose can be achieved by fostering CLA practices; whose goal is precisely to help readers become aware of the impact that word choices have in texts. This can grant them access to "powerful forms of language, and to multiple audiences, platforms, and modes of distribution" (Janks, 2010, p. 133). Although there is not a particular formula for doing CLA, scholars interested in this particular line of work have provided some models for the analysis of *power* issues embedded in texts. Fairclough (1992, 2001) for example, proposes a model to deconstruct texts composed of three stages: *description, interpretation* and *explanation*. The first, refers to the description of the language used based on the wordings chosen by the writer; the second has to do with how discourses are interpreted by the reader and the third stage refers to the types of questions that are asked about the ideological origins and power effects of a particular language, which can ultimately be transformed in discourses (p.132).

Following on his steps, Janks (1993) developed a project to help South African students to resist domination and discrimination under the *Apartheid State*. Her model

proposes analyzing a wide range of texts (news, advertising, and other media texts) posing

questions such as the following:

      a) What is said or hidden in this text?

      b) Who is addressed or excluded from the text?

      c) What are the intentions for the writer's choice of certain words?

      d) Who do these particular words serve?

      e) Who do these words empower or disempower? (p. iii)

Similarly, Wallace (as cited in Burns & Hood, 1998) adapted Kress's (1989) model, to

propose a set of questions as a framework for a critical analysis of texts:

1. Why has this text been written?

2. What is the text about?

3. To whom is this text addressed?

4. How is the topic written about?

5. What other ways of writing about the topic are there? (p. 16)

Another example of how the analysis of power issues embedded in texts is that of

Sunderland (2004), who elaborates on the notions of *social actors* and *social action*

presented by Van Leeuwen (1996, 1997), which relate to "ideas, knowledge, beliefs and

practices (including linguistic practices)" that contribute to the identification of discourses

in texts (p.31). In this exercise of "discourse spotting", Sunderland looks at labeling

practices present in the text such as repetitions in the lexicon used, or how the *social actors*

are dealt with in the use of nouns. In addressing *social action*, she looks at the types of

verbs used and the inclusion or exclusion of words in collocations; in other words, the type

of information that could have been included but was purposefully omitted (p. 32).

For all the scholars above, one of the major benefits of this pedagogy lies on the fact

that students become aware of the various ways that exist of thinking and acting upon

different matters since what text producers say is not necessarily the *only* possible point of

view on a particular issue. Once students realize that texts' messages are not randomly

produced, they begin to question various forms of coercive power, such as social norms that

are exerted through language and naturalized through the perpetuation of discourses

(Fairclough, 2010, p.30). They also learn how to make more informed decisions as to the

extent they are willing to accept those norms as common sense or resist them: "When the

messages are naturalized, people seldom question the transparent social construction of the

representations" (Luke, 1994, p.10, as cited in Macedo & Steinbergh, 2007).

Some international research studies show that CLA contributes to the development

of critical thinking and the improvement of academic literacy skills among college

transitional English learners and other types of learners (Bernstein, 2004; Coles & Wall,

1987; Hull, 1993; Jordan, 2007; Lancaster & Taylor, 1992; Lesley, 2001; Morrel, 2003, as

cited in Sanchez & Paulson, 2008). Morrel's (2003) case study, for example, demonstrated

that students who were part of a minority group due to their ethnic, racial and social

conditions were capable of challenging misrepresentations of urban youth communities as

they also developed academic literacy (p. 169). Coles and Wall's (1987) study, on the other

hand, showed that when issues of access to working opportunities are tackled using

students' personal experiences and backgrounds, they develop the ability to identify

different discourses of power and domination embedded in work-related texts.

Like the researchers above, Lancaster and Taylor (1992) demonstrated students'

capability to identify discourses that affect their own values when they are confronted with

such kinds of texts. In general terms, the above-mentioned studies concluded that students

in transitional English courses (often labeled as "underprepared") could in fact engage in

critical work as they started to access all kinds of discourses. After implementing an

activity to foster critical thinking skills among students from college transitional English,

Sanchez herself came to the conclusion that, "The dialogic nature of the classroom was a

perfect place for students to engage in discussions about the socially constructed nature of

language and the unequal social practices resulting from language practices at play in the

real world" (p.172).

Despite the benefits mentioned above, it is also true that fostering CLA in the class

environment has presented some researchers with challenges and lingering questions.

Wallace (1999) discusses the results of a critical reading course in England with EFL

mainstream students, aiming at seeing the effects of applying CLA principles in non-

marginalized contexts to analyze discriminatory forms of language in several texts (p. 108).

In her conclusions, she raised questions about the *biased* nature of the political texts chosen

for the implementation and the extent to which raising awareness on issues of social justice

could respond to long or short term needs of students. Additionally, McKinney (as cited in

Wallace, 1999) reported students' resistance to a critical reading course that aimed at

enabling a group of students of color to become aware of the complexity of the socio-

political relationships they were immersed in following the *Apartheid*. Contrary to what the

researcher expected, far from empowering those students who belonged to marginalized

groups of society to engage actively in critical classroom interactions, the nature of the

course made them "feel uncomfortable" (pp. 100-101).

The successes and challenges mentioned above sparked my interest in learning what

I, having a critical agenda in mind, could learn from a study drawing from CLA principles

developed in this particular context. I was also interested in helping students recognize how

language was covertly used to create positions of power or disempowerment among people,

15

yet unlike these studies, I intended to gear my focus of attention on *power* and *gender*, issues that Sunderland (2004) has explored to understand how gender inequalities are perpetuated through the acceptance and reinforcement of discursive practices in different contexts.

Sunderland subscribes to the idea that first of all, *gender,* as opposed to biological *sex* (masculine or feminine), has to do with differences that are concerned with human behavior, which are "learned, mediated or constructed" (p.p. 14-15). According to her, the issue of gender is more a matter of *social constructionism* than one *of social practice*. This is to say that, culture and society play a crucial role in the construction of people's notion of gender, which is mistakenly bound to that of biological sex. In other words, because of their innate sexual attributes, men and women have traditionally been assigned certain roles within the society and they are expected to act accordingly; for example, the notion of women being "careers by default" or men being the "household providers". This male-female binary (as the only possible gender categories) coerces people to subscribe to a particular set of common beliefs in relation to what being a man or a woman entails regardless of their own *gender identities* (p. 18).

Like Sunderland, Judith Butler (1993) affirms that there is nothing inherent to being a man or a woman, which should make us decide what to wear (dresses or suits) or how to act (as cited in Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). This means that we really act following social norms that have coerced our freedom to feel and think otherwise in order to maintain the *male-female* gender binary. Rosenblum and Travis (2008) agree with the idea that disrupting such norms and structures is severely punished by society and the consequences of doing so have led to acts of violence and discrimination such as *misogyny, transphobia, homophobia,* just to mention some. To the authors, gender, as a language with only two

possible meanings, can result in damaging communicative interactions. They all coincide in affirming that gendered discourses have become a problem that has caused boys and girls, men and women to establish relations of dominance among each other, and this is the reason they urge teachers to foster practices of texts' analysis in the classroom that empower learners to resist dominant gendered discourses.

Although there are not a lot of studies in the literature that inform the incorporation of CLA principles to raise awareness of gender issues in media texts, I found, however other critical work-based studies that do so. For instance, there have been studies informing the use of critical media literacy (CML) principles in classrooms to foster a reading of gender issues in texts: Hedley, Markowitz and Puchner (2015) implemented a unit focusing on gender stereotypes to show seventh and eighth graders how media constructs stereotypical representations of women and men which affect their positions in the workplace. Their findings suggest that the level of awareness about the issues tackled during the implementation was raised. Similarly, Sargent and Corse (2013) informed the results of an experience using media to engage undergraduate students in theories of gender construction, through the creation of photo essays. Their aim was to raise awareness of social constructions around the concept of *gender* and its intersection with categories of race, social class and sexuality The researchers concluded that the exercise allowed learners to carry out essays that surpassed the critical analysis in terms of gender, "… students are able to analyze and demonstrate how gender is negotiated, transgressed, affirmed and/or reproduced in social interaction" (p. 246).

In a different context, Ajayi (2015) informed the results of using critical multimodal literacy to foster a reading of issues of gender in media texts among three Nigerian high

school students. Results showed that both teacher and students succeeded in finding spaces in the curricula to challenge the texts analyzed and promote female students' agency to resist hegemonic practices of socially produced gender structures in Nigeria.

Gender issues have historically permeated different aspects of Colombian society, too. Every day, TV news programs and newspapers report acts of hatred and violence that are committed as a product of gender discrimination. Because these media reports are sometimes biased, it is imperative that educators and researchers in our country, like the ones mentioned above, take an active role in fostering practices conducive to a more informed reading of these texts in their classrooms.

All in all, experts in the field, seem to agree on two facts: (a) that in a world saturated by media, raising awareness on how language is used in media texts would greatly contribute to social change and responsible citizenship (Comber, 2001; Giroux, 2009; Janks, 2010; Kellner & Share 2005; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007), and (b) that among many of the social contexts where raising awareness of the power of language is needed, the school is perhaps one of the most important places where work towards social emancipation has to be carried out (Janks et al., 2013; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Shor, 1999; Vasquez, 2001). Therefore, Colombian universities and language centers should not be the exception. They should start including Critical Language Awareness principles as a relevant component of their curricular designs. In doing so, they would be teaching students to read not only *the word* but to read *the world* as Freire and Macedo (1987) have urged them to.

Setting

This study took place in an English extension program offered by the school of languages of a public university in Medellin, where I was a teacher for about five years. The program is offered outside the main university campus in a building located in the heart of the city, and it welcomes students from in and out of the university. Approximately one thousand students from different socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds and ages take courses in different languages, mainly English. Students join the program for a variety of reasons that go from improving their listening and speaking abilities so that they can communicate with foreigners or relatives abroad, to enhancing their linguistic competence in order to have access to other academic programs.

The English program is oriented towards the development of the four language skills expected to be acquired in either of the two types of programs existing: one is the regular program, composed of 12 courses of 480 hours taught over the course of 6 semesters at a rate of two sessions of 90 minutes each per week. The other one is the intensive program, composed of 6 courses of 240 hours taught over the course of 3 semesters at a rate of 4 sessions of 90 minutes per week. Aligned with the *Common European Framework*, courses 1 through 6 in the regular program and 1 through 3 in the intensive programs respectively are considered basic. Courses 7 to 12 and 4 to 6 are considered advanced.

Between basic and advanced courses, there are transitional courses, known as courses 3 and 5 in the intensive program, and 5 and 9 in the regular programs. While in most levels students follow the textbook *American Headway,* the transitional courses 3, 5 and 9 focus on listening and speaking skills using materials other than the above-mentioned textbook. The purpose of such courses is to provide students with

opportunities to enhance oral and listening skills while grammatical and functional contents covered along the preceding courses are "recycled". By the time students have reached courses 5 and 9 in the two programs, they are expected to be *independent* language learners. The fact that course contents in levels three, five and nine are usually chosen by teachers, gives instructors license to include a variety of activities that range from practicing listening skills through songs, web pages, video clips and movies, to engaging in discussions about different types of texts. It was in the context of this instructional freedom, that it was possible for me to design a curricular unit for the analysis of the language used in media texts.

Participants

The participants in this study were 12 students, ages 16 to 25, taking the listening and speaking transition course *three* (basic) in the intensive program. This was a course which main objective consisted in allowing learners with opportunities to recycle material covered in previous courses while placing an emphasis on spoken communication. This characteristic of the course made it possible for me to incorporate media texts aiming at doing both: foster the use of oral skills and follow the intended agenda of this study. The group was composed of 4 young men and 8 women who were in the transition from high school to college and university programs. The majority of these students had started the English program at the language center, except for two students who had taken a placement test and had recently joined the course. They mostly came from a low to middle socio-economic background and none of them claimed to be working or having started a college or university program at the time this research was conducted.

I played both the role of teacher and researcher while I was teaching course 3 in the intensive program. By the time I was assigned this course, I had already taught all the different levels offered in the program and participated in the development of activities both, academic and cultural, which were carried out in the center throughout the year. This allows me to say that I was well acquainted with the context and had enough experience in the academic-related issues there. It is perhaps relevant to mention that the nature of students' enrollment in the courses offered at this particular language center was something that did not give us, the teachers, the possibility to get to know much about their backgrounds. Since many of them were external public, we only came to have contact with students on the very first class of the course, so this diminished the opportunity to profile participants prior to the implementation of the study. As a result of this situation, their linguistic backgrounds and language proficiency level was not information I really had from the beginning, which would have been really useful along every stage of the process.

In-class talk I had carried out with students in other courses alike (in terms of age and educational background) led me to believe that critical work in this context would be pertinent: Unmindful students' comments and jokes about people's appearance, race or sexual orientation, and *sexist* statements about what men or women were expected to be like, for instance "*women talk too much, or men don't cry*", were issues I had never known how to handle, so I would just ignore the whole situation and go on with the lesson because I thought it wasn't my duty as a *language teacher* to engage in such kinds of matters until now. Overall, this was my rationale to assume that this group of young learners, who were digital natives and whose daily lives revolved around media texts _particularly found on the Internet, could possibly benefit from learning about the damaging effects of covert

language embedded in the texts they read and produced themselves, as the authors mentioned above had suggested.

Throughout the development of this course, I realized that, like most teachers, I also included the use of media resources in my classes only as a means to spur discussions and help my students gain confidence in using the target language. However, I had never fostered the critical consumption of media texts among learners, let alone gain awareness about the presence of gendered language in those texts. The development of activities incorporating a critical agenda in our lessons helped me realize that the teaching of a foreign language could have a bigger impact in students' formative process as integral human beings who were capable of questioning and resisting ideological positions that surrounded them on the daily basis.

In the following section I will provide information as to how I was able to reach the objectives purported in this research study. Specifically, I will describe the nature of the study and its main goal, the unit design process, the data collection steps that I followed along with some details about how I carried out such data analysis.

Research Design

This qualitative study subscribes to the principles of critical research. According to McLaren (2003), critical theory allows teachers to transform their classrooms in "cultural terrains" where students are not only subjects of "indoctrination or socialization" but also become empowered and informed about social issues (p. 62). Specifically, raising awareness of the gendered nature of some media texts to foster a more critical consumption of them was the aim of this study. Van Sluys (2003) suggests that by encouraging learners to take critical positions concerning the agendas behind the construction of media texts, teachers help them to "become active participants that question how the world is and work toward more just images of what it might be" (as cited in McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 21).

A qualitative study is intended to transform the world given the impact of its characteristics, as established by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). Creswell (2007) explains that qualitative research is characterized by the following: a) Data is collected in a natural setting; b) the researcher plays a key role in the collection and organization of such data; c) data comes from multiple sources: e.g., interviews, journals, observations, etc; d) data is analyzed in an *inductive* manner (bottom up); the focus of research is placed on the participants and the meaning of the information they provide along the study; e) the design is *emergent* or in other words, it is subject to modifications along the study; f) there is a theoretical lens through which the entire research process is carried out; g) inquiry is *interpretive*: the information gathered by the researcher is subject to his/her interpretation considering historical and social factors of the context where the study has taken place;

h) there is a *holistic* account to research; in other words, the problem is observed from different angles to identify the multiple factors that could affect the obtained results. (p.p 38-39). The above mentioned characteristics coincide with those that were considered all along the design, implementation, and data collection and analysis of the present study.

In terms of research method, this study was framed as *Classroom Research,* which in the view of Allwright and Bailey (1991) is research "centered on the classroom" and focuses on *classrooms interactions* and not issues that might be the nature of inquiry in other research methods; namely, the program, the teaching and learning materials, the testing processes, etc (p. 2). Thus, the source of interest here relies entirely on what occurs in the classroom context, which includes a variety of topics that range from how teachers and learners cope with errors in language learning and production, to the effects that other linguistic interactions in classroom environments may have. For the case of this particular study, my interest was to observe whether teaching from a CLA perspective, would have any effect in students' perceptions of the materials we were to use in class, which I hoped I would be able to identify in their products (e.g. the worksheets they were to hand in or the classrooms discussions we were going to have around some of the texts I was planning to share with them), and if they would develop some critical consciousness about gendered discourses that would later allow them to identify gendered language in other media texts alike.

Although seen as a cyclical process that has traditionally involved a "nonlinear pattern of planning, acting, observing and reflecting" upon teaching practices, Susan Noffke (1997) has called for an understanding of Classroom Research from a more critical standpoint: One that acknowledges the professional, personal and political dimensions of

Action Research carried out within the realm of democratic schooling (p.2). This is to say that beyond the view of Classroom Research as a method to facilitate self-monitoring and self-reflection of teaching and learning practices, the author calls for moving from a less individualistic view of this research practice, towards a more *emancipatory* research type of activity that regards and acts towards the improvement of schools social conditions (Noffke, 1995, p. 16). Such improvement can only be achieved when research design allows all the participants in educational contexts to reflect on how their practices perpetuate issues of inequity and social injustice (Kemmins & McTaggart, 1988, as cited in Noffke, 1995). Here, the critical and the practical are not seen as two different elements of research; the former is "embedded" in the realities of learners' daily lives: "Here the major concern is whether educational goals, activities and experiences lead towards forms of life that are characterized by justice, equity caring and compassion" (Noffke, 1995, p. 20).

Because of the particular characteristics of this study (a small-scale project that was to be carried out within some time and space constraints), the participants for this study were purposefully selected. Cresswell (2007) defines *purposeful sampling* as a strategy to select participants in Qualitative studies, given the researcher's need to inform the outcome of the observed phenomenon in a particular context (p. 125). Citing Marshall and Rossman (2006), the author states that sampling can be subject to modifications during a study, which commands certain degree of flexibility on the researcher's part. Thus, the participants in this study were strategically chosen given the characteristics of the EFL course (previously mentioned). The intended focus of research was to explore to what extent the students of this FL course would become aware of hidden gendered discourses embedded in different types of media texts. Data collected included *video-recorded*

sessions of discussions about the language in the media texts, *worksheets* containing texts analyzed by students, a *teacher's journal* and a *final questionnaire* answered by students at the end of implementation. To carry out this data collection, I designed a unit incorporating CLA-based principles in the activities we were to do in class. This unit allowed me as a teacher and researcher to learn *how* language learners in the group would carry out a critical analysis of the selected media texts while they also enhanced listening and speaking skills in English. In the subsequent section, I will elaborate on the criteria considered for the unit design, and I will also describe the content of the activities I included.

Unit Design

Being aware of the fact that there is not a set of defined rules as to *how* critical literacies can be integrated in a curriculum (Comber, 2001), yet, as Fairclough (1992) affirms, it is possible to make a CLA analysis of texts accessible to FL learners given their explicit knowledge of the language in terms of syntax (p.69), I embarked on the design of a CLA-based unit to learn how possible it would be for a teacher like me, who had taught following more conventional teaching practices, to foster a critical reading of gendered media texts among my students. Luke, O'Brien and Comber (1994) affirm that, "The texts of everyday life are not innocuous, neutral texts requiring simple decoding and response… Left uninterrupted, everyday texts play major parts in building and reproducing social structures" (p. 140). In the same vein, Wallace (1992) argues that when EFL learners are not seen beyond their primary function of language learners as language critiques, they are being "marginalized as readers" (p. 62). Following these and other scholars' similar recommendations, I provided students with opportunities to problematize texts they might

26

encounter in media in the target language and allowed them to voice their thoughts and opinions regarding those texts.

Despite my personal convictions about the positive effects of critical work in the classroom, I acknowledged some scholars' arguments as to the demands of the necessary language level of students to carry out a critical analysis of hidden messages in media texts; Perkins (1998), for instance, maintains that "Uncovering hidden viewpoints or unspoken beliefs involves a subtler use of language than learners may be capable of at post-beginner stage…" (p. 37). Similarly, Eastman (1998) argues that at the early stages of the language learning process, it is "unrealistic and unfair" to expect students to have the necessary competence to state their own position about a text (p. 27). With these considerations in mind, choosing the media texts for the unit was a real challenge. However, once I decided that we would analyze texts containing gendered discourses in terms of *image*, *power and age*, I started to look for advertisements, commercials, songs, and movie excerpts that would address these issues.

As scholars in the field have advised, one does not become "critical" without proper *scaffolding* (Comber, 2001; Mc Laughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs in The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which has been defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86, as cited in Walqui, 2006). Walqui claims that scaffolding is related to the ZPD in the sense that it is others' assistance to solve learning difficulties what allows learners to reach their goals. Wood (1988) defines scaffolding as, "tutorial behavior that is contingent,

collaborative and interactive" (p. 96, as cited in Walqui, 2006). In the context of education, scaffolding occurs as a result of this process: First, the teacher provides support for the development of certain skills through systematic planning of some activities; second, he/she carries out the activities in the class, and third, the teacher assists learners in a "moment-to-moment" interaction every step of the way (p. 164).

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) state that the experience of becoming critically aware starts when teachers take the principles of critical literacy and adapt them to their classes, taking into account the needs of the specific program and, in an act of "creation", explore the issues of interest in the particular learning environment with students. In fact, the authors assert, "Even when a method has already been used, it is never quite the same in future applications" (p. 16). In line with these scholars' advice, the texts I chose positioned men and women in particular ways in terms of power, age, social class, and race. They contained information about hygiene, airlines, clothing, beverages, food, etc., and seemed ideal for this kind of analysis with students since the language used in them covertly activated stereotypical representations of women, men, old people, and people from different social classes and races. Among the types of texts chosen there were print ads, short T.V commercials, a song, and a movie excerpt.

Then, I created a series of Power Point presentations to carry out scaffolding activities in class (see appendixes A and B for scaffolding Power Point slides samples).The scaffolding activities in the context of this study were geared towards: a) raising awareness of the ways texts represented and positioned writers and readers (Janks et al., 2013) and b) showing students how to look into lexical features (i.e., the use of *nouns* and *adjectives*, the

pronoun choices in texts, and the use of *active* or *passive voice*) to uncover issues

embedded in language (Janks, 2005).

Since I couldn't find models of CLA-based courses in our context, I adapted

questions for the analysis of the above-mentioned texts following Janks's (1993) and other

scholars' proposed models (perhaps it is relevant to mention that these were applied in very

different contexts with participants who also differed a lot from those I was designing this

unit for). To facilitate the texts' analysis, I wrote questions intended to provide students

with tools for a critical reading of them. The formulated questions were similar to those

proposed by Janks (1993) and Janks et al. (2013):

    a. What does the ad want you to believe?

    b. Do you agree with *this* particular claim? (A specific sentence or phrase in the ad)

    c. How is *this* word making you take a certain position as you read the ad? (A specific chosen word)

    d. What is implied in the choice of nouns, verbs or adjectives found in the ad?

    e. The word (X) is substituting a more commonly used word. Why do you think the writer chose to do this?

    f. Who is being included in the ad? Who is being excluded?

    g. Is the image (if it applies for the text) portraying what the words imply?

    h. What is the hidden message of the ad?

    i. Who is the author of the text?

    j. How would the language change if the author of the text was a Colombian person, for example?

    k. How does my own identity affect my interpretation of this text?

Once I had selected the texts and thought about how we would analyze them, I

started to design the lesson plans for the unit. My main concern (and biggest challenge) had

to do with being able to incorporate a critical agenda in courses that were mostly designed around structural aspects of the language such as *syntax* and *vocabulary*. The primary goal of this course, as suggested in the language center syllabus, was to allow students with opportunities to "recycle" the material they had studied using *American Headway* textbooks *one* and *two*, so I went to those textbooks and reviewed the main linguistic functions covered in them.

Such particular textbook has a functional approach to the teaching of the foreign language; this is, themes are presented in terms of functions like, *greeting someone, making an appointment, complaining* about something, etc., and grammatical and semantic aspects of the language are introduced accordingly. However, readings and listening activities along its units do not spurt critical discussions and leave little room for students to go deep further into the book's texts contents or purposes. Thus, having been given the freedom to choose which of the themes would be worth revising in our *Listening & Speaking* course, I selected and grouped the topics from those two textbooks, which I thought students would need more practice on: a) *Talking about likes, preferences and routines*; b) *Discussing past events*; c) *Revising shopping useful language and expressions*; d) *Talking about life's experiences*; e) *Discussing future expectations*; f) *Speculating about things*; h) *Discussing big world events* (see appendix H for Listening & Speaking course 5 contents).

Having decided what topics, we would revise, I started to write language, content and research objectives to fulfill course and research goals. Thus, I should say that it was my own initiative to revise the contents with a critical agenda in mind, as opposed to that proposed in the textbooks. For example, covering the lesson about physical descriptions implied not only going over *adjectives* vocabulary to describe people's appearance,

physical descriptions and revising *Simple Present Tense* structure to form accurate sentences. For the purpose of this study, it also entailed: a) discussing issues of *image* and its relevance in our social context; b) analyzing language in advertisements, which positions men and women in certain ways in terms of physical appearance; c) becoming aware of how such texts create stereotypical representations of *gender* as to how men and women are expected to look like in society.

However, I must admit that formulating appropriate objectives was not an easy job to do: I found it difficult to establish the difference between *research objectives*, which focus on collecting evidence that illustrates the phenomenon of inquiry, and *content objectives*, that address the specific goals learners are expected to achieve in terms of language learning as stated in the course syllabus. Besides this, I had never applied principles of critical reading of media texts in any of my teaching practices, and this demanded a lot of reading about how this could be achieved. In the writing of every lesson, I followed a similar structure: *Lesson title, language, content and research objectives, materials, estimated time, activities* and *product* (see appendix I for a lesson sample). Despite all the challenges I faced and with the help and guidance of my advisor, I managed to write and design 12 lessons that would serve the course goals and the purpose of this research study. The process of designing this unit took breaking old personal paradigms about teaching and learning, yet this whole process led the path for incorporating new, innovative and transformative teaching practices, which I expected would guide my students towards significant learning moments.

The Unit Implementation

This unit was intended to take three weeks of class and it was divided in twelve sessions of one hour and fifty minutes each, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:50 p.m. Students attended class from Tuesday to Friday. The unit was designed taking into consideration two aspects: One of them was to achieve the main goal of the program (the one set from the language center), which was to reinforce students' listening and speaking abilities while contents previously seen in other courses were recycled. The other, was to raise students' critical awareness of language use in media texts in terms of gender. Every lesson had its own language content and research objectives. All of them were connected to the media texts being analyzed.

Such texts were purposefully chosen by me, bearing in mind the topics we would address along with the course contents (e.g., if we were to discuss physical appearance and personality traits, I selected different products' ads where men and women were portrayed in stereotypical ways; if the goal was to learn how to speculate, I looked for a media text _a song_ that would present the language form in context, but which lyrics carried embedded gendered discourses in them). Additionally, I tried to look for texts that would be attractive to students so that they would easily connect to them; for instance, in one of the lessons we watched an excerpt from a movie that was popular at the time, and in another lesson we saw a T.V commercial, which I assumed most of my students had probably seen. Nonetheless, it is important to admit and clarify that finding appropriate materials was a difficult task at times, given the particularity of some of the topics (due to their linguistic nature) and taking into account that I was expected to follow, considering both our critical agenda, and the language center course objectives. To support texts analysis and spur discussion in class,

some scaffolding activities were carried out with the help of the *Power Point* presentation I previously mentioned.

It is pertinent to mention that this unit was originally designed for students with a higher level of English: It was thought for a group of learners taking course five, who by then would have at least 400 hours of instruction in the FL. Therefore, original texts and scaffolding activities had a certain degree of difficulty. However, due to administrative circumstances, the course was reassigned at the last minute, and although it was still a *Listening-Speaking* based course, these students were in level three as opposed to level five. This made a considerable difference of 160 hours less of instruction in the FL.

At the beginning of the whole implementation, I carried out some activities to learn students' background knowledge of media texts in general. I asked about what kinds of media texts they had been exposed to in previous lessons, and I presented some advertisements for them to answer questions about the images and language in them. As students started to get familiar with the methodology, we moved towards the analysis of more complex media texts such as songs, movies and video clips, in terms of embedded discourses in these texts. We started to explore how lyrics, ads language, and movie video clips scripts contained words that, although harmless at first glance, were in fact discriminatory towards people due to their race, social status, age and gender.

After students had become more knowledgeable of certain aspects of texts deconstruction such as *positioning, representation, identity, power,* and others (by means of scaffolding activities using the Power Point presentation I had developed), we deepened into the issue of *gender*, and I exposed them more to texts which contained language that

represented men and women in particular ways. Once we covered every topic, I asked them to do some activity related to what we had worked on that week. Some of the activities were individual and others in-small groups. Then, at the end of the implementation, students prepared a Power Point presentation in which they were asked to choose and problematize a text of their own. It was in this part of the process that learners got to analyze media texts according to their own interests. I encouraged them to look for a media text which they had probably not seen as problematic until that point; for instance, a song they enjoyed listening to or a movie excerpt they had liked watching. Thus, scaffolding would serve the purpose of *explaining, demonstrating, guiding, practicing* and *reflecting* as McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004, p.p 39-40) have suggested. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will describe the activities that took place every week in detail:

Week one. The first week started with an exploratory lesson to learn about students' previous level of awareness as to how media texts use language to perpetuate issues of gender, age, and race. Students were presented with some ads in which language was intentionally and somehow explicitly used to stereotype men and women in terms of their physical appearance, age, sex, and race (see appendix C for first lesson sample). The purpose of this activity was to collect data as a starting point to see the impact of this implementation towards the end of the whole unit. The rest of the week, we worked around representations of *gender and body image in media.* Through the contact with ads and some T.V commercials, as suggested by Granville (1993) and Janks et al. (2013), we explored the intentional use of *pronouns, nouns,* and *adjectives* to create different stereotypical representations of men and women in particular ways regarding their physical appearance. At the end of this week and after having started the scaffolding of concepts relevant to CLA

such as *representation* and *position*, students were asked to look for similar texts of their own, analyze them to uncover some of the issues we discussed in class and share their conclusions with their classmates.

Week two. During the second week we worked around issues of *gender and power* and discussed the ways language is covertly used in media texts to position men and women differently in terms of power. Taking into consideration Sunderland's (2004) approaches to discourse identification, students tried to identify gendered discourses in movie excerpts, analyzed the language of a pop song and that of a comic strip. The rationale behind this agenda was to enable students to apply the CLA principles we had learned so far with different kinds of media texts while they enhanced listening skills and participated in the discussions we had about those texts. At the end of this week, students carried out an analysis of an incomplete comic strip in groups of three and were asked to finish the writing of the script. They were specifically asked to use their own words to challenge the stereotypes they had been able to identify in the comic.

Week three. The last week took a little longer than expected because not only did the students work on issues of *gender and age,* and carried out an analysis of some excerpts from the Pixar's movie, *Brave,* but they also worked on their final unit presentations. The discussions at this point of the implementation were a little deeper, and the texts that students were asked to analyze had a higher degree of difficulty. During the scaffolding activities, we addressed the role that media play in the construction of children and adolescents' identity, and discussed how purposeful word choices in media texts foster attitudes of discrimination (*othering*). We also challenged the concept of "normal" as proposed by Janks et al. (2013). At the end of the whole implementation, students were

asked to look for a media text of their preference, namely, an ad, a movie excerpt, a TV commercial, a song, a newspaper article, etc., to uncover issues like the ones we had discussed along the sessions: *gender* and *body image, gender* and *power* or *gender* and *age* (see appendix D for model presented to students). Then, they prepared a short presentation problematizing the use of language in those texts and everyone shared the product of their work with the rest of the class. In the following section, I will explain how data was collected during this implementation and describe the artifacts that I used for such purpose.

Data Collection

To collect data, Creswell (2007), recommends the use of four basic sources of information: a) observations (participant and non-participant); b) interviews (including close or open ended questions); c) documents (of private or public nature) and d) audiovisual materials (photographs, videotapes, etc.) (129). According to the author, who encourages the use of as many data collection artifacts as possible, other sources emerged in later research proposals such as *journals,* which were also used for data collection in this particular study. In order to enhance trustworthiness, I used triangulation of data. *Triangulation* is a concept that refers to the acknowledgement of multiple perspectives in data collection to guarantee that the phenomenon of inquiry has been observed from different angles and no pieces of information have been left out. Denzin (1970) states that triangulation can take different forms: *data triangulation* (the use of several sampling artifacts: surveys, questionnaires, etc.); *investigator triangulation* (various researchers participate collecting evidence); *methodological triangulation* (several methods of data collection are considered: observations, transcript analysis, etc) and *theoretical*

triangulation (the interpretation of data from different perspectives) (p. 472).

Bailey and Allwright (1991) affirm that although having several data collection perspectives in classroom research does not guarantee "accuracy" in the obtained results analysis, at least it does allow the researcher to look at data from different angles and not believe in "the absolute truth of data taken from any single perspective" (p 73). In line with these scholars' ideas, the data for this study was obtained by means of 4 different sources: *a journal* written by me as the participant researcher, *video recordings* of the sessions in which there were group discussions relevant to the focus of the study, CLA-based worksheets completed by the students analyzing various media texts, and a final questionnaire answered by them after the whole data collection process had been completed. Data collection started on July 9th, 2015, day on which students were invited to participate in this study and signed their consent forms, and it ended a month later, on August 9th, day on which I sent students a questionnaire to learn their impressions of the whole experience. Next, I offer a more detailed description of the procedures and instruments used to collect data:

Teacher's journal. According to Patton (1990), field notes constitute the most important document the observer has in order to prove he/she was actually on site. Patton states that when writing field notes, the researcher not only gains a different insight as to what actually occurred during data collection, but also allows the reader to "experience" what he/she (the observer) lived while collecting data: "Field notes provide the observer's raison d'être. If not doing them, (the observer) might as well not be in the setting" (Lofland, 1971, as cited in Patton, 1990, p. 302).

I wrote a journal that consisted of 12 entries corresponding to the 12 lessons that I implemented. The format for these entries consisted of two columns. One contained the descriptions of the events as they occurred in every session; the other had notes about my personal interpretation of those events. As suggested by the literature in the field, I registered my most inner thoughts concerning this research experience not only in an effort to be objective, but also to allow myself with opportunities to express feelings of concern, frustration or excitement through the data collection process.

Video recorded sessions. There were two particular moments when videos were recorded: those when I carried out scaffolding activities to foster CLA for a critical reading of gendered media texts, and others when students presented their own texts' analysis in tasks that I assigned at the end of every week. Although every session was not entirely recorded, I purposefully selected some parts of the class that provided rich information in relation to the development of CLA; this is, pieces of evidence that were relevant to the intended focus of the study: for example, worksheets that would allow me (the researcher) to see whether or not some level of *critical awareness* was being raised as a result of our scaffolding activities, texts deconstruction activities, and so on. Students consented to appearing on camera after having been explained the ethical considerations of this research study and ensured that their identities would be protected. However, whenever a student did not want to be video recorded, his/her decision was respected.

Students' worksheets. Using Janks's (1993) model of work to foster CLA among young learners in South Africa and those presented in Janks et al. (2013), I designed worksheets that students were expected to complete as part of class work, but they also

served as evidence of their critical awareness of the texts we addressed in and out of class.

I adapted the questions from the author's model in order for students to analyze some

additional texts after scaffolding activities took place (see appendixes E, F and G for

worksheets samples). The worksheets contained a set of guided questions to prompt

students about the language used in a magazine ad, a TV commercial, the lyrics of a song or

some part of a movie shown in class. Questions varied depending on the nature of the

media text(s), but for the most part of the activities, however, the questions problematized

linguistic choices in the ads: *What does X pronoun refer to? / What is the impact of using*

word X in this part of the ad? / Who do you think this message has been written for? / What

is the author implying by saying…? What does the author want you (the reader) to believe?

/ How does this word or phrase position men/women here? / Is there any relationship

between the text and the image?

Given the fact that the focus of this course was the enhancement of students'

listening and speaking skills, it is important to clarify that the data analysis presented here

was not carried out in terms of learners' language proficiency. The main focus of this

research was to see whether Critical Language Awareness of gendered media texts could be

raised through scaffolding activities prepared by me and others developed by students. As a

learner of these current trends in education, I became aware of the relevance of reading

texts with a critical perspective in mind myself, and gradually started to change my vision

as to what being more than a language instructor entailed. I wanted to be an active

participant in the integral education process of my students. One that would contribute to

make them reflexive and critical informed readers of the messages that surrounds them on

their daily lives. As a future researcher, my particular interest with this study was to

explore how students would respond to the teaching of the FL with a methodological proposal which most of them had not previously been exposed to, and whether such texts' analysis would make our classes inviting communicative spaces where they could also improve their oral and listening skills along with the unit implementation.

At the beginning of scaffolding activities, questions revolved around stereotypical representations of men and women in the texts, who the texts had been written for or what the text's author wanted the reader to believe; however, as I incorporated scaffolding activities to raise CLA amongst students, questions became more analytical in terms of the word choices in texts (sample of such questions have been provided above). For each media text, a new set of questions was created that was also connected to different CLA concepts discussed during scaffolding activities such as, *position, power, representation,* and others relevant to CLA pedagogic proposal.

Final questionnaire. In order to learn students' own impressions as to the whole unit implementation, I created a questionnaire using *Google Forms*, which was answered by all twelve students after the data was entirely collected on the last day of class. The questionnaire contained both, open and closed questions, and it was done in Spanish to make sure students would answer it without language restrictions. Questions were geared to obtain information about students' perception of this methodological approach as well as their challenges to complete the proposed activities (see appendix J for final questionnaire and graph).

Data Analysis

For the process of data analysis using NVIVO 9 software, I followed a series of

steps, which I describe as follows: After I had all the information organized in folders, that

is, the teacher's journal, the students' worksheets, the video recordings' transcripts and the

students' questionnaire answers, I uploaded this information in NVIVO 9. I created folders

in the program and labeled them according to some preliminary themes. The *First Text*

Analysis folder contained an activity that students worked on before the implementation.

Three folders named, *Issues of gender and image, Issues of gender and power* and *Issues of*

gender and age contained the information of each week of implementation. I also created a

folder called, *Teacher's journal* for my field notes, and as for the questionnaire, I decided it

would be more convenient to analyze these responses separately because it had been

created in *Google Docs*, so I set this information aside. Since it was a small group of

students (12), I decided to use all the data provided by the whole group. Additionally, many

of the activities were carried out in pairs, and small groups, and this meant that in some

cases I didn't have individual samples.

Subsequently, I returned to the leading question of this study: *What are the*

challenges and possibilities of using critical language awareness principles to foster a

critical reading of gendered discourses in media texts among EFL students? As I started

going through the collected data, some "recurring patterns" started to emerge (Boyatzis,

1998, as cited in Patton, 2002 p. 452) and they gave way to the creation of the following

categories: a) Coping with students' limited linguistic resources.; b) Students' resistance

towards methodology; c) Issues with texts in materials design; d) Time management

difficulties; e) Awareness of word choices in media texts, and e) Awareness of gendered

discourses in media texts. Finally, I classified them into two main themes: *Challenges* and *Possibilities* to foster CLA.

The process of analyzing data took longer than expected because in order to ensure the trustworthiness expected in this type of qualitative analysis, I read all the categories, subcategories and themes created during the coding process several times to ensure that they were representative of the patterns I had found in the data. However, given the time constraints (one month was the time frame that I had for data collection both, as a Master's student and as a *course 5* teacher at the language center), and the lack of support from other researchers or collaborators while collecting and analyzing the data (as opposed to other projects which are conducted by groups of researchers), unfortunately I cannot say that I counted on the possibility of having a *prolonged engagement* to data or *member checking* techniques , which are other two elements that would ensure trustworthiness, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose.

In the following section I will report the findings of this implementation and some of the most significant pieces of data, which account for the results of this study.

Findings

The main purpose of this study was to see how challenging or possible it was to foster a critical reading of *gendered discourses* in media texts by applying principles of CLA (Critical Language Awareness) in an EFL course. To achieve this purpose, the models for text analysis developed by Hillary Janks (1993) and Janks et al. (2013) were applied in a pedagogic unit, which was implemented in class to help learners become aware of the existing relationship between *language* and *power,* and how, as texts readers, we have the choice to, either give our consent to dominant discourses in the media texts we consume on a daily basis (e.g., magazines, video clips, T.V advertisements, and others), or resist their content by reading against them in a more critical manner. As suggested by the author, along the course of this study students were shown how the words in some of the media texts they analyzed_ *nouns, pronouns, verbs* and *adjectives* were deliberately selected to serve the interests of a few to maintain the *status quo* (particularly in gender-related issues).

Data demonstrates that despite students' linguistic inaccuracies in some of the activities they carried out, this type of methodology did raise consciousness among learners as to *how* purposeful linguistic choices in media affect people's agency, and fosters issues of discrimination and inequality; more specifically, how *gender issues* are perpetuated in the discourses embedded in these texts. In the subsequent sections I will provide evidence from data of how such consciousness was raised and I will also illustrate some of the challenges I encountered during this implementation.

Possibilities to Foster CLA

The scaffolding activities had two purposes: First, to raise awareness as to *how* words are purposefully used by texts' writers to perpetuate issues of r*ace, social status, age* and particularly *gender*; and second, to enhance speaking and listening skills through the discussions that were generated by the texts presented. Despite the fact that students needed help to understand the language in the chosen texts, the transcript excerpts presented here evidence how both objectives were achieved.

Awareness of word choices in media texts. At the beginning of the implementation, I carried out scaffolding activities to show students how the language in the texts we came across in our daily basis was not neutral. Like Vasquez (2004), Harste and Albers (2013) see a rich source of material for any critical curriculum in texts that they encounter in everyday lives (e.g., cereal boxes, posters, advertisements). As the authors claim, we "have become a culture of consumerism" and they call for the importance of developing skills to interpret and critique media messages with learners (p. 2).

Like in their qualitative study, aiming to foster critical reading practices among 90 school teachers in North America, we used advertisements in this unit to uncover issues of race, age, social status, and image in different products to then, start moving towards the central purpose of this study: the analysis of gendered discourses in media texts. Here is evidence of some of those preliminary activities, in which students were asked to analyze the choice of words in a variety of magazine ads. After scaffolding with students about how they could focus on particular linguistic choices, they started to go beyond the obvious in

the messages to draw their own conclusions as to what was implied in the texts. This is

illustrated in the following examples:

Figure 1. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

Teacher: You think that somebody from a particular race would feel uncomfortable with the ad? Why Liseth? From what race?
Student 5: No sé… (laughter)
Teacher: A ver los demás... Do you agree with Liseth? -That this relates to some women from a particular race? Or from a particular gender?
Student 4: A Race
Teacher: Race? What race? ¿Qué raza?
Student 4: Because she is (incomprehensible) middle age, como Medio Oriente, no se
Teacher: Ah no, she is from the Middle East, te entendí _middle age, middle aged es una persona más o menos de mi edad…
Student 4:Entonces, then we think that she is … how do you say, callada?
Teacher: Quiet
Student 4: She's very quiet, she is oppressive
Teacher: Oh, oppressive or oppressed?
Student 4: Oppressed
Teacher: Yeah, oppressive is the person who oppresses, oppressed is the person who receives the action, so…
Student 4: Oppressed
Teacher: That she's oppressed
Student 4: Yes, or she's less important than the man in her religion or her culture…[*sic*]
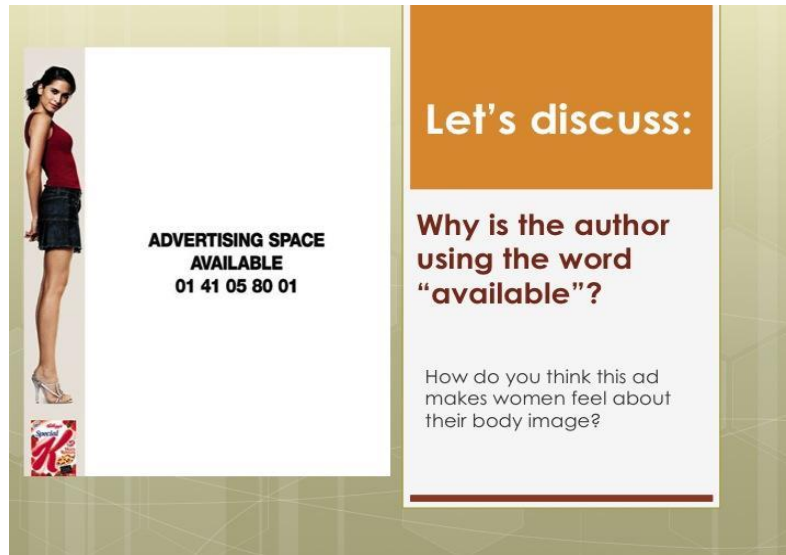
Figure 2. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

Teacher: Uhmm Okay Why is the author using the word, *available?* What is the meaning of the word, *available*?
Students: Disponible
Teacher: Disponible. That is right. Space available. How do you think this ad makes women feel about their body image?
Student 7: Feel… -¿Se siente?
Student 4: That are fat
Teacher: You think they feel fat?
Student 4: Because the image said or show that this woman is health because is thin. Not the all women that are health need be thin special.
Teacher: The image. What about the word, *available*? What is the connection between the word available and the image?
Student 1: Because the woman is thin, and it is not necessary all the space [*sic*].

There is additional evidence of how CLA was raised through the scaffolding activities in the worksheets that students were asked to do on their own. As a product of every session, I asked them to analyze the language of a media text such as that used to advertise a product in a printed ad, a commercial we had seen in class, the lyrics of a song, or a movie excerpt. Some students' responses to the exercises proposed in the texts, evidence how they succeeded in uncovering issues in those texts themselves. Following the

46

model proposed by Janks and her collaborators in *Language & Position* (1993, p. 12), I problematized the food advertisement below by posing a series of questions about the use of some particular words. In this exercise, the answers given by student 8 to the questions in her worksheet, suggest that the scaffolding activities we carried out with similar texts in the classroom helped her see beyond the literal meaning of the words in the texts.

Figure 3. Text Analysis Worksheet

Student 8:

"By using the word impact, the author refers to how you feel when you take your size, for example, if the measure is very big, then you will feel bored and disappointed" [*sic*].

"In my opinion, the author uses the command, "Don't let it" in the paragraph because the author want say how you feel take your measure, so he want that you eat Kellogg's for have a thin body, time after eat Kellogg's you can take your measure again and then of see the result, you will feel happy." [*sic*].

"By using the phrase "look your best", the author refer to the only thing that matters is: have a strong, and thin body" [*sic*].

"We are in a society where if you are fat then you are ugly. To sympathize with the reader, the author want make you happy eating his cereal, because, if you are thin then you are beautiful, and if you are beautiful you are happy" [*sic*].

In another activity of text analysis, students were shown an *Old Spice* TV commercial (see transcript in the paragraph below). Then they were given a worksheet that problematized some specific linguistic choices in that commercial. These students' answers show their success in inferring covert language in the commercial:

"Hello, ladies. Look at your man. Now back to me. Now back at your man. Now back to me. Sadly, he isn't me, but if he stopped using ladies scented body wash and switched to *Old Spice*, he could smell like he's me. Look down; back up. Where are you? You're on a boat with the man your man could smell like. What's in your hand? Back at me. I have it: It's an oyster with two tickets to that thing you love. Look again. The tickets are now diamonds. Anything is possible when your man smells like *Old Spice* and not a lady. I'm on a horse."

These are students' excerpts of their analysis on the text above:

Student 9

a. Why do you think the author repeats some pronouns so many times?

Because he train to compare the man that watch the comercial with the actor

Student 12

b. How is he positioning himself in comparison to the viewer's couple or partner?

He is much better that the viewer's 'cause he used old spice and old spice convert the people in better people

Student 10:

> c. How does the statement, *"sadly, he isn't me…"* affect the viewer's position?
>
> The women can feel that they don't have what they deserve

Student 7:

> d. How is the author representing men in this commercial? _ Does this representation include most men?
>
> for my bount of view the actor look ly ya rogant and degrades other men for his appearance and luxuries.
> *the actor is not representing and include most men because don't show us other men that don't use other deodorant

    Not only did print texts allow students to become more aware of purposeful choices in media, but audiovisual texts like movies served this purpose as well. Before I started to learn about critical thinking, I had presented many movies in class as a means to promote the development of listening and speaking skills in my lessons. In this case, watching the PIXAR movie *Brave* with a CLA agenda in mind, gave students the opportunity not only to practice language, but also to explore how these types of media texts continue to perpetuate stereotypical representations of people. Before watching the movie, we had discussed issues of power and gender, and we had analyzed representations of men and women when being positioned as *powerful* or *powerless* in movies. In class, students also analyzed some samples of such Disney's movie excerpts.

In this conversation, I asked students whether they thought Disney princess characters or heroes affected the way they viewed themselves when they were little kids. As students became aware of the issues discussed, they started to make connections between their own life experiences and the activities we were carrying out in class:

Student 10: Bueno profe, yo quería ser siempre pues la monita, con los crespos así, pues porque era la más bonita, pero pues también a uno le tocaban las más feas (students laugh)
Teacher: How did it make you feel when you had to play the role of the least likable princess? How did you feel as a girl?
Student 10: Mmm no entendí teacher
Teacher: ¿Cómo te sentías cuando tenías que hacer ese rol de la princesa que no querías ser?
Student 10: Pues yo no sé, fea (laughs)
Teacher: What kinds of stereotypes, talking about gender, what kinds of stereotypes do you think those princess movies perpetuate?
Student 10: Teacher for example I think that many childrens are play, so you say you …o sea tenemos una princesa negra, supongamos, tenemos una negra y una blanca, o sea yo digo que escogen más fácil la blanca…
Teacher: Think about the purpose, cuál es el objetivo de princesas como *Snow White* y como *Cinderella* en la vida, in life? What are their big dreams?
Student 4: Married
Teacher: Marry a prince, find a blue prince charming, asi se dice, encontrar un principe azul, «a blue prince charming ». ¿Cuál es el rol del hombre en esas películas? _They are a heroes, the heroes who do what? ¿Qué hacen esos héroes?
Students: Salvar a la princesa de ser sirvienta [*sic*].

The purpose of seeing *Brave* was to raise awareness of the fact that, although media texts like movies have apparently changed in terms of *how* their language is more inclusive and respectful towards difference (such seems to be the intention in *Brave*), there are still some unequal gender representations in them. This particular movie portrays a teenage girl who is independent, far from the mold that *Disney* had created in other past female movie characters. In spite of this new portrayal of women, some students succeeded in identifying gendered discourses and challenged the ways men and women were positioned differently in terms of power. Besides this, they also identified other stereotypical representations of

people in aspects such as their race and age (see appendix G for complete *Brave* movie

activity). These are some of their answers:

Students 8

3. We have discussed concepts such as representation, positioning, power, and gender stereotypes. Analyze these excerpts from the movie and at the light of those concepts answer the questions below each of them.

    a. Speaking of her three brothers who are mischievous, Merida states: "…they get away with murder! I can never get away with anything." How is she positioning herself?

    Her brother get away with everything because the are boys. and she can feel sad, rage, because as she is a woman, she is judge all time

Student 3

c. When entering the palace Merida states: "My whole life is planned out. preparing for the day I become… Well my mother! She is in charge of every single day of my life" How is she positioning her mother?

    She positioned her mom as a manipulative whoman who wants her doughter to do everything she says.

Student 2

5. The movie shows stereotypes concerning gender, race, social class and age. For instance, the children's behavior at the dinner table represents children as naughty a incapable of table manners. That perpetuates the idea that most children act like that when eating. Can you identify other stereotypes?

    a. Regarding women : weak, delicate, fearful, without right of deciding for themselves

    b. Regarding men Stronge, fighters, rude, and also the men wear dresses

    c. Regarding Irish culture People that fight for everything, that the most people are clumsy

    d. Regarding adolescents, children or elders children are naughty and elders are clumsy

    e. Regarding social status high society: have many manners; low don't have manners

Student 1:

Figure 4. Text Analysis Worksheet Excerpt

The activities that students did in class set the foundation for their own texts' analysis at the end of every unit. In the following activity, students were asked to look for a text and using CLA principles proposed in previous scaffolding activities, problematize the language in the text of their choice. They were precisely instructed to look for repetitions of certain words and try to explain the reasons behind them; that is, question word substitutions, and purposeful selection of nouns and adjectives (see appendix D of power point slides used to model the activity). The following Power Point presentation slide developed by a student demonstrates that despite her language limitations, she put a significant amount of effort to carry out the text analysis:

Figure 5: Student's Text Analysis Slide

Student 12: (student starts reading the song lines in the presentation) "*When I'm fat and old and my kids think I'm a joke…*" In this part first I show us, how is positioned this phrase of the older? I think that this phrase positioned older as all decrepit or forgetful as don't have energy, okay. "*I won't act my age; no I won't act my age. No, I'll still feel the same around you*". What is the purpose of repeating this phrase so many times? In this part, this part, this part, and this part (pointing at repetitions of word in the text) _I think that the purpose is show that the old is horrible and terrible because the person don't do anything. "*When I'm fat and old and my kids think I'm a joke cause all the stories that I told, I tell again and again…*" In this part I think… How is the text positioned the song readers? _I think that positioned as bad person because the sons joke the fathers or olders, the sons are very bad person. Bueno I repeat so (inaudible) in the text I think that is othering or exclude that old people are different age that also think him, how him also him couple, because he say "I", pudiera ser… pues los dos, porque no decir los dos y no solo yo. Bueno, _What part of the text construct something legitimate? _I think that this part "*I won't feel someone again*" because the story that I told that I tell again and again, I can't (incomprehensible) I think that is legitimate because the person think the older is… ¿Como digo todos son así?
Teacher: They're all like that
Student 12: They're all like that, but it's not true because I know the elder that have many energy incluso…
Teacher: Even
Student 12: Even drive a bicycle so I think that is not true [*sic*].

Although this student might not have formulated grammatically accurate questions

and statements as to how the text was positioning the reader, or what kind of stereotypical

53

representations it perpetuated, her discourse reflects a critical analysis about the fact that the song did misrepresent elders. What is remarkable here is the fact that this was a text that the student found by herself. This evidences her capacity to start identifying media texts that contains problematic language of her own. On two other occasions, I recall a couple of students expressing how they took personal interest in analyzing what some texts they came across, intended them to believe, and what the texts actually meant to say: One of them referred to a candy package called *Nerds*, which insinuated that its content was for "smarter" kids; she did bring the package the following day and shared her findings with me. The other student expressed having felt compelled to take a closer look to *Dove* health-care products ads and related some of her own interesting discoveries about the ads' linguistic choices: She commented on how they were apparently "inclusive" of all kinds of women, yet they truly used discriminatory covert language. Both episodes left me with a feeling of enthusiasm about how the implementation was indeed resonating in students' minds even outside the classroom environment.

One of the main purposes of developing a critical analysis of texts is to provide students with tools that will allow them to "resist" the language in media and not believe everything they read (Janks, 1993). The scaffolding activities were intended to provide them with tools to do this on their own. Unfortunately, I have no further evidence that after we finished the project, the participants in this study continued to resist stereotypical discourses in media, other than the data collected from the tasks they were to carry out during this implementation. This was "their time" to prove that in fact, they were getting there; as to whether this had an impact beyond the research experience, one can only hope it did.

This other student, like the one in the example above, chose to present a text analysis of one of her favorite songs. What is interesting in her discourse is the way the analysis of the text affected how she felt about the song after she had become aware of what the song's lyrics actually meant:

Teacher: What do you think is the intention…?
Student 5: For me, in this song she say that perfect woman is look like she, with big booty and perfect body, with surgeries, perfect face…
Teacher: Oh, okay…
Student 5: Nos pone por debajo de las mujeres que no tienen las medidas que ella tiene o que tienen un trasero mucho más grande y pues, por lo menos en esta parte que habla de un narcotraficante que le compra los senos que le compra todo, para vestirla bien y para ella estar bien. Muchas niñas se mantienen a costilla de…
Teacher: Do you like the song?
Student 5: Yeah, but…
Teacher: And now that you understand what the song says do you feel the same towards the song?
Student 5: No, este fin de semana la vi mucho; vi la letra y vi la canción y yo decía pero why? I don't have the perfect body, entonces…
Teacher: ¿Y eso cambia el sentimiento que te generaba la canción antes?
Student 5: Si
Teacher: ¿En que lo cambia ?
Student 5: La percepción de cómo veía la canción antes, wow it's funny…
Teacher: It's a cool song…
Student: Yeah, pero no sabía que decían eso…[*sic*].

As seen in all the excerpts presented above, students realized that purposeful word choices in media texts have implications in *how* texts' producers position themselves as writers and position readers as well. Although in many cases students were not necessarily aware of which linguistic category those words belonged to (*pronouns, nouns, adjectives or verbs*) they did notice how the text's producers used and/or omitted words purposefully to position readers in particular ways. The final questionnaire that was applied to students at the end of the implementation, also evidences how awareness of the relevance of this kind of work in a language class was raised among learners (see appendix J for questionnaire sample).

55

Question: *¿Consideras que es pertinente hacer análisis de textos como los que hicimos en cursos de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras? _Justifica tu respuesta.*

"Por supuesto que sí. Pienso que todos esos textos que analizamos durante este trimestre con la Profesora Paula, ayudaron mucho para mi desarrollo lingüístico y para mi capacidad de entendimiento, entendí que no es tener un texto y dejarme llevar por la lógica porque detrás de un verbo pueden existir otros significados si lo juntamos con otra palabra" [*sic*].

"Si, me pareció muy interesante la experiencia, opino que son temas que se prestan para que queramos expresar nuestra opinión y por lo tanto para querer hablar y poder practicar inglés" [*sic*].

"Si estoy de acuerdo con el análisis de texto como lo hicimos en el curso porque eso nos ayuda a ser más pertinentes con nuestras expresiones y el hecho de analizar es una forma de expresar nuestra opinión aun cuando no coincida con lo que dice el texto y eso es lo que nos hace analíticos porque nos hace pensar en el por qué estamos de acuerdo con el texto o por qué no, y de esta manera aprendemos a ser menos prejuiciosos y ver más allá de lo que dice el mensaje" [*sic*].

Overall, students' answers to the questionnaire evidenced a general satisfaction with the methodology. Although some of them expressed having faced difficulties (especially in terms of the level of language in some of the media texts) the majority of the students found the course enriching and they agreed on the fact that it provided them with tools that they could use to be more critical when reading different kinds of texts.

Awareness of gendered discourses in media texts. Bell Hooks, a scholar who has devoted her career to raise critical consciousness through feminist education and who Following Freire's steps sees education as a liberating practice, states that,

> "To engage in dialogue, is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers,
>
> scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not
>
> be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing and host of other
>
> differences" (p. 130).

For her, teaching students to "transgress" against issues of gender, race, social class is the only way teachers can really contribute to the building of classrooms were a truly holistic education takes place (Hooks, 1994). Being able to share conversations like the one below, which transcended the contents of an English lesson for functional purposes was quite an interesting experience that allowed me to know students better not only as learners, but as men and women, growing up in a world of stereotypes built on the basis of consumerism. As our discussions progressed some more elaborate discussions led the way to start identifying gendered discourses in the texts I presented in class.

The following is a discussion that took place after the ad below had been shown to students during the scaffolding part of the session (see slide for a better context of the conversation):
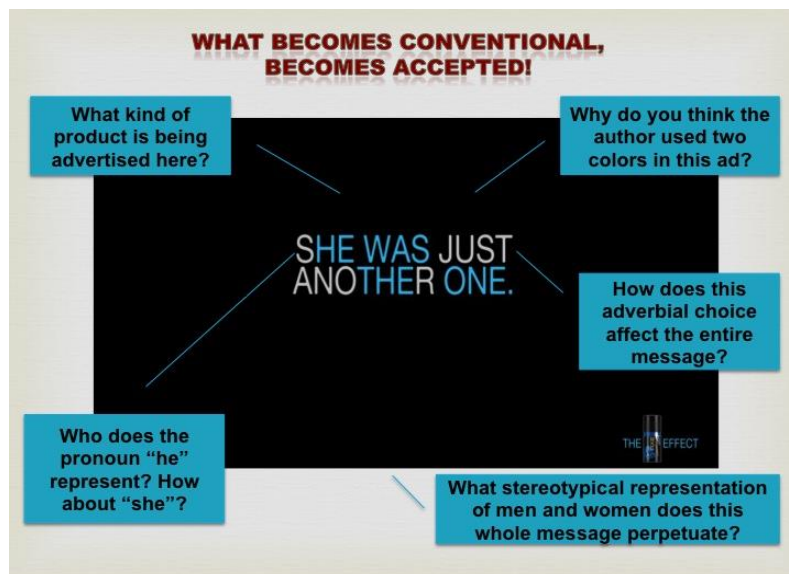

Figure 6. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

Student 5: Yo pienso que eso es como subliminal, ahí hay dos contextos.
Teacher: A ver cuéntame…
Student 5: Porque ahí está *he was the one* or *she was just another one*

57

Student 1: Porque mire que la "S" está blanca

Teacher: Hay un propósito para los dos colores, ¿cuál?

Student 3: Include both sentences

Teacher: Include both sentences, two different ways to reading the text. Very well, okay. Uhmm that's the reason the author used two colors. ¿Qué producto están promocionando allí? _What kind of product is that?

Students: Deodorant

Teacher: Deodorant for men or for women?

Students: For men

Teacher: All right, y luego dice, -Who does the pronoun "he" represent? ¿A quién representa el pronombre "he"?

Student 4: The gender masculine

Teacher: Men. ¿In general? ¿A todos los hombres?

Students: No

Student 4: Who uses the deodorant

Teacher: Whoever uses the deodorant. _How about she? ¿A quién representa "she"?

Students: A la mujer

Teacher: ¿A cuál mujer?

Student 4: Who know the men that use deodorant

Teacher: La que acompaña al que usa el desodorante (laughs) Okay. Pero ahí hay un estereotipo tremendo, hay dos. There is a stereotypical representation of men and there is a stereotypical representation of women ¿Cuál? ¿Quién me cuenta?

Student 4: It says that she was just another one. Ella era solo otra…

Teacher: ¿Qué representación estereotípica crea eso del hombre?

Student 4: He is important and the women are mmm are many women is other in the world.

Teacher: Entonces qué estereotipo es ese? ¿Los hombres que? That men what?

Student 7: Que el hombre fue primero.

Student 5: Que el hombre es único.

Student 1: That men are dogs (laughs)

Teacher: That men are *womanizers*, que los hombres son perros.

Student 1: Yes

Teacher: Que todos los hombres son así. Perdonen la expresión, pero esa es la expresión, *womanizers*, que todos son «mujeriegos». That is the word. ¿Y cuál es el estereotipo de la mujer ahí? *He was the one…*

Students: (Commenting and murmuring)

Student 5: El es único, no sé, y la mujer es una más del montón.

Teacher: Por eso, pero que representación. Ya dijimos que los hombres todos son…

Student 3: Que ahí lo importante es el tipo porque está saliendo con…

Student 1: No, ahora es ¿Qué estereotipo hay de la mujer? Entonces dice, ella era solo…

Teacher: El era el único, he was the one, ¿qué representación o estereotipo puede haber ahí?

Student 8: Que la mujer es más correcta y más fiel en lo que hace

Teacher: Y eso es un estereotipo también porque no todas las mujeres…

Student 10: Porque hay mujeres muy perras! Students: (Laughter)

Teacher: Miren, qué interesante : Se da la representación de que todas las mujeres solamente le seremos fieles a un solo hombre. ¿Aquí hay gender issues? ¿Vemos aquí un asunto de género, sí o no?

Students: Yeah! [*sic*].

The discussion above clearly shows how several students got engaged in the conversation despite their limited vocabulary to have the conversation fully in English. They actively participated with the teacher in the analysis of how different elements of this advertisement constructed stereotypical representations of both, men and women.

In a similar discussion, a student raises awareness about the kind of gender-related issues perpetuated through the language of this text as she examined not only the words in it, but also attempted to explain how those words were intentionally connected to the images. The student emphatically challenges the intention this text's creator had in making those particular choices:
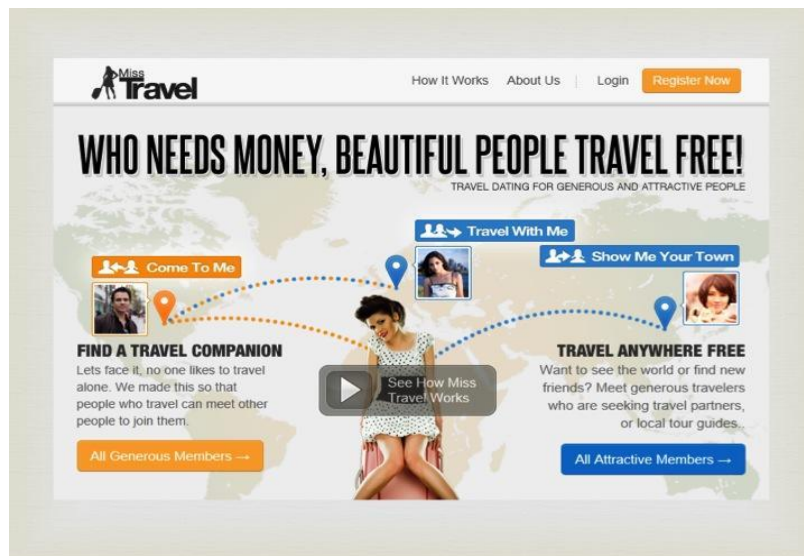
Figure 7. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

Teacher: (Teacher reading) Okay, *"Who needs money: beautiful people travel free"*...
Student 4: I think that there are a gender, ¿Cómo se dice?
Teacher: Issues. Gender issues. That's the term that we are using: hay un tema allí con el género, you talk about *gender issues* or *race issues* or *social class issues,* yeah…
Student 4: Donde dice, "*all generous members"*, is the person who invites other person, there are a man, there is a man. But …ahí teacher, donde dice…
Teacher: Where it says…
Student 4: "*all attractive members"* there is woman…

Teacher: So, how is this positioning men, and how is this positioning women? What is the role of men according to this?
Student 4: Invite
Teacher: They are the ones who invite. What is the role of women? ¿Quién va a pagar? Who's going to pay?
Students: The man
Teacher: So the women can travel for free. What kind of women? All women in general?
Student 4: No. Beautiful women.
Teacher: Beautiful women, that is right. ¿Y cómo hace sentir eso a una persona que no es tan atractiva, that is less attractive? Included or excluded?
Students: Excluded.
Teacher: Absolutely [*sic*].

In this activity by using Beyonce's song "*If I Were a Boy*", I was able to review a structure that was a linguistic objective for that day (second conditional) while I raised awareness about how songs, like many other media texts, become vehicles for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes due to writers' choices in their lyrics. These students' answers evidence their awareness of this issue (see appendix E for complete song activity).

Student 9:

2. Pronoun "they" in verse one refers to it refees to the majority of men with there habits

Student 4:

4. The phrase in bold positions men like IF they say lies for sleep with other girls.

5. The rules, the author refers to The autor refers to the rules that men should be in control of women so that women would be faithful

6. The phrase positions women as _if all them were faithful and never lie to their husbands._

This, being the first time they ever analyzed the text of a song following the proposed model, presented some challenges for students; for instance, they had difficulties to answer questions about *who* certain pronoun in the text was referring to, or *what* a particular word choice implied. Nevertheless, in most of their answers in the prompt sheets there is evidence that they tried to focus their analysis on the linguistic choices made by the songwriter. I found this very remarkable given the language level of students and the fact that this was a type of activity with a song that they had not done before. As a matter of fact, some of them were able to "spot", as suggested by Sunderland (2004), traces of gendered discourses in the verses:

Student 5:

1. Some of the stereotypes I was able to identify in verse one are:

- _Women should be quiet and compliant. Women should excuse all infidelity_
- _Women should continue all rules imposed for the men_
- _Women should await her man ot home_
- _All woman should be faithful with her man and her man is easily unfaithful_

Student 4

1. Some of the stereotypes I was able to identify in verse one are:

•Men can wear what they want, They don't have restrictions so people think.

• All men drink beer, chase for many women and get into trouble.

In the following activity, students were presented 4 excerpts of popular Disney movies: *Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast, Mulan and The Incredibles.* After having discussed the effects that these movies cause on children's construction of their identity, students were asked to choose one they would like to work on and do these exercises in a worksheet: a) transcribe a movie excerpt from the video clip, and b) identify which particular linguistic choices in the transcript evidenced the perpetuation of gender issues in the discourse. Although students expressed having had difficulties to understand all the words in the video clip, these students' excerpts show that some of them were able to find traces of gendered discourses in the texts (see appendix F for complete Disney movie excerpts activity).

Worksheet Activity:

1. What stereotypical representation(s) of women can you detect in the movie excerpt you saw?

2. Transcribe the fragment(s) in the text that exemplify your answer and highlight the key words, pronouns, adjectives, nouns or verbs that reinforce that representation.

Student 4 worksheet excerpts (Selected video clip: Aladdin)

Stereotype:

Men need money for seduce women, and in some cases power or authority because It's attractive for women.

Movie Fragment:

Y: Do I know you?

A: Ahh not,

Y: You remind me someone I meet in the marketplace

A: The marketplace? I have servants to go at the marketpleice for me why I've been observing to go to the marketplace for my servant so it couldn't meet me on it.

Student 5 worksheet excerpts (selected video clip: Beauty & the Beast)

Why (if any) do you think is the reason for movie producers to continue to reinforce those stereotypes?

I think that the people who do this things have implicit purposes and in the case of Disney they need that the children continue believe in fairytales, namely, If the new generations don't like the charming prince, cinderela or princess, fairs, king and cawtels what king of movies disney need become to do for have the same consumption that It has in this moment.

Students' worksheet excerpts (selected video clip: Mulán)

Stereotype:

The woman should be Obedient with her man,

The women should be Beautifull to find the perfect man and marry

Movie Fragment:

• A Girl can Bring Her Family, Great honor in one way By striking a good
match and this could be the day. Men want Girls with good taste
Calm, Obediant who work Fast-Paced.

• You'll Bring honor to us all

• ¿ How could any p~~Como no p~~ Fellow Say « No Sale »

• Destiny guard our Girls, And our future as it unfurls please
look Kindly on these cultured pearls each a perfect porcelain
doll "women"

Although the students above were able to complete this activity, and in their answers it is clear that they succeeded in identifying gender stereotypes perpetuated in the movies, such was not the case of the majority of the students. This particular activity was challenging for two reasons: First, the time I had planned to work on the activity was unrealistic: I assumed they would not have major difficulties to understand the language in these video clips, which I had thought were good choices for them; and second, although the movie excerpts were not too long, they found it very difficult to transcribe the texts. Many of them handed in this activity incomplete and none of them did follow instructions accurately. I described this along with other similar episodes in my journal.

The purpose of some of the activities was to raise awareness on the fact that our ideas of *gender* have also been culturally and socially constructed because, as Sunderland suggests, we are "texts' interpreters" (Sunderland, 2004, p. 4). In the following activity, students were presented with two word clouds which were going to be used to advertise girls' and boys' toys. In her answers, this particular student questions the way these words position men and women:

Figure 8. Text Analysis Worksheet

1. How did you make the decision of which poster was to be used for the girls' toys and which for boys' toys publicity?

"When someone like me look at the posters and read the words in its immediately now that the first picture is for Boy's toys and the second for girls because they have things that I think that a boy do or like, and the same whit the girls" [*sic*].

2. Can you identify adjectives and nouns in both ads that position boys and girls in a certain way?

"Boy: Power, fire, motors, vehicle, ninjas, combat, attack, different, explosive, opponents"
"Girls: friendship, mommy, perfect, glamour, party, easy, talk, love, fashion, babies" [*sic*]

3. As a man or as a woman, how do you particularly feel represented by each of the ads?

"I won't lie that with some words I identify myself but I in strongly disagree because I' m not easy, rocker or ride, and I don't think that the little girls should think that they need be like this word describe us" [*sic*].

4. Do you think the use of those particular words create gender stereotypes? (Explain).

"Sure, when the children read this words, they can don`t feel any representation with them lives and they can begin to be sad or worry because they aren't normal or common in the society when in the real life nothing is perfect o equal like in the ad" [*sic*].

5. Could some of those words be used for the opposite gender ad? Which ones? _What would be the implications of doing this for the selling of products?

"Off course, some examples are friendship, fun, powerful or cool. When they do things like this perpetuate the stereotypes for be a girl and a boy. The author off the ad pressures the children to be like they think that a child is, and for them isn't the same be a girl that be a boy" [*sic*].

In sum, the scaffolding activities not only raised awareness about gendered issues in the media texts presented in class, but also provided learners with opportunities to gain confidence to use the language in communicative situations. This is what most students expressed in the final questionnaire:

Question: *¿Piensas que esta experiencia contribuyó en algo con tu proceso de aprendizaje de esta lengua extranjera? Justifica tu respuesta:*

"Si. Aparte que pude pulir mi parte gramatical y de vocabulario, al finalizar el curso sentí que ya se me hacía más fácil analizar cada texto" [*sic*].

"Si. En este curso aprendimos mucho vocabulario nuevo, formas de hablar, de expresarnos e incluso mucha gramática para poder hablar correctamente durante las sesiones" [*sic*].

"Si, aprendí mucho vocabulario, a analizar más las cosas y a expresar lo que pensó más fácil" [*sic*]

"Si contribuyó, por una parte, conocí otras formas de expresión que se salieron de lo cotidiano de los libros básicos de inglés, y segundo reforcé la idea de que hay que ver más allá del mensaje para hacer un comentario analítico y ver algo diferente a lo que ven la mayoría de las personas" [*sic*].

Challenges to Foster CLA

As a researcher/teacher, implementing CLA-based activities in the FL classroom, in a way, transformed pedagogical principles that led my teaching practices prior this study. Far from only introducing a "critical element" in the English classroom, Pennycook (1999) cautions us on the fact that teaching from a critical standpoint commands a big transformation of one's personal *attitude* and *way of thinking* in the process of raising consciousness of critical issues in the language classroom: "Change in our students is not about the predictable results of awareness or mastery, but about the unpredictable effects of a changed relationship to our histories and desires" (p. 340). The possibilities I have illustrated in the sections above, offer proof of students' potential to develop critical reading skills in the language classroom. Nonetheless, I have to admit that this was a road that had its ups and downs, and that along the course of this implementation, there were some difficulties that ranged from students' personal concerns about the efficacy of this methodological approach (as expressed by some of them and registered in my journal), to

some personal uncertainties as to whether I was successfully fulfilling both: research and content goals.

In this section, I intend to illustrate some of those difficulties, which account for the main challenges my students and I faced while implementing the unit.

Coping with students' limited linguistic resources. As previously reported in another section, this unit was originally designed to be implemented among learners with a higher command of English. Due to changes in courses distribution at the last minute, I was assigned a Listening & Speaking Course three at the language center (as opposed to course 5, which was the course I had originally been asked to teach). As a result of these learners' level of English, the texts, topics of discussion and scaffolding activities were somewhat advanced for them. Although I was able to make some adjustments in order to fulfill program expectations and course objectives, students' limited level of language proficiency became a challenge that prevented them from participating more actively, especially at the beginning of lessons. At often times, students were willing to engage in a critical analysis of texts, yet this conversation excerpt evidences this particular student's struggle to put together coherent thoughts when analyzing a song of her choice at the end of the first week of scaffolding:

Student 6: Doubting that met this song: Hut and Cold, cierto… (reading the lyrics of the song) *"The man you change your mind like a girl changes clothes, I should know that you are not good for me, cause you are hot and then you're a cold, you are yes then you are not, you are in then you are out, you are wrong then you are right is black and white…"* _Who is include and who is exclude? _Include a men that they are very doubting to make a decision as the woman if it is right in that decision. That kind stereotype in the reinfort _ehhh they reinfort that no only when change of the opinion but the men are all in this situation is with change of the opinion eeeeh in the relationship or the other things. Who is the position in the reader? Eh for me, depend of whether the reader, is woman with (incomprehensible) that not only women aren't un... teacher how do you say, *indeciso*? [*sic*].

Similar difficulties with syntax and lexicon were also evident in class conversations that took place during the scaffolding activities.

In this session we were talking about how texts *position* us (see slide below). Although the student is evidently interested in making her point, the transcript excerpt of the conversation about the slide illustrates her struggle with syntax to express her ideas coherently:

Figure 9. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

Teacher: She is wearing the typical dress (teacher reads fragment of a Power Point slide that portrays a Muslim woman): *"Everything covered except her eyes, what a cruel male dominated culture"*. _What a cruel male, *macho*, dominated culture. Y mire lo que dice ella: (teacher reads another fragment of the slide portraying a woman wearing a bikini and sunglasses): *"Nothing covered but her eyes, what a cruel male dominated culture".*
Student 3: Dominated what, teacher?
Teacher: Culture. ¿Who understands the *cartoon*?
Students: (Murmuring) a student raises her hand
Teacher: Yes?
Student 4: The old woman think the same at the other woman…
Teacher: About the other woman
Student 4: About the other woman because if I… Como lo explico… yo siempre lo he dicho… If I will be… no If I will be no…
Teacher: If I were…
Student 4: No, si yo fuera una mujer…

69

Teacher: If I were…
Student 4: If I were a woman in the Middle East I think with the religion, with the cre…
cómo se dice credo, creencias?
Teacher: With the beliefs
Student 4: With my beliefs, with my religion, all that I've learned in my childhood, and in
my life, these are good, these are a good point of the world, and the other position is bad
is… mmm ¿cómo se dice?… ¿cómo? ¿libertinaje? [*sic*].

At this point, I realized that many of the students read texts in a very "literal"

manner. This, added to their lack of vocabulary, prevented them from going a little deeper

into the texts' covert language. For instance, during a scaffolding activity we were

discussing the purposeful use of pronouns in an ad from a publicity campaign, which uses

the slogan, "*On the list*". I was prompting students with questions to help them see how the

choices in these kinds of sentences affected who was included or excluded. As seen in the

following conversation, reaching that objective was somewhat challenging because students

focused their attention on the meaning of the word "list" (see the slide below):

Figure 10. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

Teacher: Very well, thank you. ¿Y si no dijera, *"Are you on the list?",* sino que dijera, *"You are on the list"*_Cómo afecta esto el sentido de la oración? ¿Si no fuese una pregunta, sino que fuera una oración afirmativa? ¿Cómo afectaría esto la manera en que yo lo leo?
Student 5: Lo podría preocupar a uno porque le estaría diciendo que está en la lista y uno como ¿Qué? ¿Por qué? ¿Cuándo? ¿Lista de qué?...
Student 6: Es lo mismo
Student 5: No, no es lo mismo porque en la otra hay posibilidad de decir « no estoy en la lista », pero a uno le dicen: « tú estás en la lista » y uno se queda… ¿Como en lista de quién o qué?, ¿De qué está hablando? [*sic*].

This way of reading texts in such a literal manner, made it hard for some of them to interpret messages differently in written tasks as well. These examples evidence this point as well:
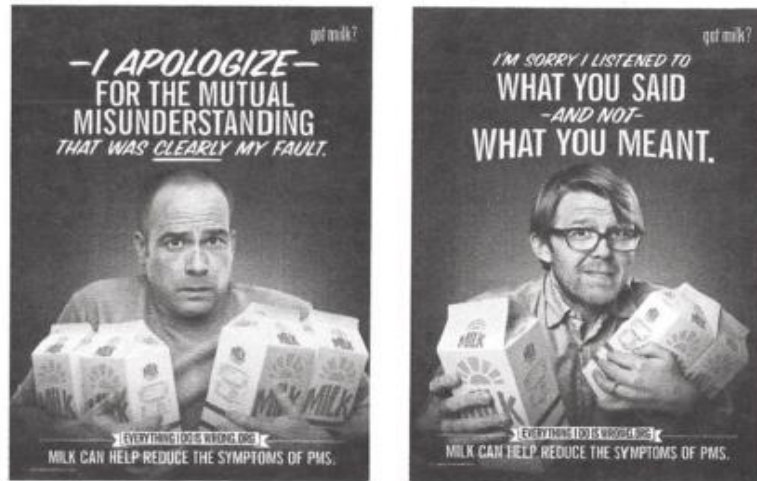

Figure 11. Images Used for Text Analysis

Students 1 and 4 (in-pair activity)

1. What are the ads about?

That the people hear but they don't listen for understaning the meaning of the things

4. Who do you think the ad was written for? For what purpose?   4.

we think that the ad was written for the men with purpose that buy milk for the women

5. What's the message in the ad?

That the men can offer apologize with milk when the women have symptoms of PMS [handwritten]

The answers to some questions on worksheets show students interest and willingness in engaging in critical analysis of the problematic language in ads; however, in some cases it was even hard for me to understand what the students meant to say:

Question: *How is the author trying to sympathize with the reader? Why is that so?*

"Because the author wants the reader between consciousness of what the Kellogg's can do to change your life, self-esteem, to see us better" [*sic*]. **(student 11)**

Question: *Why do you think the author uses the command "Don't let it" in the paragraph?*

"For my concerns that affect us not leave a tape measure If you feel good as you are no matter what others" [*sic*]. **(student 6)**

Question: *What does pronoun "it" refer to in the ad?*

"The pronoun "It" in the subtitle refer to cereal or the subway, which we are not handling these things to see us well" [*sic*]. **(student 2)**

The above-samples portray students' comprehension as to what the covert language in the messages implies, and apparently they try to make their point in their texts' analysis. However, language proficiency is a limitation in some students' cases, and this hinders their capacity to express their ideas fully. Probably some of the language in the input material was too advanced for some students' level of comprehension prior the beginning of this course. Having more information as to the participants' background knowledge would have given me (as a researcher) better insight into the kinds of activities that would have suited their linguistic competence prior this implementation.

In the final questionnaire, some students relate their personal struggles with English and how they felt that lack of knowledge in terms of vocabulary and syntax was an obstacle they faced for the development of the activities proposed during the sessions:

Question: *¿Qué tipo de retos o dificultades tuviste que enfrentar para el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas a lo largo del curso?*

"Mis retos fueron enfrentarme a hablar frente a mi profesora ya que soy muy tímida, enfrentarme a textos mediáticos y ser lo más crítica posible, aún sigue siendo un reto para mí hablar con fluidez, pero la profesora si me motivó mucho a que lo hiciera."

"Leer para poder entender, ya que antes me dejaba llevar por la simple imagen y no por su contenido textual."

As a teacher I also felt somewhat frustrated while trying to carry out some activities. I recorded evidence of my personal concerns about the issue:

"If well it is true that they had clearly understood the purpose of the exercise, the level of language in the movie was way too advanced for them. This leaves me wondering whether or not their true difficulty is being able to uncover hidden messages or it is more a matter of lack of language proficiency" (July 24th)

"As I played the commercial, I noticed that many of them struggled to keep up with the speed and did not understand very much what was being said although the speaker used a clear, not very elaborate kind of language. I had to play it four times before we could carry out the discussion." (July 21st)

"I feel frustrated when I read sentences in the slides that I know they cannot understand; we should probably be taking more time to go over all the vocabulary, but unfortunately, I do not have the time to do this. As a result, many times it is I the one who translates things for them. I am not sure this is the right thing to do, though." (August 4th)

Although observing language proficiency was not a research purpose stated from the beginning of this study, language scaffolding did take place at the beginning of each lesson. For instance, before addressing issues of *gender positioning* in a song, we went over the use of different pronouns in English (subject and object pronouns) and analyzed

linguistic aspects that I knew students would find in the text in relation to syntax. Such was the case of *second conditional*, which was also a language objective on the course syllabus (see appendix E for complete song activity). Nonetheless, time to do both, language scaffolding and CLA principles to carry out the whole activity in one single session was not sufficient. Some students struggled with syntax, vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation, and this hindered their chances to be more participative, and prevented me from keeping the pace of the lessons as I had expected I would. I spent a good amount of time helping students make sense of the texts I presented first, to then attempt at having critical discussions around the purposes of them. I wonder whether some other texts with a more appropriate level of language for students would have made a difference in the possibilities to express themselves more confidently and, perhaps more openly about the issues we discussed.

Students' resistance towards the methodology. It is my assumption that due to the difficulties illustrated above, many times some learners simply couldn't express their ideas. As a result, they resisted engaging in conversations or participating more actively, and they expressed not being able to answer the questions because they were not sure about how to do so in the FL. In written activities, they left plenty of spaces in blank. This could be due to lack of time to complete the assignments, but it is my belief that they didn't feel very "motivated" to finish the activities. These are some excerpts from class conversations and worksheets that illustrate the point I intend to make.

The following example is from an activity that took place at the beginning of this unit implementation. To start the conversation about representations of people's image in media, I wrote the following statement on the board: *"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder".*

Then, I prompted students with questions to know whether they understood the meaning of

this proverb in English. Here is an excerpt of the conversation that followed:

Teacher: What do you think the expression "*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"* refers to?
Student 2: La belleza está en el ojo del observador..
Teacher: And how do you understand that? _In English, try it in English. How do you interpret that?
Student 2:Eeeeee mejor no teacher. No sé cómo decirlo en inglés…[*sic*].

The following excerpts are taken from discussions around the concepts of *good*

power and *bad power*, which aimed at raising awareness about how language serves as a

vehicle to favor a minority and disempower others, thus perpetuating social inequities:

Student 6: Teacher, I… ¿Cómo se dice, *escoger*?
Teacher: Choose
Student 7: I choose Hitler.
Teacher: Hitler, uhuh.
Student 6: He was a one person that had a lot of power but used it very, very bad because murdered many people, a million people, only because they want that the person thought how him, that he people worshipped him.
Teacher: Oh! And in your life? Who has exerted power?
Student 6: Ay, yo no quiero seguir!
Teacher: O.k, that's O.k, Pablo [*sic*].

In a similar conversation, this other student refuses to try to continue expressing her ideas:

Teacher: Suspicious! The opposite of naïve is suspicious. Suspicaz. There you go! (talking to another student): Are you ready now? Te ayudamos... Go ahead!
Student 6: It's the power of the United States government. He governs the other nations and it's … (incomprehensible use of language).
Teacher: So, you are saying that the United States government has used good power or bad power?
Student 6: Bad power
Teacher: Why?
Student 6: Because they _se meten…
Teacher: They interfere or they what?
Student 6: Reprimen
Teacher: They, oppress
Student 6: Oppress other nations
Teacher: Ah, O.k. And in your life?
Student 6: My father
Teacher: Your father
Student 6: My parents

Teacher: Both. Is that good power or bad power?
Student 6: Good power
Teacher: Why?
Student 6: Lo mismo de Fede
Teacher: Lo mismo de Fede, pero es que Fede es Fede y tú eres tú [*sic*].

In written activities, the above-mentioned issue is also evident. Here is part of a student's answer to an activity they had had enough time to work on. It was an analysis that they carried out of the movie *Brave*. They took the worksheet home on a Friday and had the weekend to complete it. What I found interesting in this piece of evidence is precisely the fact that this particular student was usually very actively involved in all the other activities and did not have major difficulties with the language that could prevent her from carrying out this particular task.

Student 4:

5. The movie shows stereotypes concerning gender, race, social class and age. For instance, the children's behavior at the dinner table represents children as naughty a incapable of table manners. That perpetuates the idea that most children act like that when eating. Can you identify other stereotypes?

a. Regarding women _mandones, regañonas,_

b. Regarding men _peleones suicas comelones guerreros_

c. Regarding Irish culture _Duende tocando la gaita, ellos no usan ropa interior._

d. Regarding adolescents, children or elders _son sucios, creativos, traviesos torpes caprichosos_

e. Regarding social status _____

As a result of students' resistance to participate in some of the activities, I usually found myself turning my attention towards three or four students that were more willing to

express their opinions. Sometimes I simply had to go over the activity rather fast and move onto something that they would find more appealing to save the class from becoming too monotonous and prevent the group from losing interest in the whole implementation. In my journal, I wrote about those particular instances in which I had to take immediate action and change plans at the last minute due to students' lack of motivation to engage in the activities:

"We carried out our conversation about heroes and heroines and it was my assumption that more of them would connect with it, yet I was wrong. Many of them were not that interested in talking about some of those characters and expressed not being very acquainted with them." (July 31st)

"When I announced there would be yet "another task" to carry out, some of them agreed to the activity, yet a few of them resisted the exercise for they argued they were too busy finishing their academic semesters at the university, but that was it. At the end, they all consented to do the activity." (August 11th)

In the final questionnaire, a student expressed having felt that this type of methodology was tiring at times as well:

Question*: ¿Consideras que es pertinente hacer análisis de textos como los que hicimos en cursos de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras? _Justifica tu respuesta.*

"Considero que sí es bueno analizar textos mediáticos en clase, porque eso nos ayuda a llegar a expresiones en ingles que de otra forma no aprenderíamos, pero no demasiado ya que tanto análisis es aburridor."

Another expression of resistance was evident in some of the students' concerns about the effectiveness of this methodology. Several of them made it very explicit throughout the entire course of implementation and prompted me constantly with questions regarding whether or not I thought they would be able to learn English in such a different way of teaching the foreign language. Some of them (like the student described in the

example below) even considered quitting the course and they let me know they were concerned they might fail if they were not able to keep up with the proposed activities:

"Student 2 approached me concerned with his class performance. He had been absent the day before and he explained that he was a little worried about not being able to understand all the words in the texts that I was presenting in class and that this might interfere with his expectations to be able to "pass" the course. I calmed him down by giving him arguments as to how we were doing exactly what we were supposed to do in an English course of this nature, just by using a different kind of perspective. He felt better afterwards and went to work" (July 22nd).

In conclusion, taking into account institutional requirements and students' needs in the material design process, coping with language demands during the implementation of this unit was challenging for them, especially in oral production activities. However, students were more engaged in written and scaffolding activities, and although they could not always participate in discussions regarding the slides presented in the target language, they did react to them in their native language by arguing against information they found discriminatory or stereotyping in the texts.

Issues with texts in materials: Scaffolding and worksheets. Choosing appropriate texts for the purpose of this unit implementation was a real challenge. First, because there were some academic objectives in the program that needed to be addressed, and the texts selected were expected to help learners to fulfill those goals, but also as a researcher, I wanted to follow the critical agenda of this particular study, and being true to both intentions was troublesome at times. Additionally, I originally had designed this unit for a course 5. Learners at that level in the program were supposed to have a higher level of language proficiency, and because the course was cancelled due to a low number of students' registration, I was assigned a course 3 with students with a significant less number of hours in the program, hence a lower level of English. In consequence, I carried out the

implementation with learners for whom the texts I had chosen, were rather challenging, for

I did not have the timeframe to select new materials _some perhaps more appropriate to

their level of language acquisition.

As mentioned before, students struggled to understand the words in texts, so a great amount

of time had to be spent on figuring out what was actually being said first, to then go deeper

into what was embedded in the texts. This resulted in the use of translation to Spanish in

many activities: The following is a conversation that took place after seeing the *Old Spice*

commercial three times. Evidently, students did not fully understand what the actor was

saying. The conversation started with the teacher asking students what they thought the

audience of this commercial was:

Student 1: Profe, ¿la pregunta ahí es como, ¿Para quién es el comercial?
Teacher: Yes.
Student 1: For men.
Teacher: You think it is directed to men? Okay. Why?
Student: Because, teacher, it´s a _How do you pronounce desodorante?
Teacher: Deodorant
Student 1: For men.
Student 5: I think the deodorant is both.
Teacher: It's both, men and women? Why?
Student 5: Yes, these women I like the men…How do you say, *huelen*?
Teacher: To smell
Student 5: To smell good is attractive.
Student 3: It's difference use intention but is for both (referring to men and women).
Teacher: Anyone else? Natalia, what do you say?
Student 9: For men
Teacher: To you it is directed to men. Alejandro, is the commercial for men or for women?
Student 8: For men
Teacher: For men, but he said, *"Hello ladies",* at the beginning of the commercial…
Students: Yes… (Murmuring)
Teacher: If it is a commercial for men, how come he says at the beginning "*Hello ladies look at your man, now look at me...*" _So is it really for men or for women? _Sometimes what appears to be something is not necessarily that. It's a product for men, I agree with you, but he is not talking to men at the beginning of the commercial, he said, *"Hello ladies"* Okay. Why? Student 3: Because the women are good [*sic*].

As seen, I intended to help students see beyond the words the actor was saying, yet understanding the text at the literal level first, took students a long time. Another excerpt of a conversation while analyzing the language in a Power Point slide also exemplifies this difficulty:

Teacher: Look at this. These are a couple of interesting ads (teacher reads the texts): *"Everything I know about men I learned from my dog",* and *"So easy, a husband can do it".* First, how does using this comparison, the comparison of the dog and the man, construct men's image and perpetuates stereotypes? Lisa, a ver Lisa. Primero que todo, Lisa, ¿Entendemos qué quiere decir el ad? (Student looks puzzled in video and teacher continues) _Ayúdame a traducir, a ver ¿Qué quiere decir ese ad?
Student 6: Pues, ahí como que trata de decir es que… pues yo entiendo así como si la mujer tuviera el control, por ejemplo.
Teacher: Emmm, Maira? ¿Cómo me traduces tú? Tradúceme este ad…¿Qué quiere decir?
Student 2: Que hay que (inaudible) como en el hombre…
Teacher: Por ahí va. Natalia ¿Cómo lo entiendes tú?
Student 9: Todo lo que se sobre los hombres, es porque lo aprendí de mujer…[*sic*].

While carrying out scaffolding activities, I used explicit language to discuss and exemplify many of the concepts in relation to *Critical Language Awareness, such as position, representation, power, stereotypes, gender,* among others _in line with what critical texts' analysis models propose (Granville, 1993; Janks,1993; Janks et al., 2013; Newfield, 1993). However, as we discussed the use of language in media, some students did not remember the concepts presented, and this prevented them from being able to give clear answers to some of the questions asked:

Teacher: Very well, guys, everyone: Do you think media texts play a role… When I say *play a role* let's get familiar with these expressions. Do you think texts affect _I mean, television, radio, and magazines, affect our perception of men and women? _Yes or no?
Student 4: Yeah, because in the image, pictures, in the TV programs, series, has many stereotypes about the shape model.
Teacher: The role model? Yes?
Student 4: Yes. The woman is a blond woman, in any case is not intelligent, with big hips, with many surgeries, and other things, and the man has to any role model how tall, thin or well-built person, and the man who is fat is discriminated in the series, in the programs for childrens is bulling for the fat people or people that use glasses.
Teacher: Have you ever felt personally affected by those representations of people? Do you

personally feel sometimes less attractive because of those representation*s*?
Student 4: No entiendo la pregunta
Teacher: No entiendes la pregunta…[*sic*].

Because I wanted to raise awareness on issues of *gender* and *power,* I used some ads

and other texts that contained explicit discriminative language messages against women

during the 60s. Such was the case of a particular vintage cartoon of *Wonder Woman*, which

of course, not all youngsters in this generation are familiar with. Since we were discussing

the mentioned-above concepts, along with the stereotypical representations that superhero

characters have created throughout time, it was my assumption that this would be a perfect

example and they would be able to uncover gendered discourses in this particular cartoon.

Here is part of the text in question (see complete slide in appendix B):
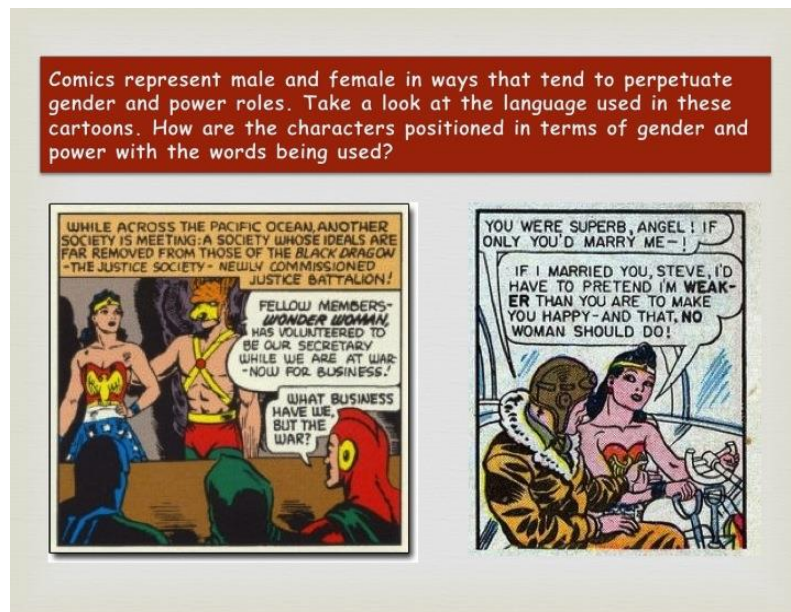

Figure 12. Power Point Slide Used in Scaffolding Activities

If well it is true that some of them found the cartoon interesting and tried to figure out what was problematic about this text, contrary to what I expected, the conversation demanded a great amount of time and energy. About this particular issue, in my observations journal, I recorded:

"It was very challenging to do scaffolding today because they had lots of issues understanding the examples that I had chosen for this activity. The language in some of the examples continues to be a big constraint. Not only that, but also the context. I chose examples of *Wonder Woman*, a character that many of them had never heard of. But, more than the character, it was to understand what she was saying in the cartoon what they found most troublesome." (July 31st).

"I also connected the idea of power to talk about gender. Some students' remarks called my attention. As we were reviewing the last two slides, I realized that many of them are not very aware of the context of some of the characters, examples and sentences that I had chosen for the scaffolding ideas, so I had to spend time contextualizing things for students; either by telling them the story behind the text or explaining who the person was." (August 4th).

When referring to difficulties they encountered with the chosen texts, in the questionnaire two students wrote:

"El audio fue una de mis dificultades y eso no optimiza mi proceso de aprendizaje, también inconvenientes con la ubicación de un texto para analizar."

"Lo más difícil que me pareció fue al momento de analizar cada texto ya que nunca había tomado este tema con tanta seriedad por lo tanto no estaba acostumbrado al análisis de estos."

Another difficulty that students faced with materials had to do with understanding activity instructions. As a result of this, they did not fulfill the task in some of the oral presentations and on the worksheets. This conversation took place right after they presented their analysis of a text at the end of week one. I had asked them to look for a text in which men or women were represented in particular ways in terms of their physical appearance. This couple of students looked for an ad that portrayed a man using discriminative language

against a woman. They did something very different from what I had proposed:

Teacher: Okay, but I have a question for you, how is this presentation related to *image*?
Student 9: Teacher…
Teacher: ¿Cómo se relaciona con la…porque recuerden que íbamos a buscar advertisements que tuvieran que ver con *self-image*, you know, physical appearance…
Student 9: Teacher es que eso, pues esto fue lo que nos vino a la mente.
Teacher: Claro, les paso lo mismo que al primer equipo…[*sic*].

Janks (2010) affirms that in a multimodal-oriented world of texts, the image has gained relevance in the way people construct reality (p. 63), and both forms of texts (visual and verbal) can be purposefully constructed in contradictory ways. However, the eye usually catches the image first, and this often distorts the readers' capacity to understand the underlying intention of the text to position him/her as a reader.

This is precisely the reason why focusing on the grammatical and lexical choices of the text's producers is so relevant at the time of fostering CLA. Although I had advised students about the importance of giving more relevance to words analysis (i.e., repetitions, adjectives and nouns choices, etc) and not only the images in the texts we were observing, this was rather difficult to some students. In my journal I recorded several episodes which illustrate the matter. It was not until we had analyzed a good number of texts (towards the end of week 2), that they started to actually pay attention to *what* the words in the texts said and not *how* men and women were being portrayed in the images of the ads or commercials they saw. On this particular issue, among many other entries I recorded:

 "As I went close to the couples I could notice that some of them were more focused on trying to get meaning from the image rather than the text." (July 14th)

 "The first couple shared their media text: a burger commercial in which women were clearly portrayed as sex symbols and whose physical appearance was compared to food

products. Students focused their explanation on all the visual images and did transcribe the content of the commercial, but did not get into analyzing the words in it." (July 23rd).

"Once the student finished explaining his text, I stepped in to tell him that he was clearly analyzing the image, and asked the group whether they thought this was related to what we had been doing for the past weeks. Everyone said that the difference was that there was no text in this case. I took advantage to explain that this was not CLA, but a critical analysis of media, which was also relevant, but it was not what I had proposed." (August 18h).

Overall, finding materials for this CLA-based unit was quite challenging. First, students were surprised to see that not only we were using texts that they had not explored in their previous courses, but also they were being exposed to the target language by means other than the textbooks they were used to. This approach to learning the FL was probably new to most of them, and their difficulty to understand what the texts said, may have also been the cause of their resistance to participate in the discussions pertaining some of the texts I presented.

On the other hand, I was constantly wondering about the authenticity and pertinence of these texts: I knew that for the sake of the research goals (raising awareness of gendered discourses in media), I had to purposefully look for texts that would allow us problematize this particular issue. Nonetheless, I always had big doubts and concerns about the extent to which the material I had selected, would successfully suit learners' needs (especially in terms of language goals). Unfortunately, I cannot say that I was able to identify other needs from the beginning of the implementation because, as stated in a previous section, my time of interaction with them was not long enough to carry out such endeavor. Having had this opportunity, I would have considered their needs before choosing the materials to make this a much more significant experience: One that could have better connected to students' realities. All in all, given the time and other constraints we had, I based my choices on the

assumption that raising awareness on covert gendered language in some media texts would be a good start towards a more emancipatory language teaching process amongst my students.

Time management difficulties. One of the biggest difficulties I faced had to do with the use of time. Although I had taken into account time management in the unit design, once I started the implementation, what I had previously planned didn't go as expected. This was due to some factors that can be verified in the data: For instance, the lack of students' language proficiency (as I have stated before) interfered with the development of certain activities because I had to invest double the time helping students understand the content of the chosen texts:

"I was a little disappointed to see that the time I had planned for the lessons was so unrealistic. They took almost two hours for carrying out half of what I had planned. I am concerned about how long this data collection is really going to take." (July 14th)

"Another thing that I am finding somewhat constraining is time. Perhaps students would have the capacity to uncover issues in language, but class time goes by too fast and they need more time to process texts to decode them literally first to then carry out the CLA activities and have a finished product before class is over." (July 17th)

Journal Entry 10: "Spending class time (that I had originally thought for another activity) to let students finish something they didn't in a previous lesson has become repetitive. However, I also have to acknowledge the importance of letting them complete their activities because everything that happens along this research will be meaningful to my conclusions: even the fact that students struggle to put their ideas together and take such a long time in this process." (August 5th)

As a consequence of this, I had to start changing the order of some activities to comply with both my objectives as a teacher and researcher: to cover the material and review the structures I was supposed to for the particular course I was teaching, and besides to carry out the critical analysis of the media texts that I had included in the unit. These Journal excerpts account for this situation:

"Because students continue to take a long time on the activities that they have to hand in, I continue to struggle with time handling management for completing language activities and fulfilling content objectives." (August 11th)

"This was not supposed to be the first activity, but at the last minute I decided to switch activities to be somewhat strategic and make better use of time." (August 5th)

Students expressed having problems to manage time when doing the different proposed tasks. In fact, this student expressed feeling somehow overwhelmed by the amount of activities they had to do in such a short amount of time:

Question: *¿Qué tipo de retos o dificultades tuviste que enfrentar para el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas durante el curso?*

"La mayor dificultad que enfrenté fue el manejo del tiempo, porque al estar en un curso intensivo es mucho el tiempo semanal que invertimos en inglés y con estas actividades es como si se hubiera duplicado por la cantidad de actividades diarias que debíamos realizar" [*sic*].

Time management was definitely a very relevant issue along this whole implementation. Making realistic decisions about how long a scaffolding activity was going to take or whether students would have enough time to respond to questions in prompt sheets was something that required experience in planning and lesson design. Furthermore, it also demanded lots of creativity to move from one activity into the next or change their whole plan if necessary. Although students had the opportunity to take some of the activities home when class time was not enough, they still handed in incomplete activities. In sum, time played a fundamental role in the success of the critical analysis of texts because this activity calls for taking into account students' learning pace if we expect students to do a conscientious job.

In the subsequent sections I will continue to discuss some of the findings presented in this section at the light of the theories that informed this research, as well as their relevance, implications and further recommendations for other researchers who might also be interested in exploring the possibilities of CLA-based teaching like me to gain better understanding of the challenges and successes of incorporating principles of this critical approach to language teaching in their classrooms.

Discussion

Learning a foreign language for functional purposes is one of many students' main goal, yet being critical as to the social, cultural and political implications that accompany this process should be part of both teachers and learners' agendas (Okazaki, 2005; Sanchez & Paulson, 2008). Following principles of Critical Literacy (CLs), and more precisely of Critical Language Awareness (CLA), the present study aimed to break foreign language teaching and learning traditional practices, by fostering critical awareness among a group of learners in a language center in Medellin, Colombia. To reach this purpose, a unit incorporating principles of CLA was designed and implemented during three weeks of class in daily sessions of two hours, four times a week. During every session, students were exposed to a variety of media texts, and with the help of scaffolding activities, they learned about principles for texts' deconstruction (Janks et al., 2013). Thus, they were given the opportunity to analyze the linguistic choices of those texts and others they selected themselves. Data suggest that, despite some challenges encountered during this implementation, *Critical Language Awareness* was indeed raised among some of the participants who were able to uncover covert gendered language in the written texts and were successful in engaging in critical discussions around the analyzed material.

Critical scholars whose thoughts and experiences have illuminated this research study (Janks, 2005, 2010; Janks et al., 2013; Kellner & Share, 2007; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, Sunderland, 2004, 2006), agree on the fact that being a *critical reader* is not a skill inherent to the act of reading. To them, a critical reading of language that maintains the *status quo* can be developed during a process that starts by becoming aware of the fact that language in texts is not neutral.

For example, there was an introductory activity, designed to explore whether the students in this group would be able to identify issues of *race, social status, age*, *body image,* and *gender* in product advertisements. A few of the participants in this study where able to find stereotypical representations of people in some of the media texts presented at the beginning of this implementation, yet this was not the case of the majority of students. Results in the analysis of that initial activity showed that to most participants, there was nothing *out of the ordinary* with the language used to advertise different products, yet indeed, some texts had clearly discriminatory statements towards women and men and positioned them in stereotypical ways (see appendix C). In contrast, at the end of the intervention, a different response was found: When all the students were asked to look for and problematize a text of their own, they showed a significant increase in their capacity to challenge word choices that perpetuate stereotypical representations of people in media. In their final presentations, students were able to reflect upon some particular linguistic choices such as *pronouns, nouns, verbs* and *adjective* choices, which positioned the reader in particular ways according to the individual purposes of texts' creators.

In this implementation I used Janks's (1993) and Janks et al. (2013) models to foster CLA principles while carrying out activities from the course syllabus. Wallace (1992) affirms that texts selection is key to "expand students' horizons, both interpretatively and experientially" (p.107). Despite the challenges some of the learners had in coping with language in some of those texts, scaffolding and class activities proved to help them realize the impact that covert language has in the way texts position readers, and how this affects their perception of reality. Texts such as printed ads of different types of products, movie excerpts video clips, song lyrics and others used in class, brought a differentiating element

in the lessons they had taken in previous courses, yet presented them with alternatives to

approach the language other than the use of a traditional publisher's English textbook.

Additionally, scaffolding activities through which they learned the meaning of concepts

such as *positioning, representation, othering,* among others, or a focus placed on words

substitutions, repetitions and word choices, gave them a new perspective as to how

language is purposefully constructed to serve individual purposes and agendas. Despite

what critics of using explicit *metalanguage* in the foreign language classroom think _

claiming that it may not be the best strategy for language learning (Alderson, 1997, as cited

in Wallace, 1992), to Wallace (1992) doing so guarantees the interpretations of the

language that is "shared within the classroom community" (p. 106).

In addition to this, scaffolding, as suggested by Sunderland (2004), helped learners

become aware of misrepresentations of gender in advertisements. Shannon (as cited in

Harste & Albers, 2013), affirms that particularly advertisements have "pedagogic ways" to

teach us how to read the world and behave according to their producers' needs, and those

pedagogies "recreate our own images". The author maintains that being able to read against

advertisements requires a skill to read critically; which means to "read awake" and with

agency (p.16). There is sufficient evidence in the data to affirm that, some of these students

not only developed skills to read issues embedded in the language of media texts, but also

gained awareness of their own representations of gender. In other words, they realized that

their own discourses, which contained stereotypical ideas about men and women, have been

socially constructed (Butler, 1993, as cited in Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). A comparison of

students' texts analysis at the beginning and end of the unit implementation revealed that

students who had not succeeded in identifying issues of gender in the media texts presented did become more aware of gendered discourses towards the end of the course.

All in all, incorporating principles for texts deconstruction in this course led the way for learners to start questioning the coercive power of media texts and even resist it. As Sholes (1985) affirms, given the constant "assaults" of media manipulation our learners are prone to, the worst attitude us teachers can have is "to foster in them an attitude of reverence before texts" (p. 61). As stated in the findings, participants started to question some of the texts in the foreign language they had enjoyed before _namely songs, whose linguistic content they could not completely understand before. The activities carried out during the implementation helped them realize how the writers of those texts purposefully positioned men and women in sexist ways. Consequently, these learners' perception of such texts changed (e.g., their preferences about some of the songs they listened to). This awareness led them towards a place of opposition, as Janks (1993) suggests, not for the sake of mere resistance, but for contesting their own discursive practices, through which they can inadvertently disempower others, and perpetuate issues of injustice and discrimination (p.iii).

Along with these important gains in raising critical awareness in students, several challenges were faced, too: If well it is true that a critical reading of texts has been fostered by researchers in different contexts at early stages of the language learning process with positive outcomes (Eastman, 1998; Perkins, 1998; Reade, 1998), these scholars agree that difficulties to cope with language in the materials they presented to students, might have prevented learners from fully engaging in critical discussions about explicit language in texts. It is also my belief that, if this implementation had been possible with students who

had a higher language proficiency level (the ones this unit had originally been planned and designed for), perhaps the collected evidence as to how they developed a better understanding of covert language in texts would have been more compelling, and there wouldn't be lingering questions in my journal and other data collection artifacts as to why not all the students carried out all the proposed tasks.

Perhaps another difficulty had to do with how heterogeneous groups were at the language center: students do take final exams to be promoted to the following course, yet not all of them follow the same process: Often times students join the classes after having taken a *placement exam,* and the result of this is evident on the various levels of language competence one encounters in the same course level. From the beginning of this course, it was evident that 6 of the students had a better command of the language, which allowed them to express themselves with some fluency and coherence despite some vocabulary issues. The other half of the group, in contrast, had major difficulties with syntax and lexicon. This hindered their capacity to understand many of the texts we analyzed in class answer questions in the worksheets or participate more actively in the discussions we carried out during the scaffolding sessions. Such students' difficulty to use the target language was perhaps the cause of their resistance and lack of interest to take part in the proposed activities as suggested in some of the collected data. Perkins (1998) and Eastman (1998) reported similar issues as to learners' responses in their experiences with critical texts' analysis.

Comber (2001) and McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) suggest that the experience of adapting and incorporating principles of critical work into the teaching of a second or foreign language is a "challenging one", for no model can be entirely applicable to all

contexts. Choosing appropriate texts to foster a critical analysis of power issues in them has

proved to be one of some researchers' main concerns (Perkins, 1998; Wallace, 1999). This

was particularly true for this implementation as well. Wallace (1992) cautions on the fact

that traditionally, critical reading has not been a source of interest in FL courses in general

(p.62), and the literature review I carried out in the Colombian context, aiming to foster a

CLA analysis of media in a FL course (prior this implementation), showed a similar

situation. Additionally, for the implementation of this unit, I used models created by

scholars whose work was done in international contexts and with learners who had very

different needs, such as those proposed by Janks (1993) and Janks et al. (2013). It is my

assumption that, like in Perkins's (1998) study, some of the selected texts for this

implementation proved to be irrelevant and decontextualized for the participants.

One of the possible causes for this setback was that some of the texts were written in

different contexts and periods in time (see appendix B); in addition to this (as discussed in a

previous section), the materials I used were intended for another audience: one with a

significant difference in the amount of time spent in the program, so the texts were perhaps

too advanced for these learners. In my view, more time and consciousness as to the

pertinence of the materials selection is definitely key to have better participation in critical

discussions around media texts and classroom interactions amongst learners. As advised by

Perkins (1998), "…relevance to the learners' lives is the most important factor in the choice

of text" (pp. 30-6) _I admit that this is perhaps one of the biggest lessons learned as a

novice researcher in this field.

As suggested by some of the CLs and CLA scholars mentioned in this study (Clark

et al., 1990; Janks et. al, 2013; Luke & Woods, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004),

teaching from a critical perspective is a relevant issue at the light of the changes that living in a world of social inequalities supposes, hence the need for changing traditional education paradigms to incorporate critical work in schools' agendas. However, to fulfill this goal, teachers and researchers require support in terms of curricular dispositions and educational policies in institutions. Although I was able to prepare all the lessons taking into account my interests as a researcher and the demands of the academic program, lack of time to develop the syllabus activities and foster CLA principles altogether was a constant constraint. All in all, it is my belief that further research in this line of critical work, would probably help researchers who are not experienced in this field to make more assertive decisions as to the unit design, materials selection and time management before carrying out a CLA-based implementation similar to the one described in this study.

In the last section of this paper I will present the conclusions I have drawn from this study along with implications that other teachers interested in exploring the effects of fostering CLA in the language classroom might find useful for their research studies.

Conclusions

How could one conceive education without an agenda of empowering and transformation of students' lives? _From Freire's ideas of a "dialogical" approach to literacy, *Critical Literacy* emerged as a pedagogical approach to provide learners with literacy skills that would allow them to emancipate from a "banking model of education" that served the purpose of a dominant social class in rural Brazilian communities during the 70s. Since then, and following on his steps, scholars worldwide have built upon CLs fundamental principles by adding new concepts and creating models that have responded to different moments, contexts and learners' needs (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Janks, 2003; Luke, 2001; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Pennycook, 2001; Vasquez, 2003, as cited in Luke & Woods, 2009). As stated by Luke and Woods (2009), far from being a methodology, or a set of principles, CLs entail a whole "educational project" to which several theorists have contributed with their own views of education (p.1).

One of such contributions has been the one provided by scholars in the field of linguistics and texts analysis, whose views about literacy contradicted the classical view of Freirian pedagogy based on *voice* and *ideology* as the central and sole tenets of an education for emancipatory purposes. To texts analysts (Halliday, 1978, 1994; Halliday & Martin, 1993; Hassan & Williams, 1996, as cited in Luke & Woods, 2009), being critically literate also meant to have a deeper interaction with the complexities of texts construction in regards to how learners' mastering of textual genres could grant them *access* to powerful modes of texts production and interpretation. Such ideas later gave way to what scholars like Fairclough, interested in the intersection between *discourses* and *ideology* came to

name Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): an approach that focuses on a "systematic analysis of texts and other elements of the social process" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 10). Subsequently Fairclough, elaborating on the concept of power, and how ideologies are shaped by discursive practices, called for the teaching and fostering of Critical Language Awareness (CLA), a pedagogic application of texts analysis that entails teaching students how to read texts critically by attending their lexico-grammatical constructions, ideological stances and the conditions under which those texts have been produced. The premise is that such close engagement with texts provides learners with tools to truly understand the ideological and political agendas that are at stake in texts, and how language serves a purpose for the establishment of power relationships between texts' producers and texts readers.

Drawing from his ideas, Hillary Janks developed models for CLA instruction to foster a critical awareness of unequal relationships of power following Apartheid in South Africa (Janks, 1993). In a world of socially-created categories such as *race, gender, class, religion* and *ethnicity,* Janks (2014) asserts that the only possible way to reconcile the historically-created norms that have put less privileged people in a place of disadvantage is by providing present and future generations of learners with a critically-oriented model of education: One that makes them aware of how social orders are maintained by texts and discourses (CLs), and also gives them the necessary tools for learning how to read against the texts that construct the "politics of everyday life" (CLA) (Janks, 2014, p. 349). Thus, a practical way of fostering CLA practices in the language classroom, entails showing learners, in an explicit manner, how the language choices that have been made by texts'

producers are meant to follow their particular agendas to persuade readers to abide by their ideologies.

Understanding the complexities of a media-surrounded generation, and how relevant incorporating CLs, and particularly CLA principles is to help readers become aware of the impact that media texts have in our decisions, a unit was developed and implemented in a FL course in order to explore the *challenges and possibilities to foster a critical reading of gendered discourses in media texts* among learners at a language center. This pedagogical unit was designed using Hillary Janks's (1993) and Janks et al. (2013) models for texts analysis and deconstruction. The goal was to combine CLA principles with the course syllabus and, by means of scaffolding activities, help participants fulfill course contents and objectives while they became aware of gendered hidden messages in some purposefully selected media texts. Although language proficiency plays a significant role in learners' capacity to engage in critical conversations about texts in early stages of language learning (Eastman, 1998; Perkins, 1998) results show that they can still develop skills to go beyond the literal content and understand how texts position them as readers.

In an era of globalization and consumerism, advocates of social transformation believe that education is the key to resist social injustice and inequity through the exercise of pedagogic acts of reflection and responsible citizenship in the classrooms (Comber, 2001; Janks, 2010; Kellner and Share, 2005; Kress, 2003; Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys, 2002). Raising awareness about stereotypical representations of people in media texts in educational contexts opens the door for learners to understand the biases behind ideological positions of texts' producers about issues like *gender*, which can be the cause of marginalization and discrimination against people whose sexual preference does not fit

socially established norms (Cameron, 2003; Sunderland, 2004, 2006; Rosenblum & Travis, 2008; Talbot, 2003). However, scholars admit that despite our efforts as teachers to guide students along the path of this perspective, it is ultimately the reader the one who needs to "understand the bias and decide how to balance it with his or her own knowledge" (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p.26).

Luke and Woods (2009) suggest that Freirian approaches to literacy set the framework for a more emancipatory type of education, and Freire's proposals were in line with the socio-economic and political junctures of the context where he developed his work. Thus, knowing the particularities of individuals before carrying out literacy projects that would allow them to free themselves from the political oppression they were subject to, was a key element in Freire's decolonizing educational philosophy (p.8). However, the authors maintain that technological advances have commanded a new framework of possibilities to expand our views about the teaching and learning of literacies (as new ones have also emerged with the demands of computer-led activities in people's daily and professional lives). The ways to incorporate critique practices along the process should not respond to a fixed set of procedures to achieve this; therefore, Critical literacy shouldn't be seen as a "unified or single method approach", but as a "family of approaches to the teaching and learning of cultures and societies, texts and discourses" (p. 9). This is to say that, regardless of the different perspectives scholars may have about how this purpose could be achieved, what is important remains the same to all of us: Educate people towards the construction of a more equitable society.

An increasing concern to include CL practices in the Colombian educational landscape (Mora, 2014a; Mora, 2015a) in recent years, and the effort of Colombian public

and private universities to allow in-service teachers _like me, to access educational programs that prepare us for the demands that teaching with these new pedagogies in our agendas entails, have given us a new perspective towards the exercise of our profession: One that allows us with the opportunity to contribute to the building of democracy and citizenship just as scholars like Kellner and Share (2007) and Gainer (2010) propose. Results in this study show that it is not only relevant but also possible for us language teachers to draw our attention towards a different kind of praxis that leads us to "promote equitable learning where no student feels marginalized or neglected" in our context (Mora, 2014a, p. 18).

However, some potential challenges that future researchers might face have to do with, a) finding appropriate materials that suit students' needs in relation to their realities; b) being able to fit a critical agenda in the institutional curriculums given the time constraints of many of our educational contexts, and c) designing efficient lesson plans that will not only allow them to foster critical literacies among their students, but also do proper language scaffolding in their classes, so that they can become proficient language users. As for materials selection, an important aspect to keep in mind has to do with students' level of proficiency. In line with Perkins and Eastman's (1998) studies (as cited in Brown & Burns, 1999), as a researcher I learned that it is "unrealistic" to expect that all the students will feel equally comfortable participating in critical discussions in the foreign language unless they have the sufficient linguistic tools to do so.

One of the biggest obstacles that participants in this study faced to engage in the proposed activities had to do with their low level of language proficiency. Prior the implementation stage, I had set objectives and prepared lessons thought for a higher level of

language learners, yet administrative decisions changed the plan at the last minute, and I was assigned a course of learners whose English level was lower. This, of course, represented an obstacle that as a researcher I had to overcome, but it resulted in a bigger challenge for participants along the way. Besides, teachers have to keep up with different schools' curricular agendas. This poses an additional challenge because designing activities that allow us to do critical work and comply with the syllabi proposed by the schools demands a lot of time and creativity. Also, we cannot forget that in public and private schools in our context, there are several activities that suppose last minute class cancellations and changes in the daily routines of our teaching practices, which might prevent us from having the time that this type of work entails.

This study aimed to see how challenging or feasible it would be to incorporate principles of CLA in the lessons of a FL class. The implications of its results for teachers and future researchers give an insight as to how language classrooms can become spaces for the construction of responsible citizenship by empowering learners to challenge texts of massive consumption that exert ideological control on readers. It also contributes to understand how capable learners are of being "word and world readers" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) when given the opportunity to have their voices be heard in their learning environments. For us teachers these kinds of experiences help us understand how we can benefit from our learners' own personal stories in order to rethink our teaching practices and reinvent ourselves as professionals in a world that calls for breaking old education paradigms. Besides, it lights the way for researchers interested in contributing to this field to make the necessary adjustments in order to avoid the difficulties I personally encountered.

As suggested by Mora (2014a), a solid framework for teaching CLs is imperative for both, pre service and Master's students to raise a consciousness as to *how* they can be "advocates" themselves to build more equitable and inclusive language learning spaces (p.17). Studies like the one this paper reports, represent a small contribution in response to the need of research in regards to *language* and *literacy* in our country. Having lived an experience of detaching myself from the constraints of a textbook, to explore along with my students some other possibilities to view language learning as a framework for *critique* and *social action*, gave me the opportunity to move from the safe terrain of language literacy I had hitherto been familiar with.

Morrell (2009) cautions on the relevance of putting *critical research* at the service of more English classrooms for the development of innovating curricula that informs the best ways to approach the teaching and learning of language education (p.103). In line with his ideas, it is my assumption that this type of research would be highly pertinent in public schools in our context where learners (who are themselves victims of marginalization and discrimination) could give us better insights as to the impact that this kind of pedagogy might have in their learning processes and in their lives beyond classrooms walls. Only then we would be able to say that our contributions to this field truly come from the particularities of our context and aim to respond to the needs we have identified in our own learners.

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Appendix A

Power Point Slides Used in Scaffolding Activities
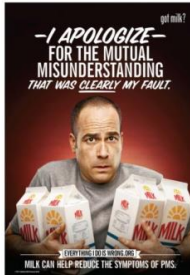
Appendix B

Power Point Slides Used in Scaffolding Activities

Appendix C

Centro Internacional de Idiomas y Culturas U de A
Course 3 / Ads Analysis Activity / July 14th, 2015

Names: _____
_____

Look at the ads and answer the questions below.

1. What are the ads about?
_____

2. Who are the people in the pictures? _What do they look like?
_____

3. Can you find any relationship between the written texts in the ads and the images?
_____

4. Who do you think the ad was written for? For what purpose?
_____

5. What's the message in the ad?
_____

1. What is the ad about?
_____

2. Who are the people in the pictures? _What do they look like?
_____

3. Can you find any relationship between the written texts in the ads and the images?
_____

4. Who do you think the ad was written for? For what purpose?
_____

5. What's the message in the ad?
_____

1. What is the ad about?
_____

2. Who are the people in the pictures? _What do they look like?
_____

3. Can you find any relationship between the written texts in the ads and the images?
_____

4. Who do you think the ad was written for? For what purpose?
_____

5. What's the message in the ad?
_____

1. What is the ad about?
_____

2. Who are the people in the pictures? _What do they look like?
_____

3. Can you find any relationship between the written texts in the ads and the images?
_____

4. Who do you think the ad was written for? For what purpose?
_____

5. What's the message in the ad?
_____

First Lesson Worksheet Sample

111

Appendix D

Power Point Slides Used to Model Text Analysis

IF I WERE

A BOY (Beyonce)

Unveiling Stereotypical Representations of Men in a Song

Let's think about this songwriter's intentions when he or she composed the song. Answer the questions in the bubbles.

{Verse 1}

1. What stereotypes are created in this paragraph about men? Underline key words that reflect them.

If I were a boy even just for a day
I'd roll out of bed in the morning
And throw on what I wanted and go
Drink beer with the guys
And chase after girls
I'd kick it with who I wanted
And I'd never get confronted for it
'Cause **they** stick up for me

2. Who does the pronoun "they" refer to in this line?

{Chorus}

3. What are the author's intentions in changing pronouns here? _How do they position the singer differently?

If **I** were a boy
I think I could understand
How it feels to love a girl
I swear I'd be a better man
I'd listen to **her**
'Cause I know how it hurts
When **you** lose the one you wanted
'Cause **he's** taking you for granted
And everything **you** had got destroyed

113

{Verse}
If I were a boy
I would turn off my phone
Tell everyone it's broken
So they'd think that I was **sleeping alone**
I'd put myself first
And **make the rules** as I go
'Cause I know that **she'd be faithful**
Waiting for me to come home
To come home...

{Chorus Repeat}

It's a little too late for you to come back
Say it's just a mistake
Think I'd forgive you like that
If you thought I would wait for you
You thought wrong

{Chorus }

But you're **just** a boy
You don't understand
Yeah you don't understand, oh
How it feels to love a girl
Someday you wish you were a better man
You don't listen to her
You don't care how it hurts
Until you lose the one you wanted
'Cause you're taking her for granted
And everything you had got destroyed
But you're just a boy!

4. How does the phrase in bold position men?

5. What rules is the author referring to?
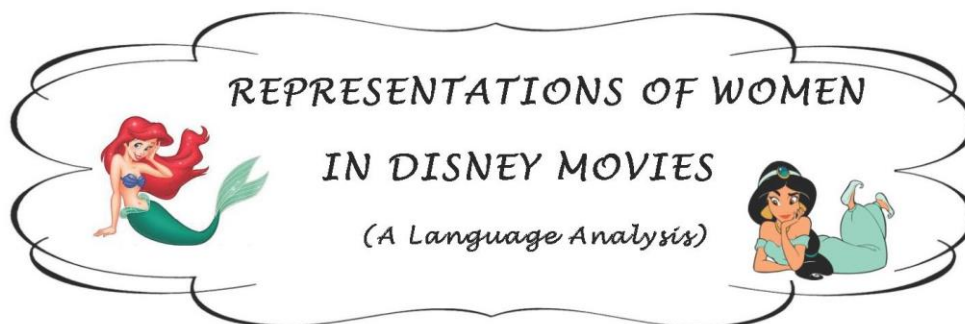
6. How does this phrase position women?

7. How does the word in bold affect the reader's concept of men?

9. Highlight other words or phrases in the verse, which reinforce some representations of men.

Song Analysis Worksheet Sample

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN DISNEY MOVIES
(A Language Analysis)

Names: _____   Date: _____
_____

You will see an excerpt from a popular Disney movie. As you watch the video, pay close attention to the language used and do the following activity:

What stereotypical representation(s) of women can you detect in the movie excerpt you saw? Transcribe the fragment(s) in the dialogue that exemplify your answer and highlight the key words, pronouns, adjectives, nouns or verbs that reinforce that representation.

Stereotype:
_____
_____
Movie Fragment:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Video Clip Analysis Worksheet Sample

Appendix G

CENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE IDIOMAS Y CULTURAS
UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

CLA MOVIE ACTIVITY

NAMES: _____
_____

DATE: _____

1. Write a sentence describing the following characters in terms of their personality types or physical condition:

a. The father _____

b. The father _____

c. Merida _____

d. Merida's brothers _____

2. There are some parts in the movie that position both, men and women in particular ways in terms of power and their gender. Here is an example:

Merida's dad gives her a bow for her birthday, and her mother says, " *A bow, Fergus? _She's a lady...*"

In the case above, the mother implies that because of her gender condition, she can not and should not use a bow, thus perpetuating the idea that women are fragile and weak for certain activities as compared to men. Choose four more examples like this and take notes of the sentences used:

a. _____
_____

b. _____
_____

c. _____
_____

d. _____
_____

116

3. We have discussed concepts such as representation, positioning, power, and gender stereotypes. Analyze these excerpts from the movie and at the light of those concepts answer the questions below each of them.

    a. Speaking of her three brothers who are mischievous, Merida states: "...they get away with murder! I can never get away with anything." How is she positioning herself?

    _____

    _____

    b. At dinner time Merida places her bow on the table and the mother asks her not to place it on the table. Her Dad says, "Leave her be…princes or not, learning to fight is essential!" How is the father positioning Merida?

    _____

    _____

    c. When entering the palace Merida states: "My whole life is planned out. preparing for the day I become... Well my mother! She is in charge of every single day of my life" How is she positioning her mother?

    _____

    _____

    d. The mother asks her dad to give her the news of the ceremony to offer her to the suitable men for marriage, yet when he starts to do it she interrupts him and does it herself. How is her attitude positioning her husband?

    _____

    _____

4. As we have learned in class, there are cases in which we are topdogs or underdogs depending on the situations we are in. Choose a situation in which each of these characters is being either a topdog or an underdog. Circle it and write a sentence or describe the situation.

    a. The Mother   **TOPDOG**   **UNDERDOG**

       Situation: _____

    b. The Father   **TOPDOG**   **UNDERDOG**

       Situation: _____

    c. Merida   **TOPDOG**   **UNDERDOG**

       Situation: _____

    d. The brothers   **TOPDOG**   **UNDERDOG**

       Situation: _____

Movie Analysis Worksheet Sample

LISTENING & SPEAKING COURSE 5

(A language program based on the contents of American Headway 2 Series)

      This is a summary of the main contents, grammar and functions covered by the book described above. The name of lessons is not identical to those on the book, for there are more on the book and I have grouped some contents for practical issues. For the implementation, of course, not all the lessons have to be included, yet these are the topics that we are expected to recycle during the listening and speaking part of the course, which should not take longer than four weeks.

WEEK	TOPIC	GRAMMAR	FUNCTIONS
1 **(8 hours)**	**Getting to know you better**	-*Simple Present* to describe likes, preferences and routines. - *Present Continuous* to describe a scene or an ongoing event.	-Talking about one's personality type -Describing people's physical appearance and attires. -Discussing people's interests and choices.
2 **(8 hours)**	**My life's turning points**	-*Past Simple* to narrate experiences at different stages in our lives in the past. - *Used To* form to describe habit in the past.	-Discussing turning points in our lives in the past. - Narrating events and different kinds of situations about our lives in the past.
3 **(8 hours)**	**Going shopping**	-Adverbs of quantity *some, any, a little, a few, a lot, many* -Shopping expressions and related vocabulary	- Discussing shopping experiences. - Purchasing items at a convenient store

4 **(8 hours)**	**Things to do,** **people to see,** **places to visit**	-*Going To* form to describe future plans and travel. - *Comparatives* and *Superlative* forms to contrast the past and the present.	-Talking about vacation plans. -Comparing places and activities related to travel.
5 **(8 hours)**	**Life's great** **experiences**	-The *Present Perfect* and the *Present Perfect Continuous* to describe experience. - Using *for & since* to talk about how long an event has occurred	-Describing one's most interesting experiences and achievements - Asking and answering questions about time spent doing something.
6 **(8 hours)**	**What if?**	-*Second Conditional: If + would* for wishful thinking -Time clauses in future: *when, as long as, as soon as, when, while, until* and *unless*	-Asking hypothetical questions. - Creating chain stories using time clauses to plan events and possible outcomes
7 **(8 hours)**	**Things that** **changed the** **world**	-*Passive Voice* to describe processes and world-changing events in different tenses	Discussing how things are made and how they have changed our world forever

*Course Program at the Language Cente*r

UNIT PLAN	
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF USING CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS TO FOSTER A CRITICAL READING OF GENDERED DISCOURSES IN MEDIA TEXTS AMONG EFL LEARNERS	
LESSON 2 (Week One) Wednesday July 15th	**GENDER REPRESENTATIONS AND BODY IMAGE IN MEDIA (FIRST PART)**
RESEARCH QUESTION	*What are the challenges and possibilities of implementing Critical Language Awareness (CLA) principles to foster a critical reading of gendered discourses in media texts among EFL learners?* **Text Book: None used** **Lessons: 13** **Class time: Tuesday through Friday from 12:00 to 1:50**
	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES: 1- To use adjectives for giving physical descriptions. 2- To talk about our own perceptions of beauty. 3- To discuss the purposeful use adjectives and nouns in food advertisements to construct readers in particular ways about their self-image.
	CONTENT OBJECTIVES: 1- To unveil hidden intentions of texts' producers in the creation of media texts in relation to people's perceptions of beauty. 2- To define the term *representation* from the CLA perspective.
	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES: 1- To start scaffolding basic concepts of CLA such as, *representation, position, identity, and power*, which are needed for the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses in media by means of a ppt. presentation. 2- To collect information of students' first CLA analysis of an advertisement through a handout.
DATE:	July 15th, 2015

MATERIALS	Photocopies, T.V and Web access.
ESTIMATED TIME	100 minutes (whole session)
ACTIVITY ONE **(10 min)**	*Warm-up: Class discussion (videotaped)* As they come into the classroom, students will find the following statement on the board: ***"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"*** They will be instructed to discuss for five minutes in pairs what they think the sentence means along with these two questions: a. In your own perception, what does a beautiful woman look like? What does an attractive man look like? b. Do you think media texts such as advertisements, movies, or songs play a role in our perception of men and women's body image? _Explain. Afterwards, there will be a short group discussion to share their conclusions (video-taped)
ACTIVITY TWO **(20 min)**	*Raising awareness on representations of men and women's body image (videotape sts. participation)* A scaffolding of CLA basic concepts will start taking place during this lesson. A power point will be shared with students and they will be explained the meaning of the term *Representation* in CLA (See ppt. slides 11 to 13). The suggested activities on the slides will be carried out.
ACTIVITY THREE **(30 min)**	*Language content: Reviewing adjectives for physical descriptions* In pairs, students will go to the media lab and choose a celebrity of their preference. They will look for at least four different ways in which that celebrity is represented in order to create a poster in power point similar to the one they were shown in the previous activity (Angelina Jolie's). Once again in the classroom, we will use the same images to describe those characters physically and practice the vocabulary and structures that are commonly used for giving people's physical descriptions such as adjectives, verbs BE and HAVE. Furthermore, we will discuss how those celebrities are represented in each case and what the intentions of those particular representations might be.
ACTIVITY FOUR **(20 min)**	*Individual CLA analysis on a food advertisement (videotaped)* Students will be asked whether they are familiar with a cereal product called, *Special K* from Kellogg's®**.**

	A short discussion about the product, the kind of food it is, and the purpose it serves will take place by means of a ppt. presentation in which purposeful choice of *nouns* and *verbs* will be shown.
PRODUCT	1- Students' handout (see *word* activity attached) to do their own individual analysis of the words chosen by the text's author. 2- Videotape portraying students' discussions about the CLA concepts covered during the lesson.

Unit Design Lesson Sample

Appendix J

Impresiones Acerca del Análisis Critico de Textos Mediáticos en Clase de Inglés.

Esta encuesta tiene el propósito de conocer tus impresiones personales al respecto de la experiencia que acabas de tener con la implementación de unos principios de Anàlisis Critico del Lenguaje de textos mediàticos en tu clase de Inglés.

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1. Cuales de los siguientes textos mediáticos trabajaste en cursos previos a este? *
- o   Revistas
- o   Películas
- o   Videos Musicales
- o   Comerciales de Televisión
- o   Avisos Publicitarios
- o   Libros
- o   Ninguno de los anteriores
- o   Otro:

2. Habías tenido la oportunidad de hacer un análisis de estos textos como lo hicimos en nuestro curso de Inglés? *
- o   Si
- o   No

3. Qué tipo de retos o dificultades tuviste que enfrentar para el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas a lo largo del curso? *
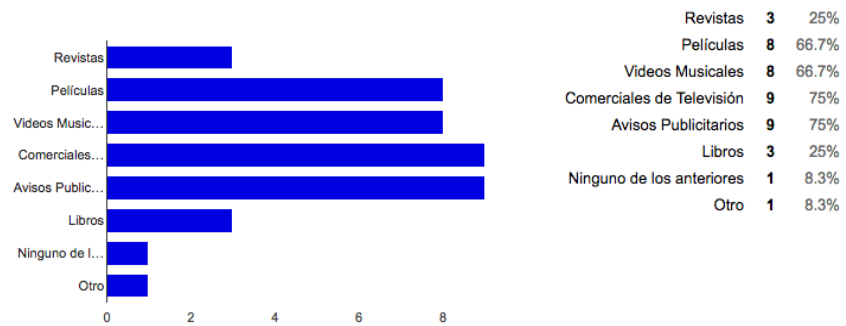
4. Consideras que es pertinente hacer análisis de textos como los que hicimos en cursos de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras? Justifica tu respuesta. *

5. Piensas que esta experiencia contribuyó en algo con tu proceso de aprendizaje de esta lengua extranjera? Justifica tu respuesta. *

6. Crees que lo que aprendiste te servirá en otros contextos o momentos? Justifica tu respuesta. *

Resumen

1. Cuales de los siguientes textos mediáticos trabajaste en cursos previos a este?

Revistas	3	25%
Películas	8	66.7%
Videos Musicales	8	66.7%
Comerciales de Televisión	9	75%
Avisos Publicitarios	9	75%
Libros	3	25%
Ninguno de los anteriores	1	8.3%
Otro	1	8.3%

2. Habías tenido la oportunidad de hacer un análisis de estos textos como lo hicimos en nuestro curso de Inglés?

Si	0	0%
No	12	100%

Final survey

124