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**TEACHING MATERIALS: A CRITICAL POSITION ABOUT THE ROLE  
THEY PLAY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

MATERIALES DIDÁCTICOS: UNA POSICIÓN CRÍTICA SOBRE EL ROL QUE CUMPLEN  
EN EL PROCESO ENSEÑANZA-APRENDIZAJE DE UNA LENGUA

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## TEACHING MATERIALS: A CRITICAL POSITION ABOUT THE ROLE THEY PLAY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

MATERIALES DIDÁCTICOS: UNA POSICIÓN CRÍTICA SOBRE EL ROL QUE CUMPLEN EN EL PROCESO ENSEÑANZA-APRENDIZAJE DE UNA LENGUA

Karla Araya Araya<sup>1</sup>

**Resumen:** Este artículo se propone esclarecer la importancia y la función que juegan los materiales didácticos – desde los planteamientos de la pedagogía crítica– en la conformación y desarrollo del proceso de la enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua. Más allá de la función instrumentalista que suele asignarse a los materiales didácticos, en el presente trabajo éstos se visualizan como construcciones discursivas que pueden facultar la apropiación del pensamiento basada en el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas que reflejen un discurso crítico ante los diferentes reclamos (problemas) históricos a los que estudiantes se ven expuestos dentro y fuera del aula. Para tal propósito, se realiza una revisión conceptual-teórica sobre la importancia y la función que los materiales tienen en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua. Bajo una perspectiva crítica, se aborda el tema de los materiales didácticos y la construcción de la motivación así como el tema de ideología y materiales didácticos. Finalmente, se concluye que en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua, los materiales didácticos son reproductores y reproducciones discursivas e ideológicas de ciertas realidades que pueden ofrecer visiones de mundo basadas en los intereses de clases dominantes si no se abordan desde posturas críticas.

**Palabras Claves:** MATERIALES DIDÁCTICOS, ENSEÑANZA-APRENDIZAJE DE UNA LENGUA, PENSAMIENTO CRÍTICO, DISCURSO, IDEOLOGÍA, MOTIVACIÓN.

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to state the importance teaching materials have in developing a language teaching-learning process based on the principles of the critical thinking pedagogy. From this perspective, this work questions the traditional conceptions and notions related to instruments of access assigned to materials. They are conceived as discursive constructions that can, or cannot, help to empower students with a critical discourse in order to promote a significant change in their attitudes towards the social, political and economical problems they face every day. To support this position, a conceptual study about theoretical assumptions related to the importance and the role teaching materials have in the language teaching-learning process has been carried out. Also, there is a general analysis regarding the relationship among teaching materials, motivation and ideology. Finally, it can be concluded that materials are reproductions and constructors of certain discursive and ideological realities that usually favor the interests of the dominant classes. That is why a critical position about the role teaching materials have is necessary to prevent the reproduction of prejudices and common sense assumptions about language and society.

**Key Words:** TEACHING MATERIALS, LANGUAGE TEACHING-LEARNING, CRITICAL THINKING, DISCOURSE, IDEOLOGY, MOTIVATION.

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## 1. Introduction

Teaching a foreign language has been considered a difficult task to accomplish because of the different situations individuals are exposed to in such a process. Students' different learning styles and needs, levels of motivation, governmental and international policies, students and teachers' expectations, availability of resources and accuracy of materials are a few examples of the multiple struggles teachers and students have to deal with.

The unexpected and diverse circumstances in which pupils and professors work require to use language to face the world. In this sense, Norman Fairclough suggests that *"language is part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena"* (2001, p. 19). Language as a social practice, then, provides individuals with inputs, experiences, emotions and discourses to solve everyday problems. Through language one faces and constructs the world. That is why language cannot be considered only a set of "rules" that individuals need to master; instead, it is way to position oneself in a world moved by unequal power relationships.

From a critical perspective, the sociability of language can be understood as a means for cultural and ideological awareness. In this respect, Tishman, Perkins and Jay (1995, p. 1) state this process of consciousness - or lack of it - is strongly developed in educational institutions because

Schools are places of culture. Not only in the sense that they introduce students to great intellectual achievements, but also in their sense of community, their spirit of common enterprise. Spend a little time in any classroom and you will instinctively sense it –a particular culture of teaching and learning. It is evident in the way students and teachers interact, in their expectations of one another, their common ways of talking, their shared understanding of what is acceptable, what is interesting, what is valuable.

At this point, the complex teaching-learning scenario becomes a harder challenge for professors and students because social and cultural matters demand a critical understanding of the role language plays in individual and social identity, different linguistic communities, politics, and economical policies.

## Language Teaching-Learning and Teaching Materials:

Teaching-learning a language implies not only developing certain linguistic skills but

also being aware of the ideological implications of the educational processes related to language. In other words, one thing is to be able to construct coherent utterances in terms of phonological, syntactical and grammatical aspects, and another is to use language to empower oneself with a critical discourse and attitude to face the world. Similarly, teaching materials can help teachers and students to develop more critical thinking, or to construct misconceptions and ideas about language and its linguistic communities.

Some of the problems related to the lack of social and ideological awareness regarding the language teaching-learning process as well as the use of teaching materials rely on the impossibility of conceiving language in social rather than structural terms. According to Norman Fairclough (2001, p. 3),

This is not surprising, for the general level of attention and sensitivity to language has been woefully inadequate, and in particular the teaching of language in schools has to a remarkable extent contrived to ignore its most decisive social functions. This cannot be blamed on the teachers, because the same is true of most of the academic work on language which the teachers have been offered as models.

The scholars' academic work has transcended the theoretical field to the creation of textbooks and any other type of materials. These teaching instruments regulate the use and production of language in the educational processes. Some linguistic forms are accepted as correct; and some others are stigmatized. Stereotypes, prejudices and lack of tolerance toward cultural and linguistic diversity are finally organized in a language program, and in the materials they use to develop the class experiences.

In this respect, Elsa Roberts (1995, p. 9) claims that

Although issues of power and politics are generally seen as inherent in language policy and planning on a macrolevel, classrooms themselves may be seen as self-contained, autonomous systems, insulated from external political concerns. The actual teaching that goes on behind closed doors is often conceived of as a neutral transfer of skills, knowledge, or competencies, to be left in the hands of trained professionals whose job it is to implement the latest methods and techniques. Language acquisition is seen as little more than a tool in service on other goals, to be used for whatever purposes the learner chooses, but generally leading toward greater economic access.

Even though theory, materials and other aspects related to teaching-learning a language are regulated in the language planning, the dynamics of power and domination can be brought to the class discussion to neutralize its influence. Bridging the gap between the level of consciousness (which a critical position about language demands) and the lack of attention to "*the what for?*" – in ideological terms – people use the language in study have implications in the educational processes, as well as the attitudes and values individuals develop towards linguistic matters, cultural diversity and society.

From a curricular perspective, a language teaching-learning program is tied to certain proposals that may restrict critical thinking because of the political view of language usage, the texts required, the aims and content targets proposed, the emphasis of evaluation criteria and the idea of culture among some other factors. Cooper R.L. states (1989, p. 45) that "*language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition [and learning], structure, or functional allocation of their language codes*". As a way to modify people's attitudes, language planning often functions within a context of ideological control. One might think that when those components of the curriculum are so restrictive in terms of tolerance towards diversity, it is very difficult to construct a teaching-learning environment based on the principles of critical thinking pedagogy. Using language can thus become a means to reinforce stereotypes, prejudices and lack of tolerance towards oneself and others.

However, there is always a range of possibilities to question and analyze the proposed teaching policies for language learning and teaching. Even though the curriculum is a world construction permeated by discriminated worldviews, it is not self-sufficient and autonomous. The curriculum is composed by the community, teachers, students, parents and the school background. The development and success of the curriculum depend on the context, the role of the individuals involved in the educational process and the use of resources. All these elements are subjects and objects at the same time. According to Elsa Roberts (1995, p. 9)

the pedagogical choices about the curriculum development, content, materials, classroom processes, and language use, although appearing to be informed by apolitical professional considerations, are, in fact, inherently ideological in nature, with significant implications for learners' socioeconomic roles [social and cultural contexts, motivations, among other aspects].

Therefore, the way the curriculum is presented and developed can make the difference between a critical thinking classroom and a non-critical thinking one. What makes the

difference between a stereotyped oppressive education and a liberating one is found in the activities students and teachers perform and their use of language. Terrence G. Wiley (1996, p. 106) proposes that

Language planning frequently attempts to solve conflicts over language, it can result in creating conflicts. Thus, we may ask: what is the relationship between language planning and various types of conflicts – social, legal, economic, political, educational? Language planning affects speakers of regional and social varieties within the language, immigrants who do not speak the standard or majority language, and indigenous conquered peoples and colonized peoples who speak languages other than the dominant one.

As part of a discipline or working field, teachers acquire and develop knowledge that is implicitly influenced by common sense assumptions regarding politics, economy, culture, education, religion, science, law, among other aspects. For instance, Unamuno (2003, p 18) states that *"nowadays, the strong cultural and linguistic homogenizing processes are presenting uniformity as something natural when diversity and variation are what is natural"* Author's Translation.

Therefore, in a complex and struggling educational context, being aware that language planning is more than an innocent curricular program to "guide" the teaching-learning process is an important step to promote critical thinking in the language classroom. In order to do so, teachers must think about the implicit information and values students are provided with when learning another language because their teaching practice could create and promote common sense assumptions. As Besley (1980, p. 3) explains, the problem is that such assumptions are

ideologically and discursively constructed, rooted in a specific historical situation and operating in conjunction with a particular social formation. In other words, it is argued that what seems obvious and natural is not necessarily so, but that on the contrary the "obvious" and the "natural" are not *given* but *produced* in a specific society by the ways in which that society talks and thinks about itself and its experiences.

Taking for granted the uses, purposes and implications of any language teaching process privileges some ways of talking and thinking over others. It is assumed that there is only one single way to "properly" approach a language curriculum. What is presented in the curriculum is understood as an ultimate truth. For this reason, language teachers should help

to question the unified relation between language and government. When a monolingual language is presented as official and assumed by common sense as truth, cultural and linguistic diversity is reduced to an exotic variation. But part of a holistic language education includes a critical analysis of those ideas diminishing cultural diversity.

One of the most common and concrete ways in which the language planning and national policies are put into practice is through the use of teaching materials such as textbooks. For instance, in Costa Rica "Have Fun" is a book approved and recommended by the "Ministerio de Educación Pública" (MEP) to teach English. This book faithfully follows the content targets, objectives, language function, evaluation criteria and the cultural view of the English language proposed by the National Syllabus.

Regarding the English language teaching-learning process, MEP proposes that "the cultural component should be always presented in the other components [formal and functional components]. Language and culture go together in order to communicate social meanings. This means that the language must be presented in meaningful situations according to appropriate cultural contexts" (2005, p.19). However, as it is presented in the textbook "Have Fun", culture seems to be associated to subject matters developed through target contents like "Holidays and celebrations in Costa Rica with some celebrations in English Speaking countries and tourist attractions offered by Costa Rican communities" (MEP). The cultural components of a language can be "studied" as target contents but it does not mean that a cultural respect regarding values, attitudes and linguistic functions are achieved or promoted when using language. Language functions should include a critical view of cultural practices, values and attitudes; and teaching materials as textbooks should also respond to demand.

Even though, in the national syllabus values such as respect, solidarity, honesty and responsibility are promulgated through different target contents, some language functions as well as attitudes and values also promote a capitalist view of society. Target contents such as "tourist attractions offered by Costa Rican communities" require the development of linguistic skills to identify "specific cultural aspects relevant in each region of the country to attract tourism" (MEP, p.51), where language function emphasizes "persuading, instructing or directing others to do something" (Ibid). Costa Rican beauties are perceived as means to **attract** foreigners as if they were merchandises one can sell.

One way to develop a more sensitive and critical attitude toward language and society, could begin by rethinking the role materials have in the teaching-learning process. Teaching materials are mainly used to achieve the objectives that have been proposed in the language



planning. Like texts that write and talk about the world, materials create conceptual frameworks -through images and writing- based on certain ideological notions. In the symbolic order, a lot of teaching materials work

in conjunction with political practice and economic practice to constitute the social formation, a formulation which promotes a more complex and radical analysis of social relations than the familiar term, "society", which often evokes either a single homogenous mass, or alternatively a loosely connected group of autonomous individuals, and thus offers no challenge to the assumptions of common sense. (Besley, 1980, p. 5)

In this context, teaching materials promote certain discourses. The danger or positive aspect regarding educational processes is that

ideology is inscribed in discourses in the sense that it is literally written or spoken in it; it is not a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of 'ideas' and is subsequently embodied in words, but a way of thinking, speaking, experiencing. (Besley, 1980, p. 5)

## **2. Teaching Materials: Some Conceptual Considerations**

Conceptualizing terms is a very difficult and dangerous task because what is left out of definitions is, most of the time, more than what is included in them. Conceptualizations are defined and determined by particular perceptions about reality that may restrict other viewpoints about truth. Through definitions, the world is organized. Limits are set and life is regulated. As Elsa Roberts (1995, p. 17) states "*social control is exerted not just by what is taught, but by what is omitted*". For this reason, a conceptual review of what has been understood as didactic materials is necessary because it permits one to rethink common sense assumptions about the role and importance didactic materials have.

In the case of traditional conceptions, teaching materials tend to be considered as instruments to access the target language. They are a means of dealing with grammar, syntax, phonetics, and cultural matters among others. Apparently, materials only have the purpose of "presenting" the language in study. They are perceived as instrumental objects to inform students and help teachers deal with the curricular aspects.

Conceiving teaching materials as means or instruments is an idea supported by theories related to input. According to Krashen (1981, p. 100) "*the condition for language acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understands ... input language*"; and materials can

make learning more accessible and understandable that language input. Following Krashen, language learning can only occur under certain conditions where the kind of input –stimulus– that students receive, is a determining factor to learn a language. Then, didactic materials are essential because they function as stimulus to promote learning.

For some other authors such as Tomlinson (1998, p. 2), a teaching material is considered as

[a]nything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language. Materials could obviously be cassettes, videos, CD-Roms, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks or photocopied exercises. They could also be newspapers, food packages, photographs, live talks by invited native speakers, instructions given by a teacher, tasks written on cards or discussions between learners. In other words, they can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners' knowledge and/or experience of the language.

Materials attempt to diminish the level of difficulty when accessing the linguistic aspects of the target language. At this point, materials are vital resources because they stimulate and develop students' linguistic skills.

On the other hand, teaching materials are perceived as partial constructors of knowledge. In this regard, Martín (1991, in Parcerisa, 1999, p. 26) explains that materials are [...] artifacts that, in some cases by using different forms of symbolic representation; and in other cases as direct references of objects incorporated into teaching strategies help to reconstruct knowledge through the creation of partial meanings of the curricular concepts. Author's Translation.

In other words, materials are meaningful constructions of reality and truth. More than teaching instruments, materials are useful because they create certain mental images and representations of everything related knowledge. Attention must be given to the importance that materials have within critical thinking discourse.

### **3. Teaching Materials and Ideology**

From a critical thinking approach, teaching materials are more than "accessing cognitive target instruments." In fact, they are discursive texts to maintain or subvert socio-political, cultural and economical models. Far from the idea of mere instruments, materials are ideological constructions to deal with language matters and the world. They are not

neutral because they evoke certain images, and in turn, attitudes about the world. Accordingly, materials help teachers conform particular systems of values regarding the language and culture in study. They are texts (that is why, more than textbooks) that under common sense assumptions can restrict tolerance and respect toward cultural and linguistic diversity. In this sense, Besley (1980, pp. 5-6) posits that

the last resort of common sense is to dismiss as "unnecessary jargon" any discourse which conflicts its own. This is an easy way of evading conceptual challenges, of course (and of eliciting reassuring sneers), but it negates the repeated liberal humanistic claim to open-mindedness and pluralism. Of course jargon exists, but from a perspective in which ideology is held to be inscribed in language, so that no linguistic forms are ideologically innocent or neutral...

Like texts, teaching materials are full of discourses about what a language is, what its study should cover, what teachers and students should know and learn. In this regard, J. Torres (1999, in Parcerisa, 1999) also states that didactic materials are cultural reproductions and reproducers because they "*serve as filters selecting that knowledge and truth in favor of the dominant class' interests*" (p.38). Author's translation.

As previously stated in conceptual terms, one of the main general ideas about the role that materials play in the language teaching and learning process is related to input, stimuli and means. However, far from considering materials necessary because they are instruments to access the target language, they are one of the most powerful ways through which ideological attitudes and values can be developed in the classroom. It is essential to take into account that teaching materials are used to deal with language and perhaps culture, and that "*language has become perhaps the primary medium of social control and power*" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 2). Therefore, teaching materials are also means of control.

When materials are presented as conventions and/or rules, and diversity is excluded from reality, common sense assumptions are developed and proposed as a unique truth. It is usually expected that teachers, students and the rest of society accept and follow the conventions proposed in the materials. This is violence exercised through consent and "*ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent*" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 3) because it is used – through materials – to treat authority and hegemony as something natural. At this point, teaching materials can determine the perception of the world students and teachers build up in regards to linguistic aspects such as grammar, syntax and pronunciation. Also, materials can shape values, social relationships, stereotypes, correctness, semantics and

pragmatics all of which are aspects related to discourse and ideology.

As texts do, teaching materials *"approach and orient the process by which certain knowledge, generally the knowledge of dominant groups, is legitimated by teachers and students"* (Apple, 1989, p. 22, Author's translation). Materials work as ideological constructs that promote and maintain certain power relationships among the individuals immersed in the language learning process. In this sense, McDonough and Shaw (1993) propose that *"most of the teaching we do is to learners in a class with others, so all materials necessarily have to be a compromise, as do teachers' interpretations of material."* (p. 56). Materials are powerful because they portray or create images that assign specific relations of significance to everything that surrounds people's life. Through them, a world of ideas, conceptions, perceptions, attitudes and aptitudes is developed. Escudero (1999, in Parcerisa, 1999) explains that

the importance of the didactic material is that it facilitates the access to certain contents but that it conditions the message (the didactic material becomes a message): it promotes a particular experience of reality conditioning the way that reality should be experienced, and it demands from individuals specific cognitive operations for the extraction of the significance it carries...The role of mediation and other roles didactic materials could play in the teaching-learning process can have a tremendous influence, especially in the conformation of the environment. (p. 33) Author's translation

In this regard, materials generate a linguistic perception that transcends class boundaries to the social and cultural contours in which individuals construct human relationships and partnership.

### **3. Teaching Materials and Motivation**

Traditionally, the significance of teaching materials has been mostly associated to the issue of motivation because they activate students' affectivity towards academic performance and the competence of the language in study. This idea of the material-stimulus is strongly supported on Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy, Skinner's operant model, Ausubel's cognitive needs and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Benjamin Bloom proposes that the development of affectivity initiates with a *receiving* process, that is, a process of stimulation students have to face in order to "learn" a language. Once students receive the stimulus, they move to the *responding* facet which demands both their voluntary and required participation. At this point, the affective domain includes *valuing*. Here students' judgments are considered a matter of *internalizing* values by means of

persuasion in order to get a level of conviction, and in turn, confidence which will lead into high levels of motivation. As a result, motivation is considered an important aspect because of its capacity to generate "positive" behaviors toward language. Similarly, teaching materials are significant because through them teachers elicit the "needed" reactions for students' language learning. These behaviorist notions of motivation instrumentalize the role materials play in the teaching and learning process because they become tools to reach the language goals.

Motivation, as reward and reinforcement, is also a perception shared by authors such as B.E. Skinner. Brown (2000, pp. 34-35) states that *"in Skinner's operant model, for example, human beings, like other living organisms, will pursue a goal because they perceive a reward for doing so. This reward serves to reinforce behavior, to cause it to persist"*. In doing so, the way rewards and reinforcement are administered is key, and materials are used to promote "good" administration of stimulus. Materials are a means of control, ideological instruments to visualize the teaching and learning process in terms of a capitalist society. Motivation works in order to increase individuals' capacity to have something.

Likewise, cognitive viewpoints stress the importance of rewards but emphasize the sources of motivation. In cognitive terms, some authors such as Ausubel proposes that motivation is achieved when individuals make decisions to satisfy the needs of exploration, manipulation, activity, stimulation, knowledge and ego enhancement. Motivation is based on the satisfaction of cognitive needs as if it were a compelling force behind the decisions people take. In this sense, Keller J.M. (1983, p. 389) claims that *"the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, the degree of effort they will exert in that respect"* are going to increase or decrease the levels of motivation.

One of the principal pioneers of the theory of needs is Abraham Maslow who developed a hierarchy of human necessities. This structural organization covers the satisfaction of physical needs up through security (safety and protection), to needs of esteem and self-realization. According to Maslow (1968),

healthy individuals satisfied enough their basic needs of security, belonging, love, respect and esteem. The satisfaction of these needs is created by a tendency to accomplish self-realization which is understood as the constant achievements of one's capacities, talents and personal goals as well as the deepest state of awareness and acceptance of one's nature... (p. 25) Author's translation

Motivation depends on the fulfillment of needs where individuals attain a high level of willingness to do something once they have passed through every stage of the hierarchy proposed by Maslow.

Consequently, teaching materials undergrid the construct of motivation. As stimulus, they can encourage students to *"perceive the value (reward) of reading, they meet the needs of exploration, stimulation, knowledge, self-esteem, and autonomy"* (Brown, 2000, p.161). In cognitive and behaviorist terms, materials should be used, selected or designed according to scientific stages of knowledge (exploration, manipulation, etc.), needs of belonging and the self-actualization of desires. Didactic materials should serve to satisfy each requirement within the hierarchy of needs. If they fail to do so, students will not be able to realize the rewards of knowledge and will *"connect the learning only to superficial needs (e.g. fulfilling a requirement)"* (Brown, 2000, p. 161).

However, the problem with Bloom's taxonomy, Skinner's operant model, Ausubel's cognitive needs and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is that any single learning experience or teaching practice such as using teaching materials is neither a mechanical nor an innocent activity. Responses to activities are a matter not only of individual or collective performance and competence, but also of ideological attitudes. In the language classroom – as in any human activity –, students' motivation is influenced by the different emotions generated from diverse perceptions about the world. Douglas Brown states that *"human beings are emotional creatures. Then, at the heart of any thought and meaning and action is emotion"* (2000, p. 63). In other words, all human beings act according to what their feelings tell them to do. But feelings are not simple responses; they are socially and culturally constructed. Society and culture shape people reactions, attitudes, opinions and thus, feelings about their background. Ideology, therefore, plays an important role in the way affectivity is constructed.

In this way, materials are part of an approach enabling the student to visualize language from a critical perspective as well as to realize the social, cultural, political, and economical practices in which language is used. Teaching materials can help teachers and students develop a language teaching and learning process based on critical attitudes towards content targets and one's system of values and feelings.

#### **4. Teaching Materials and Critical Thinking**

It is necessary to provide students with communicative spaces where they can evaluate the messages transmitted through the language, images and content presented in

the materials they use. This requires the ability to understand better what people do, and why they do that. The way materials are used in the classroom can help – or restrict – students use their cognitive and affective domains to critically reinterpret and reconstruct their realities and truths. It is important for teachers and students to see that materials are ideological projects used to persuade them.

Teachers should use the teaching resources not only to deal with any linguistic content but also to discover the worldview materials portray. Sometimes, teachers and students are forced, by language planning policies, to use materials that do not respect cultural and linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, they can use those materials from a critical thinking perspective. Both students and teachers can question the content and the approach of those materials to discern their implicit worldview. At the time they reach the institutional demands, teachers and students can criticize the social, political, economical and cultural discourses of the materials provided by official institutions.

Many students and teachers perceive the teaching materials passively, simply as a means for absorbing information or teaching and learning the language content proposed in the curriculum. Questioning such a view is crucial in a society that promotes exclusion, oppression and subordination. Fear, anger, consumerist practices and/or prejudices can be characteristic elements of some materials; however, the presence of such negative aspects could play a crucial role in the construct of new perspectives and visions of the reality students live and face. Materials full of stereotypes can help students to question what they are being presented with in the teaching materials.

Critical thinking requires the development of certain skills to empower citizens and students with the politics of representations. Critical thinking refers to a whole pedagogy that empowers students on their ability to think and reason more carefully than they usually do. The way materials are used in classroom should be a critical, conscious process. Students and teachers can work with materials that challenge their thinking about the world. Therefore, materials could transcend the idea of breaking down students' thinking into discrete cognitive and/or physical performances. Materials should permit students to express diverse viewpoints respecting differences, with a clear understanding of the possible implications that their positions have in the social contour.

## **5. Conclusions**

It is essential to reinterpret the value teaching materials play in the educational process, in the language teaching-learning classroom in particular. They portray and develop specific perceptions, treatments and common sense assumptions about the language in study. Through them, discourses – especially those of hegemonic groups – exercise their power stimulating certain values and attitudes towards language speaking communities and economic as well as political systems because materials have the power to elicit and shape images in teachers' and students' minds. When students are exposed to the use of certain teaching resources, they are not only offered an instrument to access knowledge; they are also presented with a version of reality dressed up by discourses.

The way people use materials can develop critical thinking if teachers and students are aware of the worldview materials are promoting. In a world permeated discriminatory attitudes among individuals, taking care about the language and cultural matters presented in materials can avoid the possible negative or dangerous effect teaching materials can cause. Then, instead of being instrumental structures to legitimize unfair relationships among individuals such as the lack of respect to cultural diversity and the right to be in a world free of stereotypes, self-destruction, dehumanization, contamination and war, teaching materials can be means of emancipation.

The influence that teaching materials have on the teaching learning process cannot be denied, so language teachers must be aware of the role materials have in their classrooms and the way they are used. They must consider the consequences that those teaching-learning practices promoted by the use of materials, that they have in the social contour and in the life of students. Therefore, it is urgent to rethink the significance materials have from discursive, ideological and critical perspectives. Materials should permit students to be the center of a teaching-learning process based on a responsible and critical understanding of the reality they and other human beings experience, and the reality offered by dominant groups through the materials they use in classes.

Consequently, teaching materials are outstanding elements in the construction of students' motivations, worldviews and perception about a language, society and culture. Learning a language is an affective process that demands a cultural and ideological comprehension of oneself and others. Hence, it is important to create affective language backgrounds that underline respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. Also, teachers and students should take into consideration the fact that the affective domain is not an innocent response or a set of common sense reactions toward something or someone, but actually an



emotional set of attitudes and values about the world that is ideologically and discursively constructed. From this perspective, due to the role didactic materials have in the language teaching-learning process, they can counteract stereotyped notions and behaviors about the language and culture in study.

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