Chapter 5
Multimodal Narrative Texts, Creativity, and English Teaching as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explores a methodological approach where creativity is encouraged through the production of multimodal iPad-mediated narrative texts in the English as a foreign language classroom (EFL) in secondary education. The study, which is based on creativity of human language, evaluates the multimodal productions of a group of students of secondary education (Year 7) in Spain, who work with iPads (1:1 context) within a cooperative learning approach, and analyzes this learning experience from the students’ point of view. The results show the impact multimodality has on the own students and on their way of working with the foreign language. The quality of their productions, not only regarding language but also as an act of creation, and the way they appropriate the different semiotic modes multimodality offers will also be examined. Finally, the authors suggest some guidelines to encourage multimodal production and creativity in the EFL secondary classroom and show examples which would help teachers and researchers to develop new didactic proposals at this stage.

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INTRODUCTION

Humans use language not only to communicate with each other but also to express themselves and create meaning. ‘Teaching the rules of language does not mean the end of creative uses of language’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 3). However, the creative uses of language are frequently forgotten or set aside. In second language instruction, the primary focus of writing tasks is mainly on grammar and text structure. Educators often forget the integration of other semiotic modes, such as images, sound, music, colour, which can be used to complement or add extra value to the written word, while learning and being creative at the same time. The New London Group (1996) identified six different modes of meaning: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial. Multimodality describes how these modes interact to create meaning.

The advent of new technologies – mobile devices in particular – changed the educational arena profoundly. These devices opened endless possibilities in education due to their portability; immediacy; data access; communication beyond the classroom walls; in-built facilities, and a wealth of resources. As a result of these developments, there has been an increasing interest in involving and engaging students with multimodality in recent years.

Today, multimodal ways of expression are increasingly being used both in the academic world – digital course books, PowerPoint presentations, educational and professional platforms; MOOC, etc.-, and in our daily lives – video tutorials, audiobooks, podcasts, etc. However it must be considered that new technologies per se do not generate meaningful learning experiences (Kukulska-Hulme, Lee, & Norris, 2017; Zhao & Lai, 2007), educators need to integrate them into the curriculum and design learning tasks in such a way that they provide meaningful learning experiences, and the devices’ full potential can be properly exploited in the classrooms.

The case study presented in this chapter shows the productions of 28 students from Secondary Education (Year 7) in Spain who created a narrative piece of writing in the ELT classroom using multimodality. The writing task goes beyond the traditional drilling of grammatical structures. The students are invited to design, create, and convey meaning through the multimodal functions the iPad offers. Letting the students use multimodality fosters creative thinking since they have to plan; imagine; design, and generate a final product. At the same time, multimodal iPad-mediated narratives strengthen their knowledge of the target language by combining the four skills of the language – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – in the same task generating meaningful communicative situations (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1998b; Oxford, 2001).