Meaning-Making in Colombian Applied linguistics, A Two-Decade Synthesis of Trends and Contributions: From Language-Centered Pedagogies and Research Towards Transemiotic Practices in the Era of Multimodality

Jefersson Arias-Alzate[1]

Abstract

This article presents a descriptive literature review examining how meaning and meaning-making have been conceptualized within Colombian applied linguistics scholarship over the past two decades. It categorizes the literature into six key thematic areas: pedagogies, biliteracy and multiliteracies, classroom interaction, translanguaging, and multimodality. Through this thematic organization and the analysis of selected studies, the article offers a comprehensive overview that serves as a point of reference for educators and applied linguists interested in research on meaning-making or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Moreover, the article stresses the need for a paradigm shift from traditional linguistic approaches to more contemporary, multimodal understandings of communication. It advocates for the integration of multimodality into foreign language research and pedagogy, emphasizing the creation of meaning networks through multimodal interactions influenced by cultural and identity factors.

Keywords: English learning, ELT, meaning, meaning-making, multimodality, English learning, ELT

1 Secretaría de Educación de Armenia, Quindío; Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación, Universidad del Valle. Author's. jefersson.arias@correounivalle.edu.co

La construcción de sentido en la lingüística aplicada colombiana: de las pedagogías e investigaciones centradas en la lengua hacia las prácticas transemióticas en la era de la multimodalidad

Resumen

Este artículo presenta una revisión descriptiva de la literatura con el propósito de elucidar cómo el significado y la construcción de significado han sido conceptualizados dentro de la lingüística aplicada en Colombia durante las dos últimas décadas. Los estudios se agrupan en seis temas clave: estudios centrados en pedagogías, biliteracidad y multiliteracidad, interacción en el aula, *translanguaging* y multimodalidad. A partir de la categorización y el análisis de diferentes trabajos, el documento resume los estudios en este campo, proporcionando un punto de referencia para educadores y lingüistas aplicados interesados en investigar la creación de significado o la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (*EFL*). Además, el artículo subraya la necesidad de un cambio de paradigma desde los enfoques lingüísticos tradicionales hacia concepciones más contemporáneas y multimodales de la comunicación. En esta línea, aboga por la integración de la multimodalidad en la investigación y en la pedagogía de las lenguas extranjeras, haciendo hincapié en la creación de redes de significado a través de interacciones multimodales influidas por factores culturales y de identidad.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje del inglés, construcción de significado, enseñanza del inglés, multimodalidad, significado

Introduction

Investigating the nature of meaning-making within the context of foreign language learning is a complex endeavor. Communication and language studies, especially semiotics, have demonstrated that regardless of its nature or the angle from which it is seen, the exploration of meaning is also a fascinating journey into culture, communication, and sign creation. This article attempts to review research on meaning-making in one of its core, original sites: the language classroom; specifically, in the actions and interactions that emerge, flow, or collide in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in Colombia, and the ways in which Colombian applied linguists have addressed this phenomenon.[2] The general question guiding this exploration is: How is meaning-making conceptualized and understood in the context of ELT studies in Colombian scholarship?

Meaning

To effectively delve into the intricacies of meaning-making, it is essential to first explore the conceptualization of its base: meaning. From a traditional linguistic perspective, meaning can be defined as the capacity of expressions to correspond to and represent states of affairs in the world. It arises through the logical alignment between the structure of language and the structure of reality, relying on a shared code that makes communication possible. This alignment enables the evaluation of expressions as true or false based on observable or conceivable conditions in the world (Palmer, 1981; Saeed, 2015).

The philosophy of language has played a prominent role in shaping the linguistic understanding of meaning. Thus, from the point of view of Gottlob Frege (1960), Bertrand Russell (1956), the early Wittgenstein (2017), and the thinkers of the Vienna circle, for instance, *Sinn* (meaning) refers to expressions that are meaningful because they correspond to a state of affairs in the world. For example, if one takes a rabbit out of a hat and states "This bunny is black," the expression has meaning insofar as a black rabbit can, in fact, be extracted from a hat, only if such a fact is possible in the world. It can be true or false whether the rabbit is black or not, among other possibilities. From this point of view, meaning has as one of its possibility conditions a common code that is logically apt to express the structure of the world. Thus, the structure of language might isomorphically[3] reflect the structure of the world.

Other linguists, like Geoffrey Leech (1981), expand the notion of meaning beyond mere reference to the world. For Leech, meaning can be categorized into seven types, namely: conceptual, connotative, collocative, affective, social, reflected, and thematic. His theory highlights how context, either linguistic or social, plays a crucial role in constructing sense, and how meaning can be shaped by social, affective or thematic issues, for example. From another standpoint, systemic functional linguistics, as proposed by Halliday (1979), asserts that speakers construct meaning by selecting what to say and then employing grammatical structures of their language to organize communication and convey meaningful messages. According to Halliday (1979), this process serves ideational, interpersonal, or textual functions. The ideational function involves conveying content or ideas; the interpersonal function relates to the relationship between speaker and listener; and the textual function pertains to how language signifies discourse in relation to its context of use. These three functions are fundamental to adult language usage and meaning-making, reflecting the ways language conveys meaningful communication within different contexts and across diverse interpersonal relationships.

Meaning-making

What happens in language lessons? How is the world depicted when teaching a foreign language? This inquiry now transitions from the linguistic and philosophical foundations of meaning to the practical realm of language education, where meaning-making becomes the target, specifically the dynamics of meaning-making within the classroom.

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2 Meaning-making is considered here a phenomenon due to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of learning, especially language learning where meaning is constantly being created, negotiated, and reinterpreted within the ever-changing human experience.

3 isomorphically here refers to the correspondence between the structure of language and the structure of the world ("referential meaning" in Saeed, 2015), where elements and relationships within linguistic expressions mirror or map onto elements and relationships in reality.

From a traditional linguistic strand, the possibility of making meaning depends on the command of grammars and the knowledge of fixed definitions ([Chomsky, 1997](#); [Saeed, 2015](#)). In contrast, functional approaches emphasize the roles of ideology, context, and text in meaning construction, thereby necessarily incorporating culture into the discussion ([Halliday, 1979](#); [Kress & Van Leween, 2001](#)).

Contemporary studies in applied linguistics and classroom discourse—particularly those derived from interactional sociolinguistics and classroom discourse analysis—also conceptualize meaning-making as sense-making, often using the term as a synonym of "concept formation" or "practical reasoning" ([Luk & Lin, 2007](#)). At a more specific level, social semiotics approaches meaning and meaning-making considering not only culture but also the roles that different modes of communication and semiotic resources play in the construction of sense. From the perspective of social semiotics, meaning-making could be defined as a multisemiotic, sociocultural practice of designing, constructing, and negotiating meaning ([Stein, 2008](#); [Kress, 2009](#), [2011](#); [Kress & Van Leween, 2001](#)).[4]

In Colombia, applied linguistics scholarship has increasingly recognized the foreign languages classrooms certainly constitute meaningful settings to inquire in the construction of meaning in, and through, different meaning systems. Therefore, this paper seeks to describe how the concept of "meaning-making" has been addressed in research articles focused on English Language Teaching (ELT) and English learning within educational institutions in the country. Additionally, it comments on other relevant studies published under the label of "meaning-making" in broader applied linguistics literature. As a concluding argument, the paper calls for expanding the scope of language pedagogies and research by highlighting the importance of integrating social semiotics and multimodality into both inquiry and practice. These approaches offer valuable insights that enhance the understanding and implementation of foreign language teaching and learning in Colombia's multilingual classrooms.

Meaning-making in the foreign language classroom in Colombia

This section presents a qualitative descriptive review[5] of research articles addressing meaning-making in Colombian applied linguistics. Although relatively scarce, studies on this topic were identified in major national journals dedicated to applied linguistics and ELT, including *Profile, Íkala, Colombian Applied Linguistic Journal (CALJ), HOW, Matices en Lenguas Extranjeras, Lenguaje, Signo y Pensamiento, Enletawa, Gist*. Additionally, research by Colombian scholars published in international journals and edited volumes was included—for instance, in *Multimodal Communication; Language Education in Multilingual Colombia. Critical perspectives and Voices from the Field; Working with Text and around Text in Foreign Language Environments, Second Language Learning and Teaching*.

The literature search was narrowed by the keywords and phrases "meaning", "construction of knowledge", "meaning-making", "sense making", and "knowledge making" and it was delimited to studies concerning English Language Teaching (ELT) published during the last two decades.[6] These terms were selected attending to Kress's definition of meaning-making as "making knowledge" ([Kress, 2011](#)) and [Luk and Lin's (2007)](#) framing of it as "sense making", along with other analogous terms found in the literature (i.e. "meaning", "construction of knowledge", "meaning-making", "sense making", and "knowledge making"). Subsequently, the studies were percolated and classified in a table (see [Annex 1](#)) to provide a general picture of how meaning-making is understood in ELT studies in the country. Thus, from a preliminary review of 25 articles that resulted from this search, there emerged the following thematic categories:

A. Studies focused on pedagogies.
B. Studies focused on biliteracy and multiliteracies
C. Studies focused on ideology
D. Studies focused on classroom interaction

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4 Nonetheless, following Luk and Lin (2007), this article also uses the terms "meaning-making" and "sense-making" interchangeably.

5 Descriptive reviews aim to synthesize literature within a field to identify trends, patterns, and themes in a specific research topic. These reviews typically follow systematic procedures to examine, classify, and categorize studies, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of the art in the topic (Paré *et al*., 2015).

6 Significant policy reforms, evolving pedagogical approaches, and the rise of classroom research from communicative and interactional perspectives have shaped language teaching and meaning-making in Colombia over the past two decades.

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E. Studies focused on translanguaging
F. Studies focused on multimodality

Although not all the studies explicitly refer to "meaning-making", they engage with knowledge or meaning construction in English teaching and learning processes across diverse educational settings. A thorough reading of the studies shed light on the different ways the concepts "meaning" and "meaning-making" have been understood within Colombian applied linguistics, as well as in language teaching practices and research in the country. It is also important to mention that most of the reviewed studies mainly explore meaning-making from a language-centered perspective and a few inquire into classroom communication and interaction as multimodal processes. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, those studies addressing multimodality are included in the sixth thematic category (F).

A. Studies focused on pedagogies

The first thematic category encompasses investigations into methods, teaching models, pedagogical strategies, and approaches to language teaching, with a focus on the effects of these teaching methodologies and strategies on English learning (Álvarez et al., 2018; Camargo & Orbegozo, 2010; Hidalgo & Caicedo, 2011; Padilla, 2016, Sánchez-Narvaez & Chavarro-Vargas, 2017). As can be inferred, these studies underscore the dynamic interplay between instructional approaches and learners' cognitive engagement, highlighting how students' and teachers' meaning-making is mediated by pedagogical and didactic resources. Hence, these studies highlight how both students and teachers participate in meaning-making, which is shaped by the pedagogical and didactic resources available in English classrooms. Through this lens, these studies demonstrate how meaning-making processes are not static but evolve, mediated by the interactions between learners, teachers, pedagogical and didactic trends.

Álvarez et al.'s (2018) study, for instance, examine the role of metacognitive strategies, such as keeping learning logs, collaborative learning, and contextual engagement, in vocabulary acquisition. Their findings suggest that effective meaning-making requires metacognitive awareness, enabling learners to monitor and adjust their understanding to improve vocabulary retention and comprehension. This process is described as crucial to learners' cognitive development, fostering deeper connections between language and context as they refine their understanding over time. Similarly, Padilla (2016) investigates how meaning-making unfolds within a theme-based, genre-oriented reading course. The study emphasizes the dynamic nature of meaning construction, where learners engage with text structures, content, and effective reading strategies while collaborating with peers and reflecting on their understanding. This approach highlights the importance of both collaborative peer interaction and reflective exercises. In this context, meaning-making, in is portrayed as a student-driven endeavor that evolves through active engagement with the material, peers, and self-reflection.

By the same token, the importance of interaction in the meaning-making process is further illustrated by Sánchez-Narváez and Chavarro-Vargas, who examine the impact of blended learning (BL) on the oral skills of content-area teachers in a professional development course. Their study highlights how BL creates opportunities for learners to practice and negotiate meaning in English by combining face-to-face and online interactions. This integration of instructional modalities not only supports learners' oral skills but also facilitates meaningful communication through the use of body language, pronunciation, and intonation. The study emphasizes that meaning-making in oral communication is multi-faceted, involving both linguistic elements and non-verbal cues that contribute to effective interaction and understanding.

Camargo and Orbegozo (2010) provide another perspective by examining reading comprehension through sight strategies. Their research demonstrates that learners construct meaning by integrating textual elements with personal life experiences. By relating vocabulary and themes to familiar contexts, learners enhance their engagement with the material, facilitating deeper comprehension. This highlights the idea that meaning-making is not solely a linguistic process but also a holistic one that involves personal interpretation and the alignment of new information with existing knowledge and life experiences. Similarly, Hidalgo and Caicedo (2015) explore the potential of content-based instruction (CBI) to foster both English language proficiency and motivation among students in a public school setting. Their study illustrates how engaging with content that resonates with learners' prior knowledge and lived experiences promotes both conceptual understanding and language development.

Collectively, these studies reveal several key themes in the process of meaning-making. First, they emphasize the interconnectedness of learning with prior knowledge and life experiences, illustrating that learners' personal histories shape and enrich their engagement with the language. Second, they underscore the pivotal role that interaction—whether with peers or the broader learning environment—plays in fostering the construction of meaning and deepening the learning process. Through collaborative activities, self-reflection, and the integration of various teaching strategies, learners actively engage in the process of making sense of the foreign language. Ultimately, these studies demonstrate how diverse didactic and pedagogical approaches can influence the dynamics of learning in the EFL classroom, shaping the ways in which meaning is constructed and understood.

B. Studies focused on biliteracy and multiliteracies

The second thematic category comprises research about the development of biliteracies or multiliteracies in diverse language teaching and learning environments. The studies grouped in this category (Castro-Garcés, 2021; Neiva, 2021; Rincón & Clavijo-Olarte, 2016; Salinas, 2009; Valencia, 2006, 2016) illustrate the evolving trajectory of literacy research within applied linguistics. While literacy was traditionally conceived as the process of learning to read and write in a single language, it has expanded to include research on biliteracies, which explore the interplay between two or more languages in literacy development. More recently, the field has embraced the concept of multiliteracies, which acknowledges the complexity of meaning-making across diverse modes of communication—such as text, images, and digital media—and recognizes the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in shaping literacy practices.

Valencia's (2006) study, for instance, examines literacy practices in two schools by analyzing teacher-student interactions and the construction of knowledge using textbooks and other types of texts. It highlights how reading in English is approached through vocabulary, translation, and grammar, with limited opportunities for meaningful communication in English. Collaborative work and turn-taking were observed, but the study concludes that these practices fell short of fostering deeper engagement with authentic meaning-making. The findings emphasize the need for literacy practices that move beyond procedural tasks to foster more communicative and contextualized understanding of texts.

Furthermore, Rincón and Clavijo-Olarte (2016) extend this critique by emphasizing the importance of community engagement and the use of diverse communication modes, such as videos and songs, in constructing meaning around socio-cultural issues. Their study underscores how this approach not only enriches language learning but also cultivates critical thinking skills and empowers students to articulate their perspectives on real-world issues. Similarly, Castro-Garces (2021) stresses the sociocultural dimensions of meaning-making, arguing that knowledge construction should reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of learners. The author highlights the significance of multimodal engagement, involving various modes of communication, in fostering collaborative learning and critical thinking. Neiva (2021) adds a focus on media literacy, pointing to the importance of critical thinking and personal engagement in interpreting and deriving significance from media messages.

These studies collectively demonstrate that meaning-making from a biliteracy and multiliteracy perspective is a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves active engagement, critical thinking, and the connection of learning to personal experiences and the real world. This group of studies reveal how students make meaning throughout the understanding and production of diverse texts. Besides, they certainly convey a conceptualization of meaning as socially and multimodally constructed. They illustrate how exploring literacy and multiliteracies from a multimodal perspective allows for an understanding of meaning- making in different language(s) and modes, and permits to bring to the discussion other semiotic systems and frames.

C. Studies focused on ideology

The third thematic category concerns research articles on the connection between teachers' and students' ideologies (ideas, personal theories, beliefs, and social representations) and their processes of constructing meaning in English (Cruz, 2018; Fajardo, 2014; Villarreal et al., 2016). Since the studies grouped under this category focus on some of the ideological aspects that inform teachers' and students' decisions and teaching/learning strategies; they

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necessarily discuss culture and the sociocultural dynamics of ideologies reproduced by teachers in their meaning-making practices, as well as their effects in the discourses promoted and projected in lessons.

In these studies, "meaning" is conceptualized not only as a cultural construction in which teachers and students intervene but also as a phenomenon that is constantly shaped by different discourse(s) and worldviews. For example, Cruz (2018), provides insight into how pedagogical practices in EFL intersect with the lived experiences of teachers and students. The study documents how English teachers in rural schools adapt their teaching practices based on their own personal theories of language and culture and design meaning-making activities that foster meaningful learning based on local contexts. Among the sense-making practices described are praying in English and using words with cultural semantic loads in translanguaging and multimodal literacy practices to construct meaning in the foreign language. Cruz argues that such practices not only facilitate language learning but also reveal how teachers and students co-construct meaning mediated by their lingua-cultural resources. By bringing these practices to light, the study advocates for a more nuanced understanding of how English language teaching can be reframed to incorporate local knowledge and teachers' personal theories and wisdom.

Similarly, Fajardo (2014) illustrates how university students engage with ideologies as they construct meaning in EFL lessons in a university context. Motivated by diverse texts on social and political issues, students participated in discussions that not only helped them improve in their linguistic skills in English but also fostered critical thinking that departed from their own worldviews and ideologies. This process of reflection and negotiation highlights the social nature of meaning-making in language learning, as students can navigate, challenge, or expose their beliefs within the context of their language classes. Similarly, Villareal *et al*. (2016) explore the impact of public school students' beliefs on their meaning-making during English lessons. Their findings show how both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations shape their learning experiences. Students believe that the monotony and lack of structure in English classes hinder their engagement, reducing their intrinsic motivation to learn. However, an extrinsic motivation persists, grounded in the widely held belief in Colombia that "English opens doors" to the global job market and success in foreign countries. This instrumental motivation reflects broader societal ideologies about the prestige and economic value of the language.

Taken together, these studies underscore the importance of considering students' beliefs and ideologies as integral to the meaning-making process in language learning. They demonstrate that students' beliefs about language profoundly shape how they approach language learning, how they interpret the significance of the language, and how they negotiate their identities within the learning process. These findings also suggest the need for further research into the role of ideology in language learning, not only to better understand the complexities of meaning-making in foreign language classrooms but also to give voice to students' beliefs and perspectives within the broader field of applied linguistics.

D. Studies focused on classroom interaction

The fourth and the fifth thematic categories address two recurring themes in applied linguistics: classroom interaction studies in ELT and translanguaging studies. Research on these fields brings to the fore connections of meaning-making practices in ELT contexts with linguistic and cultural production, from different angles. In the case of classroom interaction, studies draw on ethnomethodology to explore the micro-dynamics of classroom interaction, especially in regard to meaning negotiation and construction, with culture-related processes of conversation and power at macro-political and sociocultural levels (Arias, 2017; Lucero, 2012; Lucero, 2011; Lucero & Rouse, 2017; Valencia, 2016). On the other hand, translanguaging studies challenge a whole tradition of structural linguistics theory that conceptualizes languages as bounded codes—a conceptual foundation that continues to shape many language teaching methods and classroom practices many language teaching methods that still today inform meaning-making practices that promote the separation of languages in classroom discourse.

The classroom interaction dynamics and the approaches to languages and cultures, as explored in these investigations, offer a distinctive perspective within the fields of language and cultural studies. The studies grouped into the fourth thematic category (Lucero, 2012; Lucero, 2011; Lucero & Rouse, 2017; Valencia, 2016) and the fifth thematic category (Arias, 2017; Lucero, 2011; Ordoñez, 2011; Ortega, 2019) frequently employ Conversation Analysis (CA),

a discourse-analytic approach on the sequencing, structure, and organization of spontaneous talk in different contexts (Yule, 1996). Drawing also on ethnomethodology and interactional sociolinguistics, CA holds the view that conversational dynamics reveal social order, organization, and power negotiation in discourse (Erickson, 1997).

Within this framework, Lucero and Rouse (2017) and Valencia (2016) have explored teachers' and students' talk as they co-construct and negotiate meanings in and out of the lessons; and as they develop conversational frames and relations of power that may mirror wider sociocultural processes. For instance, Lucero (2012) and Lucero and Rouse (2017) examine the intricate structures of interactional patterns within EFL classrooms at the university level. Employing a theoretical framework that integrates ethnomethodological principles and speech act theory, the authors meticulously analyze the utterances that compose the interactional patterns that potentially influence interactants' classroom behavior. The study identifies two patterns of classroom interaction that typically emerge in the context studied: asking and adding about content. Through a careful analysis of speech acts in interaction, the study reveals teachers' regulatory conduct in classroom discourse,

> This study shows the great value in teachers using regulatory speech acts to keep focus on the communication of meaning. If teachers attempt to control the students' language accuracy according to the demands of convention, then the students will lose sight and the practice of using the TL for communication. (Lucero, 2012, p. 42).

In a subsequent study, Lucero and Rouse (2017) analyze classroom interaction between teacher educators and students using ethnomethodological conversation analysis (ECA) combined with self-evaluation of teacher talk (SETT) to ethnomethodological conversation analysis (ECA), the authors analyze interaction patterns that unveil how students as well as teacher educators bring to their classes "pre-planned conversational agendas" that "create a classroom interaction that is rather transactional than spontaneous" (Lucero & Rouse, 2017). In addition, the authors explain how these planned agendas relate to the participants' perception and understanding of ELT as "simply a matter of mastering the L' linguistics in the classroom setting without much reference to nor harnessing real-live contexts and the nuanced grammar and interaction that it can create" (Lucero & Rouse, 2017). This suggests that that meaning-making in the EFL classroom is hindered when the focus solely lies on mastering linguistic rules and structures within an artificial, isolated and, often, pre-planned classroom environment.

Valencia (2016) has also carried out research on classroom interaction in state and private schools. Among others, the author examines teachers' and students' talk around texts in classroom discourse. Valencia (2016) focuses on specific aspects of interaction and literacy practices involving the use of texts and the classroom discourse generated around those texts. Through the analysis of interaction, mainly characterized by Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) and Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequences, the author finds out how meaning-making occurs in the context studied. IRF and IRE are common classroom interaction patterns. IRE, characterized by a teacher's question, a student's answer, and the teacher's evaluation, often limits progressive interaction. IRF, on the other hand, encourages more open-ended exchanges by allowing the teacher to follow up on student responses with probing questions or further explanations (Valencia, 2016). Furthermore, drawing on Luk and Lin (2017), the author distinguishes between three primary types of interactions within educational settings: (1) linguistically-oriented interactions focused on language skills; (2) culturally-informed interactions rooted in shared cultural events, i.e. Halloween; and (3) institutionally-driven interactions shaped by the school's rules, power structures and discipline control. In addition, the author discusses how, through the analysis of classroom discourse, it is possible to notice how classroom processes are permeated and affected by other discourses at a macro-level, in this case, by the Colombian National Policy on bilingualism.

As it can be noted, meaning-making occupies a central position in research about classroom interaction in the articles cited, which focus on different educational contexts in Colombia. Nonetheless, the theme is not recent in the agendas of ethnomethodology. As Luk and Lin (2017) state "the study of 'sense-making practices' has been a topic of interest in ethnomethodological studies since the 1970s.... Sense making is often used interchangeably with terms such as "practical reasoning," "concept formation," and "interpretive procedures" (p. 99). However, the studies in Colombia carried out through ethnomethodology show a different approach to language learning in which the construction of meaning is regarded as a collective act, influenced and determined by discourses at micro and macro levels. Also, the emphasis on the particularities of interaction has allowed for the acknowledgment of interactants' resourcefulness in meaning negotiation. This approach repositions the use of local languages and cultural resources

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not as barriers, but as assets that support meaningful and fluid communication in foreign language education.

E. Studies focused on translanguaging

Studies on classroom discourse that focus on meaning-making and negotiation necessarily touch upon the combination of languages for communicative purposes, as evidenced by research in the fifth thematic category (Arias, 2017; Lucero, 2011; Ordoñez, C. L. (2011). Education for bilingualism: Connecting Spanish and English from the curriculum, into the classroom, and beyond. Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development, 13(2), 147-161." en la página 15; Ortega, 2019). Research on translanguaging and code alternation has also revealed insights into the role of culture in the co-construction of meaning within English lessons. These studies illustrate how culture influences translanguaging by shaping the way individuals understand and express themselves across different languages. Culture, in this sense, acts as a lens or a mirror that reflects the meaning and interpretation of words and concepts based on different social or identitarian aspects. Also, translanguaging allows individuals to draw on their diverse cultural backgrounds, as semiotic resources, to negotiate meaning, and assert their identities.

Several Colombian studies on translanguaging or language alternation showcase that the acknowledgment of linguistic diversities in students' linguistic repertoires, and the use of those for meaning-making, may result in effective and innovative pedagogic practices (Arias, 2017; Ortega, 2019; Valencia, 2016). For instance, in the context of ELT in elementary and secondary schools in Pereira, in a comprehensive study about dynamic flexible bilingualism and translanguaging, Arias (2017) demonstrates that the purposeful combination of languages can be used strategically in bilingual education to create meaning in language and content classes. Based on the context investigated, the author claims that translanguaging was perceived by teachers as a tool to facilitate the learning of subject themes in dynamic bilingual education programs. In the same manner, Ortega (2019) maintains that translanguaging can also enhance *trans[cultura]coin*.[7] According to Ortega,

> … literacy and the validation of first languages can successfully be implemented as ways to remove barriers… by allowing students to engage in their first language, serious issues regarding social interactions (such as bullying and aggression) can be discussed in the class, while simultaneously and effectively achieving English literacy skills" (Ortega, 2019, p. 156)

All in all, these studies show that culture is an integral part of the translanguaging process, influencing how individuals use language to connect, communicate, make sense of the world and co-construct meaning.

Contemporary discussions of translanguaging have led to the development of "translingual activism," as proposed by Pennycook (2019). This movement aims to decolonize English Language Teaching (ELT) by dismantling prevailing linguistic ideologies that perceive languages merely as codes that cannot intermix in classroom talk. Pennycook (2019) critiques traditional models that treat languages as isolated systems and opposes the prioritization of "elite" English varieties and the perpetuation of native-speakerism. Following Pennycook (2019) and Hemphill and Blakely (2019), it is possible to state that in the path towards the decolonization of English and ELT, neither languages are seen as monolithic systems or separate–separable entities, nor students nor teachers are considered uncritical participants in decontextualized linguistic practices.

Pennycook calls for a transition towards understanding language users as "resourceful speakers" and language learning and teaching as multimodal processes. For the author, it is important "the focus on resources and positioning: it is not so much that we need a shared code to communicate but rather that we are able to bring our different resources into sufficient alignment" (Pennycook, 2019, p. 181). This new trend, anchored in the multilingual turn and translanguaging studies, does not seek to produce native-speaker-like speakers, like the ideologies of native-speakerism or the English-only model suggested in the past, but "critical activist resourceful speakers who can draw on multiple linguistic and semiotic resources, who can accommodate, negotiate, and understand such language use in activist terms" (Pennycook, 2019, p. 182). As susch, translingual activism emerges as a way to resist traditional hegemonic

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7 "This is a process of making meaning during English-learning tasks while comparing specific linguistic variations as students learn about both their own culture and other people's cultures" (Ortega, 2019, p.155).

approaches to languages and language teaching, like the ones that have resulted in the super-positioning of English in Colombian linguistic policies and the pedagogies linked to them that research on classroom interaction has exposed.

In sum, these studies on classroom interaction and translanguaging also bring to the table a new understanding of culture that nears research in ELT to scholarship about critical interculturality. The understanding of languages and cultures transcending ideological borders, and the initiatives to challenge colonial views of languages and language teaching clearly give evidence of it. While most of the studies mentioned so far are linguistically oriented and do not necessarily focus on other modes that intervene in meaning-making, they project a notion of meaning as socially and culturally constructed. This notion of meaning and meaning-making differs from the old structural view for which meaning was a stable reference, which could be "transmitted", "taught" and "acquired" without any modification caused by contexts and co-texts.

F. Studies focused on multimodality

The sixth thematic category corresponds specifically to the discussion of multimodality and meaning. The texts reviewed for this section propose a notion of meaning derived from Multimodal Social Semiotics (MSS) and critical interculturality. MSS theorizes meaning taking into consideration all modes that contribute to signification, acknowledging the fact that language is just one of those modes. The multimodal perspective also focuses on paralinguistic features such as iconographies, gestures, movement, posture, and rhythm, among others that intervene in sign creation.

From this perspective, Mejía-Laguna (2023) explores classroom interaction in EFL lessons in a private Colombian University. The author focuses on critical learning episodes (CLE) through multimodal interaction analysis and MSS. The study reveals the unique contribution of each semiotic mode to meaning construction; nonetheless, it reveals that modes are not isolated in classroom interaction but rather work together, forming interconnected communicative ensembles that generate a deeper understanding of CLE's in the context studied. For instance, the study highlights how a teacher uses gaze, gestures, and body posture in conjunction with written text and speech to facilitate students' understanding of grammatical concepts. According to Mejía-Laguna (2023), this type of interaction creates a strong semiotic circuit that supports sense-making and engagement among students.

This multimodal perspective provides a more refined view of classroom interactions, recognizing how the entanglement of different modes contributes to the overall construction of meaning. Furthermore, the study advocates for a shift away from linguocentric views of communication, suggesting that a more holistic perspective that includes non-linguistic modes can significantly enhance language learning. This perspective aligns with the multiliteracies movement (Cope & Kalantzis 2000, 2009; Paesani *et al*. 2016; The New London Group, 1996) which promotes the idea that communication and meaning-making should be the primary focus in language education, rather than language alone.

Similarly, grounded in multimodality and social semiotic theory, Álvarez-Valencia (2016, 2023) and Álvarez-Valencia and Michelson (2023) conceptualize and discuss meaning-making from a multimodal, intercultural perspective. Similarly, drawing from scholars such as Bezemer and Kress (2016), Blommaert and Rampton (2011), and Kusters *et al*. (2017) propose reframing educational language practices in Colombia, shifting from verbocentric approaches to comprehensive theories of meaning-making. As a result, they advocate for conceiving meaning-making as a multimodal, intercultural, social, and historical process. Based on Kress's (2009) multimodal social semiotic approach to communication, Álvarez-Valencia and Michelson (2023) explain this process as follows:

A "rhetor" is an agentive sign-maker who creates a sign in response to a "prompt" in the world. The rhetor, also often one in the same individual as the "designer", selects the most apt resources for meaning making based on the particular context in which s/he is acting (i.e., relationship with the interlocutor or institution, etc.). The model accounts for an "interpreter" who then takes this message called the "ground") as a "prompt" for meaning making in an ongoing chain of semiosis (Kress,2009, p. 53). (Álvarez-Valencia & Michelson, 2023, p. 11-12)

Within this framework, the authors delve into the multifaceted aspects of teachers' and students' meaning-making. However, they also explore the dynamics of identity negotiation as well as teachers' roles and agency in the complexities of Colombian educational settings.

In Álvarez-Valencia's (2023) approach, culture is understood as "an open and dynamic repertoire of semiotic resources (material resources originating in the body or artifacts, and non-material resources- discourses, ideologies, ideas and beliefs)" (Álvarez-Valencia, 2023, p. 177). The author further argues that "most encounters between individuals have the potential to become intercultural" (p. 177), as interactions are typically mediated, filtered, and impacted by each individual's cultural semiotic repertoires-CSR. As the author notes, "in a more granular view of interaction, encounters between people of different genders, professions, and languages constitute intercultural encounters because members of these social groups bring along their own CSR repertoires" (Álvarez-Valencia, 2023, p. 178). These CSR contain and manifest people's social inscriptions and their own ways of embodying and enacting different identities depending on contexts. From this theory of interculturality and meaning construction, in which semiosis is impacted by CSR, there emerges the possibility of new perspectives in approaches to language learning that may fit the needs of contemporary education, especially those of super-diverse Colombian classrooms.

Following Stein's (2008) and Stein and Newfield's (2006) research on diverse, multicultural, multilingual classrooms, Álvarez-Valencia (2023) proposes "making the classroom a multisemiotic space" (p. 178) where meaning makers' multiple cultural semiotic resources can be re-sourced and used in transemiotizing practices, which, according to Álvarez-Valencia (2023), "broadens the focus on language and examines linguistic practice as entangled with other semiotic resources such as gesture, gaze, body in space, and touch in meaning-making processes" (p. 180). It also implies re-articulating, recovering, and legitimizing the whole universe of students' cultural semiotic resources as a way to give their identities a voice in the process of meaning co-construction.

Overall, similar to translingual activism, approaches to language education grounded on Multimodal Social Semiotics (MSS) and interculturality are starting to emerge as powerful and meaningful trends in Colombian ELT research and practice. One key strength of these trends lies in their holistic understanding of culture as a diverse and intricate entity, classrooms as dynamic ecologies, and meaning-making as a fluid phenomenon influenced by diverse CSR. Reflecting on these insights facilitates a deeper understanding of diverse educational methodologies across various contexts, emphasizing communication that emerges from shared understanding and consensus and extends beyond verbal interaction.

Concluding Remarks

This article has allowed for the examination of meaning through diverse lenses, reflecting the multiplicity of perspectives held by language researchers and teachers in relation to communication, foreign language teaching, and the construction of meaning. Based on the preliminary analysis of 25 articles concerning meaning-making in Colombian ELT scholarship, six thematic categories emerged, encompassing studies focused on pedagogies, multiliteracies, ideologies, classroom interactions, translanguaging, and multimodality. These findings reveal the multidimensional nature of meaning-making as a research focus and highlight the evolving intersections between language teaching practices and theoretical frameworks. As such, they provide valuable insights into the ways Colombian ELT scholarship contributes to broader discussions on the dynamic processes of teaching, learning, and meaning-making.

The first two thematic categories—A. Studies focused on pedagogies and B. Studies focused on biliteracy and multiliteracies—highlight complementary dimensions of meaning-making in language learning. Research on pedagogy emphasizes the dynamic interplay among instructional approaches, cognitive engagement, the co-construction of meaning, and the roles of pedagogical and didactic resources. It also reveals how interactions among students, teachers, and the broader learning environment shape meaning-making, which is enriched by learners' prior knowledge and life experiences. Thus, collaborative activities and self-reflection emerge as crucial components for deepening engagement with the foreign language. On the other hand, research on literacy and multiliteracies conceptualizes meaning-making as a dynamic, socially, and multimodally constructed process

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mediated by culture. These studies demonstrate how learners actively engage in understanding and producing diverse texts, connecting learning to personal experiences and real-world contexts while integrating various semiotic systems.

The third thematic category—C. Studies focused on ideology—shed light on the interconnected roles of ideologies, beliefs, myths, ideas, or personal theories in shaping meaning-making. The reviewed studies that focused on students' beliefs and ideologies, for example, reveal how teachers' and learners' perceptions of language shape their approaches to learning, their interpretations of its significance, and the ways they negotiate identities within the learning process. Teachers' personal theories about language and learning inform their teaching practices and the way they view ELT in relation to diverse contexts, such as rural schools. Consequently, these findings advocate for further exploration of ideology in language education to uncover its complexities and amplify students' voices within the field of applied linguistics.

Complementing this perspective, the fourth category—D. Studies focused on classroom interaction—frame meaning-making as a collective endeavor influenced by both micro-level classroom interactions, also called the micro dynamics of classroom discourse, and macro-level factors, such as language policies and power structures. This dual-layered approach highlights the resourcefulness of interactants in negotiating meaning, recognizing local languages and cultural resources as valuable tools for fostering meaningful and fluid communication. Drawing from ethnomethodological perspectives, this category highlights how meaning is jointly produced and sustained within the social order of the classroom.

The studies grouped in the fifth category—E. Studies focused on translanguaging— highlight that recognizing and utilizing the linguistic diversity in students' language repertoires can lead to more effective and innovative pedagogical practices. These studies maintain that the strategic use of students' first languages, in conjuction with the target language allows for more flexible and meaningful learning environments. In particular, the intentional alternation between languages in classrooms has been found to support both language learning and content understanding. Furthermore, integrating students' first languages not only aids in the development of linguistic skills but also helps address broader social issues, such as local problems, by fostering open discussions in a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This approach emphasizes the value of translanguaging as a tool that enriches both academic learning and social interactions in bilingual classrooms.

The final category—F. Studies focused on multimodality—explores meaning-making through a multimodal and intercultural perspective. These research studies primarily draw on contemporary approaches to communication and education such as MSS to advocate for a shift in Colombian educational language practices, urging a move away from traditional linguocentric approaches toward more comprehensive frameworks of meaning-making. Within this perspective, meaning-making is viewed as an intercultural and multimodal process that is deeply embedded in social and historical contexts.

Research on multimodality in ELT in Colombia highlights the importance of integrating diverse modes of communication and cultural dimensions in the learning process and call to broaden the view of communication beyond speech and writing. As stated in the studies, multimodality has gained prominence in language teaching practices and research globally. Hence, exploring multimodality in research has led scholars and educators to recognize that written or oral language alone does not encompass the full range of expressive possibilities in human interactions. Greater attention is thus given to the variety of modes that facilitate communication in learning and teaching scenarios.

Colombian applied linguists and language teachers might then inquire into how the integration of multimodality within English Language Teaching (ELT) research and pedagogical practices can foster a **more nuanced and comprehensive** understanding of communication and meaning-making. This shift invites the field to move beyond traditional, linguocentric views to encompass the diverse ways in which people communicate through various modes, such as images, sounds, gestures, and the interplay between them. To embark on this inquiry, it is necessary to address questions such as: In what sense can non-verbal or non-written manifestations have meaning? What constitutes a mode of meaning in multimodality? Additionally, as some of the reviewed articles suggest, it is necessary to approach meaning-making in language teaching from a different perspective, regarding meaning as culturally shaped by concrete conditions of meaning-makers such as their cultural, ideological, and identitarian background.

Social semioticians, along with researchers specializing in multimodality and language teaching, challenge the perspectives of traditional linguistics by emphasizing a more dynamic and interconnected understanding of meaning-making. Rather than viewing meaning as a product of isolated linguistic structures, they assert that it emerges from the interplay of diverse semiotic networks, communicative modes, and semiotic repertoires. From this perspective, meaning is seen as a result of semiosis, where different sign repertoires intersect in specific contexts. This paper refers to this intersemiotic process of semiosis as "constellational meaning-making".

This conception further challenges the traditional idea that any expression can "faithfully" represent "reality". The meaningfulness of language goes beyond written and auditory codes. The means or modes of communication can be as varied as the registers in which individuals can interact with each other, since the possibility of communicating or establishing a way to create meaning corresponds to the possibility that individuals have to design signs and negotiate understanding within diverse semiotic networks. Thus, meaning goes beyond language (oral or written) and involves both the body and the environment. Then, from the perspective of multimodality, meaning-making occurs when individuals engage in a sociocultural multisemiotic practice of sign design, creation, and negotiation within a particular communicative context.

Implementing constellational meaning-making into practice entails embracing multimodality and adopting openness to curricular and pedagogical change. Multimodal Social Semiotics-MSS, hence, can be viewed as an alternative to approach meaning construction in language education to cope with the cultural complexity and diversity of Colombian classrooms. As explained by Alvarez-Valencia (2023), in MSS, it is essential to acknowledge culture as "an open and dynamic repertoire of semiotic resources" (p.177). Then, as designers of meaningful and culturally sensitive communication, teachers play a crucial role in facilitating connections between diverse language repertoires. This enables effective learning to take place by aligning with the concept of constellational meaning-making where several networks of semiotic repertoires interact.

The practical application of MSS in language education calls for a departure from traditional practices, especially those derived from linguistic ideologies that tend to privilege an isomorphic, or verbocentric, view of meaning-making, and which approach languages as codes that should be kept separated or suppressed in classroom communication in order for L2 acquisition to be successful. Multimodal Social Semiotics conceives meaning-making as a co-construction in which people's cultural semiotic resources such as their sociocultural contexts, histories, narratives, different modes of communication, languages, artifacts, among others, intermingle, connect, and re-generate diverse understandings of the world. Moreover, communication among meaning-makers conveys a dynamic and fluid interchange of cultural semiotic resources mediated by each meaning-makers' identitarian profile and affiliations (Jewitt *et al*., 2016; Kress, 2011; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Stein, 2008; Álvarez-Valencia, 2023).

Therefore, acknowledging this view of meaning-making implies approaching meaning differently: in language education, transcending verbocentrism definitely implies the inclusion and acknowledgment of multiple semiotic resources in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, along with adopting new practices that involve utilizing diverse modes of communication and enabling learners to employ their full spectrum of semiotic resources (SCR) in the process of creating meaning.

In line with translanguaging trends, this article highlights innovative approaches proposed by Colombian scholars that merit further research, scholarship, and practice. Notable among these are *trans[cultura]ción* (Ortega, 2019) and trans-semiotizing (Álvarez-Valencia, 2023). These approaches advocate for the re-articulation, recovery, and legitimization of meaning-makers' cultural semiotic resources as a means of expressing their identities and fostering creative meaning-making in varied communicative contexts, particularly in educational environments. These paradigms not only challenge conventional practices but also pave the way for more inclusive and dynamic frameworks in language education, urging the field toward a more holistic understanding of meaning-making.

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ANNEX 1

Classification of the studies

Category	Authors	Year	Title	APA Reference
Studies focused on pedagogies	Álvarez, C. P., Barón, C., & Martínez, M. L.	2018	Promoting the use of metacognitive and vocabulary learning strategies in Eighth-Graders	Álvarez, C. P., Barón, C., & Martínez, M. L. (2018). Promoting the use of metacognitive and vocabulary learning strategies in Eighth-Graders. *Íkala*, *23*(3), 407-430.
	Camargo, J., & Orbegozo, J. C.	2010	Exploring EFL students' reading comprehension process through their life experiences and the Sight Word Strategy.	Camargo, J., & Orbegozo, J. C. (2010). Exploring EFL students' reading comprehension process through their life experiences and the Sight Word Strategy. *HOW*, *17*(1), 57-72.
	Hidalgo, H. A., & Caicedo, M. L.	2011	A case study on content-based instruction for primary school children.	Hidalgo, H. A., & Caicedo, M. L. (2011). A case study on content-based instruction for primary school children. *HOW*, *18*(1), 112-134.
	Padilla, F.	2016	The design of a theme-based and genre-oriented strategic reading course to improve students' reading comprehension skills at a public school in Colombia.	Padilla, F. (2016). The design of a theme-based and genre-oriented strategic reading course to improve students' reading comprehension skills at a public school in Colombia. *How*, *23*(1), 49-67.
Studies on Biliteracy or Multiliteracies	Castro-Garcés, A. Y.	2021	Awakening Sociocultural Realities in Pre-Service Teachers through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies.	Castro-Garcés, A. Y. (2021). Awakening Sociocultural Realities in Pre-Service Teachers through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies. *GIST Education and Learning Research Journal*, *22*, 173-197.
	Neiva, H. K.	2021	Developing Oral Interaction Skills in Foreign Language Learners through Media Literacy.	Neiva, H. K. (2021). Developing Oral Interaction Skills in Foreign Language Learners through Media Literacy. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *23*(1), 3-16.
	Rincón, J. A., & Clavijo-Olarte, A.	2016	Fostering EFL learners' literacies through local inquiry in a multimodal experience.	Rincón, J. A., & Clavijo-Olarte, A. (2016). Fostering EFL learners' literacies through local inquiry in a multimodal experience. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *18*(2), 67-82.
	Salinas, Y.	2016	(2009). In and out of school literacy practices.	Salinas, Y. (2009). In and out of school literacy practices. *HOW*, *16*(1), 131-150.
	Sánchez-Narváez, N., & Chavarro-Vargas, S. A.	2017	EFL oral skills behaviour when implementing blended learning in a content-subject teachers' professional development course.	Sánchez-Narváez, N., & Chavarro-Vargas, S. A. (2017). EFL oral skills behaviour when implementing blended learning in a content-subject teachers' professional development course. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *19*(2), 263-276.
	Valencia, S.	2006	Literacy practices, texts, and talk around texts: English language teaching developments in Colombia	Valencia, S. (2006). Literacy practices, texts, and talk around texts: English language teaching developments in Colombia. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, (8), 7-37.

Ideologies related studies	Cruz, F.	2018	The wisdom of teachers' personal theories: Creative ELT practices from Colombian rural schools.	Cruz, F. (2018). The wisdom of teachers' personal theories: Creative ELT practices from Colombian rural schools. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *20*(2), 65-78.
	Fajardo, N. R.	2014	Ideologies Revealed during the Construction of Meaning in an EFL Class.	Fajardo, N. R. (2014). Ideologies Revealed During the Construction of Meaning in an EFL Class. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *16*(2), 21-36.
	Viáfara, J. J.	2011	How do EFL student teachers face the challenge of using L2 in public school classrooms? *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *13*(1), 55-74.	Viáfara, J. J. (2011). How do EFL student teachers face the challenge of using L2 in public school classrooms? *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *13*(1), 55-74.
	Villarreal, J., Muñoz, J. V., & Perdomo, J. M.	2016	Students' Beliefs About Their English Class: Exploring New Voices in a National Discussion.	Villarreal, J., Muñoz, J. V., & Perdomo, J. M. (2016). Students' Beliefs About Their English Class: Exploring New Voices in a National Discussion. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *18*(2), 139-150.
Classroom interaction studies in ELT	Lucero, E.			Lucero, E. (2012). Asking about content and adding content: Two patterns of classroom interaction. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *14*(1), 28-44.
	Lucero, E.			Lucero, E., & Rouse, M. (2017). Classroom interaction in ELTE undergraduate programs: Characteristics and pedagogical implications. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *19*(2), 193-208.
	Valencia, S.	2016	Meaning-Making Practices in EFL Classes in Private and State Schools: Classroom Interaction and Bilingualism Policy in Colombia	Valencia, S. (2016). Meaning-Making Practices in EFL Classes in Private and State Schools: Classroom Interaction and Bilingualism Policy in Colombia. In: Chodkiewicz, H., Steinbrich, P., Krzemińska-Adamek, M. (eds) Working with Text and Around Text in Foreign Language Environments. Second Language Learning and Teaching. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33272-7_15
Translanguaging studies	Arias, E.	2017	*Translingüísmo y aprendizaje integrado de lengua y contenido como modelo de educación bilingüe dinámica.*	Arias, E. (2017). *Translingüísmo y aprendizaje integrado de lengua y contenido como modelo de educación bilingüe dinámica.* Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Pereira.
	Lucero, E.	2011	Code-switching to know a TL equivalent of an L1 word: Request-Provision-Acknowledgement (RPA) sequence.	Lucero, E. (2011). Code-switching to know a TL equivalent of an L1 word: Request-Provision-Acknowledgement (RPA) sequence. *HOW*, *18*(1), 58-72.
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