


THE MULTIMODAL GENRE “*STICKER*” IN THE CLASSROOM: A PERSPECTIVE ON VISUAL-CRITICAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH CLASSES <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.046-017>**Francisco Welton Machado¹, Marina Rocha de Castro², Francisco das Chagas Gomes³, Kennedy José Alves da Silva⁴, Noé da Silva Carvalho⁵ and Raimundo Lenilde de Araújo⁶****Abstract**

This study approaches the use of the multimodal genre sticker in English classes, focusing on the perspective of visual-critical literacy. The sticker genre refers to a form of visual communication that uses images, icons, or illustrations, often accompanied by short texts or phrases, to convey emotions, ideas, or messages concisely and impactfully. The study examines how stickers, widely used in digital communication platforms, can be employed as pedagogical resources to develop students' language skills and critical reading. The analysis indicates that the use of multimodal genres, such as stickers, in educational practices allows for the integration of visual and textual aspects, stimulating critical reflection on the messages involving images and symbols. Through a literature review, the overall objective was to investigate the use of the multimodal genre sticker as a pedagogical tool in English classes. It was possible to ascertain that stickers can be an effective tool for promoting a more dynamic and critical teaching of the English language.

Keywords: Sticker, Visual-Critical Literacy, English Classes.

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technologies and the growing use of visual and multimodal tools have had a significant impact on the educational field, especially in language teaching. The sticker genre refers to a form of visual communication that uses images, icons, or illustrations, often accompanied by short texts or phrases, to convey emotions, ideas, or messages in a concise and impactful way. Widely used on digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and other social networks, it has become an integral part of students’ everyday communication (Castro et al., 2023). This resource, which combines image, text, and symbolic elements, presents itself as a new form of interaction and expression, raising questions about its pedagogical potential. In the context of English language teaching, the use of stickers may represent an innovative opportunity for the development of visual-critical literacy, helping students interpret and produce texts that involve multiple modes of communication.

However, what is generally observed in English classes is the limited exploration of this multimodal resource. Despite the increasing use of stickers in students’ daily lives, there is a significant gap regarding the pedagogical use of this genre in language teaching activities. The following question therefore arises: in what way can the multimodal genre sticker be used as a pedagogical tool to promote visual-critical literacy in English classes? We begin from the hypothesis that the planned and strategic use of stickers in educational activities can foster not only language learning but also the development of students’ critical skills, enabling a deeper reading of visual and multimodal texts.

This study is justified by the growing relevance of multimodality in contemporary communicative practices and on the need to prepare students to engage critically with these genres. By integrating stickers into English classes, teachers can make activities more meaningful and connected to students’ digital reality, while also promoting a critical and reflective approach to visual forms of communication.

Thus, the general objective of this study is to investigate, through a literature review, the use of the multimodal genre sticker as a pedagogical tool in English classes, with a focus on visual-critical literacy. The specific objectives include: discussing what literacy is; analyzing and identifying the characteristics

of the sticker as a multimodal genre; and discussing how the use of this resource can contribute to the development of critical and communicative skills in English classes.

LITERACY

The term literacy may be considered quite current in the field of Brazilian education. According to Soares (2019, p. 32):

“...this term seems to have been used for the first time in the country in 1986 by Mary Kato, in the book *No mundo da escrita: uma perspectiva psicolinguística*. As part of a book title, the term appeared in 1995 in the books *Os significados do letramento*, organized by Ângela Kleiman, and *Alfabetização e Letramento*, by Leda V. Tfouni.”

It is understood that teaching English from a literacy perspective does not mean merely transmitting content in a fragmented way, or working with texts through a process of vocabulary training and isolated or decontextualized content. Teaching must, in fact, be situated within social contexts through reading. Part of this work consists of bringing in news, promoting contact with newspapers and magazines, and reading short texts in digital media, comic strips, and comics. It also means enabling reading not only at school, through textbooks, but also in different places, such as an instruction manual explaining how to assemble a device, or even a guide for finding a route to reach a destination without getting lost.

Working with literacy enables students to encounter different places and cultures without leaving the classroom or home, through readings of stories, fables, films, among others, and even becoming emotionally involved with their endings, with the morals or life lessons of fables, and with the characters in general.

Furthermore, working from the perspective of literacy also means promoting self-discovery, since understanding oneself by writing an autobiography and discovering what one wants to become through it is, in other words, enabling learners to appropriate writing for use in social practices.

Literacy, in this sense, is the way of understanding and interpreting a text, making use of its messages in practical life. According to Soares (2019, p. 35), the term “is of English origin, ‘literacy,’ which translated into Portuguese means being literate.” To achieve this state of literacy, pedagogical work is required through teaching based on authentic, contemporary genres—texts from the learner’s social context from a critical perspective—so that students may use writing in social practices.

Thus, in today’s world, an interesting and appropriate teaching practice cannot be limited to the mere reproduction of the letters of the alphabet and the decoding of written symbols. Nor are superficial readings viable amid the many tiny texts of primers, emptied of meaning, with no connection whatsoever to students’ everyday lives and no openings for dialogue and questioning, as was once done in schools. Today, literacy acquisition is no longer synonymous with the 26 letters of the alphabet; it has become much more than that, since reading involves modes of being, ways of living, and ways of acting in the world, as the social text is constructed within society. If this is how it works in the acquisition of the first language, the same principle applies to learning the English language.

MULTIMODAL GENRES AND MULTILITERACIES IN THE CLASSROOM

There is consensus that, with the advancement of technology, as already stated, textual genres have multiplied and their concept has also changed. Stories and cultural facts of life, for example, which were once told or conveyed through social texts such as notes, letters, newspaper columns, among others, now appear in other formats. With the intensification of digital media, the speed at which these stories and facts circulate has also multiplied, reaching people’s homes more quickly and with simultaneous content, within multimodal texts. We therefore understand that, in order to keep pace with the speed of the world, the text has become “multimodalized.” Thus, there has emerged a need for a practice aimed at the multiliteracy of young people, because, according to Rojo (2013, p. 14):

“The concept of multiliteracies, articulated by the New London Group, seeks precisely to point out, from the outset, through the prefix ‘multi,’ two types of ‘multiples’ that contemporary literacy practices involve: the multiplicity of languages, semioses, and media involved in the creation of meaning for contemporary multimodal texts and, on the other hand, the plurality and cultural diversity brought by contemporary authors/readers to this creation of meaning.”

Thus, we believe that this student will become capable of formulating hypotheses, extracting and/or attributing negative or positive meanings to the constructive whole of the work—meanings that emerge from their experiences, lived realities, and knowledge, and that may or may not be confirmed upon completing the reading.

In view of this, we understand that when the learner becomes capable of this feat, it may be said that they have reached the state of being multiliterate. Thus, they will be active within the process of the “multis”: multiculturalism, which is generally implicit in a text—graphic, imagetic, digital—in globalized society; and the multimodality of the texts that compose it, encompassing visual, sound, gestural, spatial, and visual aspects, which are social and cultural resources that integrate with the text with the aim of multiplying meanings, a process also known as semiosis. In this way, multimodal genres are understood as texts that combine two or more of these modes of language, these semioses.

These texts, known as verbal texts combined with nonverbal ones, used to be called mixed texts; in contemporary texts, however, they are called multimodal genres: texts that combine two or more modes of language. They may also be categorized as a “multitextual” genre, a macro-verbal text with several mini-texts around it. This has become possible with the support of new technologies, making texts increasingly dynamic due to the greater articulated mixture of these modes of language.

Reading work from this multimodal perspective requires understanding images, sounds, and other semioses not merely as illustrations. It is necessary, in fact, to know why a particular image is on the featured cover of the day’s newspaper, reaching a level of comprehension similar to what we experience when we hear noise outside the house and know that it is raining, or when we listen to music or watch a video and become emotional because we have understood the message.

Teaching English in the light of multiliteracy will be a splendid process, since, when taught in the traditional form in which the teacher is the sole holder of knowledge, this practice silences the student, as there are no discussions or exchanges of conceptions with learners. In addition, another obstacle to meaningful learning is the use of monotonous materials that are distant from students’ realities and interests, with an emphasis on formal aspects of grammar. According to Faraco (2006, n.p.), referring to the fear of memorizing terms, concepts, and rules with no relation whatsoever to contemporary life, this “is a huge bogeyman in people’s lives.” This connotation of “devouring” reveals the function of consuming the meaning of use and function, generating the fragmentation of teaching.

Nowadays, choosing multimodal texts is a way to mitigate this fear of the English language, which cannot be taught in isolation but rather in context. Multimodal genres, such as a comic strip, for example, provide this possibility by ensuring the development of multiple interpretations in a text, with opportunities to follow a more dialogical line, involving social themes aligned with students’ tastes and interests.

In view of the facts mentioned, it can be concluded that the use of multimodal genres has expanded with the growth of the internet. Consequently, young people are in daily contact with these creations on smartphones. These more powerful mobile phones, with the functions of a computer, have allowed the proliferation of social communication networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and even digital figurines, or stickers. Furthermore, according to Maia (2013, p. 62), “the population’s contact with ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) and the simultaneous reduction of costs allow peripheral groups to gain faster access to information and to produce and share content.” In view of this, a pedagogy of multiliteracies with critical teaching is necessary, grounded in various texts of the multimodal genre, which may contribute to the resolution of various issues involving conflicts, indifference, intolerance, racism, inequalities, and emerging prejudices in the classroom.

Moreover, the use of texts from the perspective of multiliteracies inserted into the classroom brings innovative benefits to education and to the intellectual development of human beings, even more

so when the theory is focused on visual-critical literacy. This type of literacy, according to the theorists of the New London Group (1996), “attributes verbal language to the use of moving or still images.” Among the many relevant reasons for promoting this literacy are: the valuing of all learners, the training of small/large entrepreneurs, and the formation of students as citizens.

This is because students who are constantly connected to Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT), according to Prensky (2001) and Palfrey and Gasser (2011), cited in Tezani (2017, p. 297), “are called ‘digital natives.’” Therefore, teachers must detach themselves from the standard teaching model in order to begin integrating or innovating their classes with these new media, both electronic—television, radio, and the internet—and printed—newspapers, magazines, journals, folders, leaflets, pamphlets, recipes, instruction manuals, posters—as well as digital media—e-mails, internet, digital phones and applications—in other words, mass media. This is because these resources allow for diverse simultaneous uses of language, whether verbal, oral or written, photographs, or images, in school practice. In addition, they ensure the interaction of different forms of knowledge, including linguistic, textual, visual knowledge—visual, spatial, or gestural—and world knowledge together with diverse cultural traditions, which come together and multiply the meaning or significance of reading or of the text. Thus, this is highly positive in the learning context, as it guides learners to deal with and respect differences, raising self-esteem and self-knowledge.

In this way, it will also contribute to the formation of entrepreneurial students, because this cultural multiplicity, present in multisemiotic texts, whether digital or printed, is what gives voice to visual images. By analyzing the context in which they are inserted, students carry out visual reading, which broadens their horizons and helps them organize in their minds the ways of seeing and recognizing everything that surrounds them. As Fairclough (2016, p. 97) states, “...the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people’s heads, but from a social practice that is firmly rooted in material, concrete social structures and oriented toward them.”

Thus, every student has a voice, due to the countless possibilities and points of view that may emerge when interpreting an image. This interpretation identifies possibilities of seeing, expressing opinions, and thinking in different social situations, with personal initiative, critical, responsible, and constructive positioning, and the sharing of ideas, using dialogue when making decisions and seeking transformations collectively, yet always according to the cultural context.

On the other hand, we have the formation of students as citizens, insofar as teaching takes place in an integrated manner with words, sounds, and images. When these aspects are well explored in the classroom, they lead students to use different languages, verbal and nonverbal, as a means of producing and communicating ideas, interpreting and enjoying the cultural goods that surround them, or, in Goethe’s words: “Merely looking at something tells us nothing. Each look leads to an inspection, each inspection to reflection, each reflection to a synthesis, and then we may say that, with each attentive look, we are theorizing” (cited in Barros, 2006, p. 01).

Therefore, by handling different sources and means of information associated with technological resources, which are rich in images, students develop autonomy to acquire and construct their own knowledge. Thus, by appropriating new knowledge and putting it into practice—whether with family, friends, or community—this individual has new ideas, shares them, questions, discovers, shares points of view, helps others, and asks for help if needed. In the future, they may be capable of socializing opinions and points of view. This concerns the full development of the individual, who elaborates their life project, which is a necessary condition both for intellectual and moral formation, and serves as a guide for students to live collectively, exercising citizenship ethically. After all, “one of the main objectives of school is precisely to enable its students to participate in the various social practices that use reading and writing (literacies) in city life, in an ethical, critical, and democratic way” (Rojo, 2009, p. 107).

Considering the arguments mentioned, we argue that the use of multiliteracy focused on readings of multimodal genres and visual-critical literacy, with innovative, integrated, and authentic readings, contributes to educational formation, preparing students for adult life with regard to work, the exercise of

citizenship, and social experience. This can be reiterated through the “pedagogy of multiliteracies,” which values the formation of students not as mere consumers, but as transformers, researchers, and critics when faced with any text, even when producing one.

Furthermore, the multimodal text may include these five modalities—linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural, and auditory—at the same time. Each modality presents its own meaning; however, they come together and combine in such a way that one supports another. In addition, one expands or multiplies the meaning of the other. Thus, in order to perceive these modes in the same text, Halliday (1975 cited in Cani, 2019, p. 248) observes the need to articulate three meanings: ideational, related to experience of the world; interpersonal, related to the expression of the speaker’s social role; and textual, related to the ability to create and identify a text. In this way, by associating these meanings, various interpretations emerge.

It should also be emphasized that a text composed of a single modality will not currently meet the needs of the social group. In the case of students, it will not be an inviting text, because the appropriate contemporary text that young people want is one with reduced phrases, but with a greater range of information encompassed in these short sentences through other modalities, such as images, colors, and so forth.

Human communication is multimodal from an early age; that is, language development occurs multimodally in face-to-face interaction from birth. In this regard, Vygotsky (2010, p. 39) states that:

“In this type of interaction, individuals particularly play a fundamental role in the construction of the human being; therefore, social interaction, whether directly with other members of the culture or through the various elements of the culturally structured environment, provides the raw material for the individual’s psychological development.”

With regard to interaction in the communicative process in the classroom, which is the interest of our study, some modalities are involved: sight, hearing, and the visual or gestural information provided by the participants in the discourse, which serves as support to complement the receiver’s auditory

information. Generally, facial expressions, eye movement, body movement in general, postures, nonverbal sounds, and appearances are used.

In addition, the main basic function of language is “cultural exchange: the language system, or modalities, that human beings create in order to communicate with their peers, which is clearly visible in human beings from infancy” (Vygotsky, 2010, p. 44). This means that, even without knowing how to read and write or understand the words expressed by adults at this stage, communication can occur through sounds, gestures, and expressions. The reader or interlocutor who has the ability to identify the meaning of this multimodal message, managing to use this multiplicity of modes in favor of meaningful interpretation, will have this interpretive capacity of the modes as what makes them a multistate being; that is, one who reaches various states of multiliteracy.

Teaching English in the light of multiliteracy is an excellent process, since when it is taught in the traditional, passive form, teaching becomes tiring. The teacher is the sole holder of knowledge, silences the student, there are no discussions or exchanges of conceptions with learners, and monotonous materials that are distant from students’ realities and interests are used. It should also be noted that, for an educator who has already been teaching the same subject for approximately thirteen years, it may even be possible to present basic grammar and vocabulary; however, today, choosing a more dialogical approach, with social themes aligned with students’ interests, should be the choice of all teachers, including those from other disciplines.

This pedagogical work, consistent with the learner’s real needs, acts in favor of a multidisciplinary and simultaneous multiliteracy, so that the student may become “multiliterate” in an integrated way, since the role of fostering literacy does not belong only to the language teacher. It is necessary that, in all curricular components, there be an understanding that, in order to act fully in the world, the student must be literate in other disciplinary knowledge or in all aspects of life.

Being aware that all texts manifest themselves in some textual genre, which are communicative models, broad knowledge of the functioning of different textual genres will be important for this study, both for the comprehension of textual reading and for text production.

VISUAL-CRITICAL READING IN THE CLASSROOM

What can be done to reduce fights in the schoolyard caused by sending “nudes”—one to another girl’s boyfriend—and by bullying? Such incidents often result in physical altercations.

It is indisputable that the first and foremost response is to react to so many conflicts and not to ignore them or assume that they are mere childishness because they are part of one’s age. These situations are texts from the social context of the community, with prominent voices in the group chosen for our study. They are situations that may appear implicitly in a reading, in which the teacher may draw attention to this perception and, from there, work with discourse, belief, ideology, and prejudice, analyzing the issues collectively in order to promote reflection and better re-elaborate these concepts democratically. Here, it is worth evoking the thought of Paulo Freire (2018, p. 39), when he states that critical teaching practice implies right thinking and involves the dynamic, dialectical movement between doing and thinking about doing.

Furthermore, the pedagogy of multiliteracies, which according to Rojo (2012, p. 28) emerged with the New London Group, is described by Viana et al. (2016, p. 43) as a movement that advocates the creation of teaching projects so that cultural conflicts arising from young people’s reality may be addressed in the classroom, reducing violence and generating perspectives for a better future.

With these practices, we will certainly be contributing to education for life, to the formation of good people, thereby developing critical sense by confronting and debating points of view. In addition, it is possible to make classes more creative and meaningful by promoting teaching grounded in the student’s own life and in the dynamic learning of the English language, which is currently taught with so little ingenuity and criticality, relying only on disconnected content.

It is also worth emphasizing that, through this methodology, students will be able to disseminate knowledge, transform discourse, and construct a new discourse for the community. This is literacy/critical reading. In this regard, Freire (2018, p. 96) tells us that a “critical-educational practice is one in which, as a specifically human experience, education is a form of intervention in the world.”

As can be seen, the context demands the need for a highly critical stance in order to avoid the spread of these negative discourses around the school and in other social groups in which students participate, such as family and groups of friends. Even in groups on social networks, “stickers” appear with implicitly embedded prejudiced marks. Breaking with this will only be possible through a critical pedagogical stance, which, according to Coimbra (2008, p. 54), “may be considered a path that leads to questioning the fallacy of social inevitability, since it is part of its actions and of the survey of belief systems... internalized in society.”

This process will be fundamental for the socialization and humanization of these young people, due to the processes of renewing concepts through discourses pertinent to the critical act and through problem-solving aimed at the construction of new social texts.

Through the points of view that emerge in the analysis of sentences, other forms of positive knowledge about this same group of students may be perceived. Even when they externalize this lack of perspective on life through this social text, they may still possess raw material, namely those positive forms of everyday knowledge. Moreover, this knowledge arising from daily life is essential to teaching practice, according to Freire (2018), because by starting from this knowledge, students may feel more valued, since the studies are taking their knowledge into account. In other words, it is necessary to show that there is good knowledge stored in their minds and that those crystallized discourses are often negative “dogmas” that they hear other people say and reproduce. It is up to educators to prevent the proliferation of these arguments, especially because it is understood that the process of this critical reading ends in the mind, where:

“There are two types of memory: short-term memory, or immediate memory, or working memory, which has a limited capacity of at most nine elements, such as words, and as new words arrive, it empties itself to make room for nine more words; otherwise, it becomes overloaded... and once memory is emptied, if we cannot recognize the material as a meaningful unit, it will be immediately forgotten. But if the material is meaningful, it begins to receive the action of another type of memory, whose capacity is not limited: deep memory or long-term memory, where all knowledge is organized: knowledge of the language, experiences, convictions, habits, etc.” (Kleiman, 2008, p. 16)

Hence the importance of working with reading according to students’ culture, so that they may see that the focus of pedagogical practice is on reading comprehension and not, in isolation, only on grammar or only on vocabulary, which, if presented separately, would possibly be lost in immediate memory. This does not mean that the two are not important, but it is necessary to integrate them into a whole, in order, through the result, to present the English language as a possibility for expanding knowledge. In addition, students can be encouraged to develop new perspectives on cultural life, enabling them to exercise their citizenship in a critical and reflective manner.

For this purpose, it will be important for reading comprehension activities to take place in three parts: pre-reading, which precedes reading; detailed reading; and post-reading.

The first stage will activate world knowledge, or prior and long-term knowledge, as Kleiman (2018) calls it, in relation to the text that is about to be read, aiming at greater interaction between the student and the text. This moment occurs before the student reads the text and takes place through activities prepared to verify what contributions learners bring regarding the subject. A discussion or an exploration of the image that generally represents the content of the text may be carried out, or a video, a song, or an informal conversation may be used. What matters at this moment is what will attract or motivate the student to “embark” on the text.

The second stage is the moment when the objective of the text is stated to the learner, showing the reading instructions, what they will identify, and what they will do with that reading. At this stage, the reader begins to search through their previous knowledge for everything that is relevant to reading

comprehension. The text always offers many paths, but not everything is evident; therefore, some inferences are necessary, and these require questioning and analysis, that is, critical reading.

The third and final stage brings together the student’s long-term knowledge, which has already been activated in the pre-reading activity, with the content of the text seen in the second stage of reading. It is worth emphasizing once again that the educator must follow certain factors when choosing the text, such as the student’s linguistic level and personal interest. In this phase, the student starts from the knowledge already acquired and consolidates new knowledge, thus forming the reading cycle. Once appropriated, this new knowledge will, in turn, become prior knowledge in other discussions or reading situations.

It is also important that reading be well planned, so that students may achieve the result intended by the teacher. For this reason, activities need to be carefully designed and must be aligned with the objectives and, as already stated, with the student’s linguistic level. In addition, it is important that they correspond to the student’s needs, for example: short texts involving fixed sentences whose structures may include “Greetings,” “Classroom Words,” and “Magic Words.” These texts are within the students’ interests and needs, since they need to greet one another and the teacher, as well as apologize and use polite language in the classroom with everyone in the class. In this way, by beginning to interact with these short phrases, they may feel secure in their linguistic competence, which will give them the certainty that they are capable of much more, provided that they seek the knowledge necessary for use in daily life.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this study was to seek to understand the pedagogical potential of the multimodal genre sticker in English classes, with a particular focus on visual-critical literacy. Based on the literature review, the analysis showed that, although stickers are widely used in everyday communication, this resource is still underused in educational contexts. However, the studies analyzed demonstrate that the use

of multimodal genres, such as the sticker, offers significant opportunities to promote critical reading and the production of texts involving multiple languages.

The sticker, due to its hybrid nature, allows students to develop both their linguistic skills and their ability to interpret visual texts. When used in a planned manner, this resource can enrich pedagogical practices, making language learning more dynamic and relevant. Furthermore, by working with stickers, students can develop a critical view of the messages conveyed through images and symbols, which contributes to broader training in terms of visual literacy.

Thus, the use of the sticker genre in English classes can be a powerful tool for integrating visual-critical literacy into educational practices, offering students an innovative way to engage with language and digital culture. The study reinforces the importance of teachers exploring new multimodal genres, adapting their pedagogical strategies to include students' digital realities and to promote foreign language teaching that is both meaningful and critical.

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