

# Critical Interculturality and EFL Textbooks: Examining the Tensions

*Interculturalidad crítica y los libros de texto  
para la enseñanza del inglés: examinando las tensiones*

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## Abstract

This article aims to analyse the relationship between critical interculturality and textbooks for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To achieve this, I analysed 94 documents, including articles, dissertations and book chapters published in several national and international databases in the period from 2013 to 2023. The review of these studies also serves as a means to understand how different scholars have analysed textbooks in their contexts. This article is derived from a doctoral study that stems from my personal and professional interests. The research presents seven tensions that reveal traditional ways of analysing textbooks over decades, the need for deeper critical intercultural views, biased cultural and intercultural representations, uncritical literacy practices, coloniality of being, bilingual policy hegemony, and controlled evaluation, selection and use of EFL textbooks. All this means that there is a need to consider critical interculturality as an attempt to decolonize traditional ways of teaching at different educational levels of education. The result of this analysis further suggests a research gap regarding critical interculturality and EFL textbooks.

**Keywords:** critical interculturality, EFL textbooks, interculturality, textbook analysis.

## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la relación entre la interculturalidad crítica y los libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Para lograrlo, analicé 94 documentos, incluyendo artículos, disertaciones y capítulos de libros publicados en diversas bases de datos nacionales e internacionales en el periodo del 2013 al 2023. La revisión de dichos estudios también sirve de medio para comprender cómo diferentes académicos han analizado los libros de texto en sus entornos. Este artículo se deriva de un estudio doctoral que surge de mi interés personal y profesional. La investigación presenta siete tensiones que revelan formas tradicionales de evaluar los libros de texto durante décadas, la necesidad de puntos de vista críticos interculturales más profundos, representaciones culturales e interculturales sesgadas, prácticas de alfabetización acríticas, colonialidad del ser, hegemonía de políticas bilingües, y evaluación, selección y uso controlados de los libros de texto de inglés. Todo esto significa que existe la necesidad de considerar la interculturalidad crítica como un intento de decolonizar las formas tradicionales de enseñar en los diferentes niveles educativos. El resultado de este análisis sugiere, además, una brecha de investigación con respecto a la interculturalidad crítica y los libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés.

**Palabras clave:** interculturalidad crítica, libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés, interculturalidad, análisis de libros de texto.

## Introduction

Becoming critical intercultural subjects has become a challenge in a society that requires citizens that respond to the local, national and international needs to communicate in different contexts. As a response, education and language teaching arise as an answer to help minimize barriers between different language and cultural systems around the globe. Going beyond, intercultural communication has emerged as the possibility to establish meaningful intercultural encounters (Álvarez Valencia, 2014; Byram, 1997; Sercu, 2005). In this respect, language textbooks appear as a pedagogical resource in the classroom that helps students in their process of learning. However, cultural imperialism is reflected in the EFL textbooks for teaching and learning that become the structure that perpetuates hegemonic power (Kumaravadivelu, 2014). Thus, evidence has shown that power relations control EFL textbooks in which some cultures are superior to others (Kumaravadivelu, 2014; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2022; Soto & Méndez, 2020; Walsh, 2009a, 2015). Regarding this, De Mejía (2006), Miranda and Valencia Giraldo (2019), and Usma Wilches (2009) stated that the bilingual education policy in Colombia has a great influence from institutions and international corporate institutes. Moreover, materials, methodologies, learning activities, and strategies that come from West and North countries leave aside cultural elements from the own and other communities (Canagarajah, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2014; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020a; Prabhu, 1987). These tensions between interculturality and EFL textbooks have shaped and homogenized Colombian English Language Teaching (ELT) practices for decades which in turn conceal cultural diversity and identity.

This is the reason why critical intercultural studies appear as an urgent call to value and recognize the other. This recognition implies the understanding that minority groups have differences in values, language dialects, customs, race, sexual orientation, social, and cultural capacities, and social classes, among others, that need to be catered into any discourse. To do so, critical interculturality in Latin American countries emerged as a political, social, and ethical stance (Granados-Beltrán, 2018a; Tubino, 2004, 2013; Walsh, 2009b, 2015; Zárate Pérez, 2014). Having in mind the importance of textbooks in EFL education, and how critical interculturality, as part of the decolonial turn, needs to be considered in those pedagogical materials, the work done by different scholars unveils some tensions between what EFL textbooks claim and what they really guide learners to learn. In this regard, tensions between critical interculturality and EFL textbooks are understood as those frictions and limitations that become recurrent along with the findings and results of the different studies. Based on this, an analysis regarding critical interculturality and EFL textbooks is of high interest to acknowledge the tensions between these theoretical constructs by means of what has been done in Colombia and around the world, the way EFL textbooks are analysed and the possibilities to develop research in this field. With this in mind, this paper aims at answering the following question: What is unveiled from the analysis of critical interculturality and EFL textbooks in Colombia and around the world in the last decade (2013–2023)?

## Critical Interculturality

Regarding culture in EFL Education, it is a known fact that language and culture cannot be conceived as isolated terms in education. McLaren (2003) conceptualizes culture as the perceptions of a social group and its members' life conditions. Furthermore,

Álvarez Valencia and Bonilla (2009) define culture as the interpretations of beliefs and ideas from human actions based on the traditions and interactions between individuals. Following this idea, the inclusion of cultural elements into the lessons is a matter of high interest to maximize learners' understanding of the world as intercultural subjects (Álvarez Valencia & Bonilla, 2009; Kramersch, 1998; Trosborg, 2010). Culture is present in language and reciprocally language is present in culture (Kramersch, 1998). This is a basis to affirm that cultural aspects and traits are conceived as pivotal elements in the process of learning any language. The teaching of languages inexorably relates to culture as this is part of the background of every societal group. In line with this point of view, Álvarez Valencia and Bonilla (2009) agree on the importance of addressing cultural contents in the EFL lessons. All this means that language and culture are intertwined and this world advocates the need to interact, communicate and understand one's own as well as the culture of others. As stated by Oviedo-Gómez and Álvarez Guayara (2019), "the relationship between language and culture permits the awareness of different cultural codes" (p. 17). All in all, the teaching of any language requires educators to become aware of the importance of integrating cultural elements as they belong to the roots of the individuals involved in the communicative process.

Concerning the shift from interculturality to critical interculturality, several scholars agree on the importance of transitioning from the concept of culture and interculturality to critical interculturality (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015; Hidalgo, 2005; Quijano, 2014; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009; Tubino, 2005, 2013; Viaña *et al.*, 2010; Walsh, 2009a; Zárate Pérez, 2014). First, the way interculturality is conceived in Latin American countries and Europe is different. While in Europe, it was introduced as a response to the immigrants who were massively moving to their countries, in Latin America, it was the result of the need to reposition Indigenous people, their communities and customs initially (Tubino, 2005; Zárate Pérez, 2014). Thereafter, the awareness towards the importance of repositioning these communities was also rendered to other marginalized communities that are the result of the armed conflict, displacement, racism, classism, and centralized political decisions, among others. Thus, listening to the voices of these marginalized communities becomes imperative. In this regard, Walsh (2009a) identifies the need to transition from the initial stages of interculturality, described as relational and functional interculturality to critical interculturality. The author affirms this concept emerges as an endeavour to question traditional and vertical relations of power.

Walsh (2007, 2013a) states that critical interculturality is the co-construction of an ethical, political, social, and epistemic project that might help to transform realities and decolonize mindsets from a critical perspective. This is aligned with Mignolo (2007), as he understands critical interculturality departing from a decolonial turn that questions dominant and Eurocentric knowledge and that responds to that. Moreover, Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007) claim critical interculturality implies the transformation of subjects into critical ones that help to transform their own and other realities. Finally, Walsh (2010) explains that critical interculturality is not visible and tangible at present but is in its initial stages of co-construction. Definitely, decolonizing and giving voice to minoritized and marginalized communities is vital to promote spaces in which critical reflections take place.

## EFL Textbooks

It is necessary to define first what textbooks are in education and the way they are conceived as part of EFL education (Hutton & Mehlinger, 1987; Ossenbach, 2010). The textbook as an object of study is conceived at first glance in Europe by the International

Institute for Textbook Improvement. To this respect, Choppin (1992) affirmed that textbooks as objects of research “can be studied from different points of view, because they are a consumer product, a support for school-based knowledge, ideological and cultural vectors, and pedagogical instruments” (p. 102). However, EFL textbooks in the Colombian context “are not neutral as they not only depict and reproduce values, behaviours, cultural patterns, traditions and dominant ideologies, but they also reinforce stereotypes and support the idea that one nationality is superior to others” (Núñez-Pardo, 2018, p. 232). Moreover, the English textbook was defined as the main artefact for the teaching of English, as a mediator of knowledge, as a transmitter of ideologies (Borre Johnsen, 1996), and as a socio-cultural, pedagogical, didactic and cognitive mediation in teaching and learning (Núñez-Pardo, 2020a, 2022). To conclude, EFL textbooks have suffered a transition from being materials used just for the schooling years to becoming the main basis of meaningful input in EFL lessons.

Moving forward, it is pertinent to review the concept of critical interculturality and how it is addressed in EFL textbooks. The evidence showcases scarce research developed in relation to this concern. As can be evinced in the literature, there are some studies in which cultural elements, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and interculturality are addressed concerning EFL textbooks (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Henao Mejía *et al.*, 2019; Larrea-Espinar & Raigón-Rodríguez, 2019; Rincón, 2019; Rosyidi & Purwati, 2017; Sándorová, 2016; Soto & Méndez, 2020; Su, 2016); leaving aside critical interculturality in their theoretical constructs. However, some scholars have conducted research in which both components are analysed. For instance, Granados-Beltrán (2018b) developed a study to analyse critical interculturality in language teacher education programmes. The analysis showed that the materials, including textbooks, used to teach the language do not promote and reinforce critical positions in the learners. Moreover, Núñez-Pardo (2022) conducted a documentary study to analyse critical interculturality and EFL textbooks in Colombia. The author revealed a set of ontological, epistemological, and power criteria for decolonized EFL materials *otherwise*. The revision of these studies allowed me to identify a research gap in conducting critical qualitative research to explore students’ and teachers’ voices regarding critical interculturality and EFL textbooks.

## EFL Textbook Analysis

Content analysis has been traditionally used as the method to analyse textbooks. Evidence from different studies shows that quantitative content analysis is a prevalent method for textbook evaluation. The work of Cunningsworth (1995), who is a pioneer scholar in this regard, is well-known in textbook evaluation for a set of criteria to select appropriate coursebooks. Different studies put into practice Cunningsworth’s (1995) checklist criteria to assess coursebooks (Farichin, 2019; Mayasari, 2015). The results from these studies suggest the need to adjust and select more suitable criteria for textbook evaluation as elements from an intercultural perspective are not catered to. This vision can be also confirmed in other studies in which content analysis takes place based on statistical and numerical data (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Sobkowiak, 2016; Su, 2016; Tompkins *et al.*, 2006; Tracana *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2021). The findings in these studies show recurrent patterns, in which the analysis is focused on the review of units, lessons and activities in charts, statistics, frequency of patterns, and percentages, among others. With this in mind, these studies neglect the possibility to complement the content analysis with the perceptions of the real users of the textbooks. As a result, the analysis from different empirical studies is a mirror that reflects the different tensions that emerged in the intersection between critical interculturality and EFL textbooks, and the way EFL

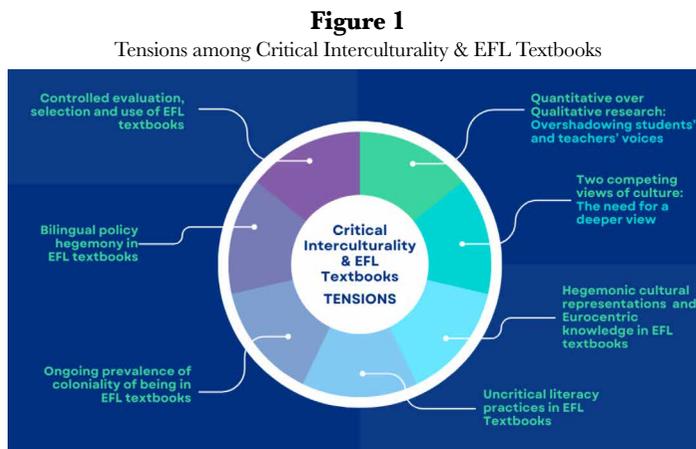
textbooks have been analysed. The analysis of empirical studies regarding EFL textbooks and their relationship with critical interculturality leads to identify seven main tensions that emerged from this review.

## Methodology

After conceptualizing the main theoretical constructs that constitute the backbone of this analysis, it is imperative to describe the methodology I used to unveil the tensions. I followed a process to gather and analyse empirical studies regarding critical interculturality and EFL textbooks in different databases. Firstly, the selection of the studies was screened by searching the following keywords in different possible combinations: EFL textbooks, textbook analysis, textbook evaluation, interculturality, critical interculturality, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and/or culture. Secondly, the literature reviewed was searched from the following sources: *English Teaching Forum*, *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *International Journal of Basic and Applied Science*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *Changing English*, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *Multilingua: Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Scopus*, *Science Direct*, *Taylor & Francis*, *ProQuest*, *Web of Science*, as well as Colombian journals including *Profile journal*, *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *HOW Journal*, *Signo y Pensamiento*, *Íkala*, *Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, *Tabula Rasa*, *Enletawa journal*, and *GIST Journal*.

As part of these criteria, I included national and international journals, book chapters, and masters and doctoral dissertations covering the last decade, from 2013 to 2023. It is imperative to mention that seminal authors and their contributions are also considered to support the tensions. I decided to exclude studies that were developed by the same author(s) and derived from the same research in multiple publications, and studies that have theoretical, methodological, and/or ethical biases. As a result, I reviewed 94 documents for the following report on the main tensions. Finally, I analysed the information to identify recurrent patterns that constitute the tensions between critical interculturality and EFL textbooks that emerged.

## Examining the Tensions



### Quantitative over Qualitative Research: Shadowing Students' and Teachers' Voices

The first tension shows a prevalence in quantitative studies regarding interculturality and EFL textbooks, and the immediate need for studies that privilege qualitative ap-

proaches. Different scholars agreed that most of the studies around the world have been done following quantitative approaches leaving aside interpretations and perceptions from students' and teachers' voices (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Lebedeva *et al.*, 2021; Sercu, 2005; Syairofi *et al.*, 2023; Widodo *et al.*, 2018). This means the traditional, systematic, and mechanical analysis of EFL textbooks includes identifying the types of activities through grids, matrices and/or frameworks. Subsequently, this type of analysis shadows the perceptions of the direct users of the pedagogical materials. The previous assertions suggest a shift to qualitative approaches to analyse textbooks that were confirmed in more recent studies around the world (Isnaini *et al.*, 2019; Rincón, 2019; Rosyidi & Purwati, 2017; Su, 2016; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). The information gathered from studies conducted in countries abroad permits to plant the seed for further research that examines critical interculturality and EFL textbooks complemented with the voices of the textbook users.

Despite this, it is imperative to recognize the efforts Colombian scholars have made by conducting studies in which critical interculturality and EFL textbook analysis are considered by following qualitative approaches (Cardozo & Lozano, 2020; Núñez-Pardo, 2020b, 2022; Ortiz Rivero, 2022). The results suggest the need to create more contextualized materials *otherwise* (Núñez-Pardo, 2020b) that respond to the specific needs of other students in other contexts, rather than the ones proposed in imposed textbooks. Hence, although there is scarce evidence, the aforementioned studies consider qualitative and mixed approaches rather than the traditional quantitative ones that are traditionally focused on just statistical, and content analyses that neglect students' and teachers' perceptions/voices on critical interculturality and EFL textbooks. In this regard, the information presented at this point showcases that a turn to qualitative approaches has been emerging; this is aligned with the review of more recent studies on the field. One of the most relevant studies in Colombia was conducted by Granados-Beltrán (2018a, 2018b) to examine the traces of critical interculturality in the initial language teacher education programmes in Colombia. The author collected data by following a qualitative critical research approach using interviews with teacher educators and discussion groups with future (pre-service) teachers. The results show how critical interculturality, from a decolonial position “can support initial foreign language teacher education ontologically and epistemologically” (Granados-Beltrán, 2018b, p. 10). This study is relevant as it highlights different tensions that emerge from language teaching programmes and novice service teachers' perceptions on this concern; these tensions include being an instructor versus being a teacher, preference for native speakers over non-native speakers, the ideal model of a language teacher, the discipline knowledge, and the division or integration between theory and practice.

Finally, Núñez-Pardo (2020b) presents the importance of following qualitative research that tends to promote critical interculturality in the EFL classroom. One of the criteria discussed in her research has to do with the relations of power. The findings suggest the need to resist hegemonic and predetermined knowledge presented in pedagogical materials based on Eurocentric perspectives. Additionally, the coloniality of being implies the need to take social actions as education transforms and is a way to emancipate human beings from repression. This is what should inspire the making of wise decisions when planning, developing, and implementing courses in language teacher education programmes to help in the development of a more critical position in novice service teachers and students alike. There is a need to continue exploring students' and teachers' perceptions to understand them as the results of beliefs, practices, and experiences from interaction in the different teaching and learning environments. This guarantees the voices of teachers and students are being recorded and analysed to complement the results of the textbook

analysis. In sum, the evidence suggests the need to consider qualitative approaches in which the analysis does not focus just on statistics, frequencies, checklists and content that neglect students' and teachers' perceptions of critical interculturality and EFL textbooks.

### Two Competing Views of Culture: The Need for a Deeper View

Research done in terms of the cultural elements identified in the analysis of textbooks revealed that although textbooks include cultural aspects, they superficially address them, leaving aside elements from deep culture (Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020; Bandura & Sercu, 2005; Hall, 1976; Itkonen *et al.*, 2015; Larrea-Espinar & Raigón-Rodríguez, 2019; Layne & Lipponen, 2016). Concerning this, different authors in the Colombian scenario affirm that there is still a prevailing way of providing cultural elements in the classrooms, and EFL textbooks maintain superficial cultural content (Álvarez Valencia & Bonilla, 2009; Gómez, 2015; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020a; Oviedo-Gómez & Álvarez Guayara, 2019; Rico, 2012). The results of these studies show that although cultural elements are being considered in the lessons, teachers and materials focus just on superficial aspects of culture such as ethnicity, race, beliefs, cultural codes, and linguistic dialects, among others. This is the reason why there is a need to consider elements from deep culture in which constant reflection and critical positions are favoured.

Moving to the international scenario, different scholars also agree on the need to address a deeper view of culture in the EFL textbooks and pedagogical materials. Rincón (2019) suggests the need to change the way of thinking and understanding that intercultural communicative coursebooks and materials need to address culture not just from a superficial stance, but from a deeper view in which taboos and norms are re-considered to avoid perpetuating stereotypes. Based on Hall's (1976) ideas, Larrea-Espinar and Raigón-Rodríguez (2019) and Lee (2009) recast culture as big "C" and little "c", concepts that have been already addressed in different empirical studies. The concepts of C culture and c culture are understood as the easy observable events (C) while the other (c) refers to socio-cultural values, norms, beliefs and assumptions. With this in mind, Larrea-Espinar and Raigón-Rodríguez (2019) conclude that textbooks need to consider both, big C and small c to avoid presenting just superficial content in the lessons. Besides, Amerian and Tajabadi (2020) and Yim (2003) affirm textbooks promote Americanisation in which superficial cultural content is maintained and the information that is offered is isolated.

All in all, the results of different studies confirm that in EFL textbooks continue prevailing superficial cultural content activities. However, the aforementioned scholars confirm and converge on the idea that a deeper view in terms of culture in the textbooks is required. If this is achieved, cultural and language barriers will decrease as understanding one's own and others' realities cannot be conceived based upon just superficial elements (Núñez-Pardo, 2018) of the different societal groups. Thus, critical intercultural possibilities to interact with students, teachers and the EFL textbooks might have a significant impact on students by questioning hegemonic and traditional practices (Oviedo-Gómez & Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2023; Walsh, 2007) in the classroom.

### Hegemonic Cultural Representations in EFL Textbooks

The third tension unveils an ongoing perpetuation of cultural representations that are hegemonic and favour North American and European knowledges. Colombian scholars portrayed that the inclusion of intercultural components in EFL textbooks favours cultural representations from other cultures and countries that are predominant concerning the culture of the target users of the textbooks (Gómez, 2015; Henao Mejía *et al.*, 2019; Rincón, 2019; Soto & Méndez, 2020; Valencia Giraldo, 2006). This infor-

mation is depicted in the content, learning activities, and iconography of the textbooks (Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020b, 2021, 2022). This means EFL textbooks perpetuate and naturalise the idea that one culture is superior to the other. On the other hand, international studies regarding the use of EFL textbooks and culture or interculturality showed how the activities proposed in these pedagogical materials favour knowledge that comes from the called native English-speaking countries (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Bernardes *et al.*, 2019; Lund, 2007; Rosyidi & Purwati, 2017; Sándorová, 2016; Sobkowiak, 2016; Tajeddin & Ghaffaryan, 2020). As a consequence, these authors conducted different studies in which British and American history, economic systems, and cultural behaviours are presented in EFL textbooks used by EFL students as the ideal(s) to be replicated in their context. Consequently, the analysis of EFL textbooks showcases that native English-speaking cultures are favoured in contexts in which English is not conceived as the official language.

This shows that those native English language cultures represent an ideal as language is linked to optimal life conditions and totalitarian knowledge (Álvarez Valencia & Le Gal, 2019). Therefore, the results of studies conducted in Colombia and around the world reveal that EFL textbooks mirrored hegemonic cultural representations centred on dominant North and West knowledges neglecting the possibilities of considering the own knowledge as possible, valid, and significant.

### Uncritical Literacy Practices in EFL Textbooks

The fourth tension refers to uncritical literacy practices portrayed in EFL textbooks. The review of studies showcases that EFL textbooks continue focusing more on traditional components for teaching and learning (Valencia Giraldo, 2006), showing uncritical literacy practices that affect teachers' and students' possibilities to reflect and transform their realities. Accordingly, Mora (2014) analysed the concept of critical literacy in Colombian language teaching. The author presented arguments regarding critical literacy in EFL textbooks and concluded that textbooks need to be linked to students' lives in a deeper way to avoid those traditional literacy practices that have framed education in Colombia for decades. Cassany (2015), Cassany and Casstellà (2010), and Núñez-Pardo (2020b, 2021, 2022) purported the idea of going beyond conventional ways of producing and using textbooks to look for the path to provide scenarios in which critical literacy practices take place. The revision of other empirical studies (Anvedsen, 2012; Chan & Cheuk, 2020; Luke, 2012; Morrell, 2012; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020b, 2022; Trigos-Carrillo *et al.*, 2021; Zhang, 2017, 2018) suggested that textbooks need to consider reading passages that foster critical readers as these pedagogical materials might be precursors of social transformation.

Traditionally, in EFL textbooks prevail literacy practices that do not foster critical possibilities to interact and question other systems (Mora, 2014; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020a; Valencia Giraldo, 2006). EFL textbooks foster and reinforce linguistic, grammatical, and structural aspects of the language rather than providing students with spaces to understand, question, value, and re-signify other cosmologies, or cosmologies otherwise (Arribas Lozano, 2021). Definitely, Colombian and international scholars concluded that EFL textbooks emphasise more on lexical and grammatical components of the language; relegating the use of that language for expressing one's own and others' complex realities in symmetrical relationships.

### Ongoing Prevalence of Coloniality of Being in EFL Textbooks

The fifth tension uncovers the ongoing prevalence of the coloniality of being in EFL textbooks. This coloniality of being is mainly understood as the inclusion of cul-

tural representations that affect the regular development of a human being in a society (Walsh, 2009a, 2010). This tension showcases the prevalence of canonical cultural representations in EFL textbooks regarding gender, race, class, and capacities (Benham & Mozaheb, 2013; Clawson & Kegler, 2000; Mikander, 2023; Núñez-Pardo, 2020a, 2021; Song, 2013; Suwarno *et al.*, 2021; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). Concerning the Colombian setting, Núñez-Pardo (2018a) identified that “sexism has continued to flourish in English textbooks” (p. 235). This idea converges and complements with Castañeda-Peña (2018) in the sense that teachers need to be attentive to messages that remain hidden in different pedagogical materials perpetuating, for example, gender stereotypes. Moreover, Cardozo and Lozano (2020) and Ortiz Rivero (2022) revealed that EFL textbooks in Colombia present a language that excludes, standardises, and subordinates people into different social classes, needs, and capacities. Based on the authors, this concern is also evidenced in the iconography, type of activities, and reading passages proposed in the EFL textbooks.

By the same token, different studies around the world also confirm that throughout decades EFL textbooks perpetuate sexist, racist, and classist contents, texts, activities, and images, among others (Canale & Furtado, 2021; Hall, 2014; Lee, 2014, 2019; Nofall & Qawar, 2015; Pereira, 2013; Su, 2016; Syarifuddin, 2014). Conventionally, textbooks present stereotyped ideas about each gender, race, social class, and capacity. All in all, traditional representations of identity markers prevail in EFL textbooks, rejecting ontological diversity. These representations that perpetuate the coloniality of being (Víaña *et al.*, 2010; Walsh, 2009a) in EFL textbooks are present not only in reading passages, but in all the intersemiotic resources that interplay in the lessons, units, and activities.

### **Bilingual Policy Hegemony in EFL Textbooks**

The sixth tension refers to the coloniality of power disclosed in the bilingual policies regarding EFL textbooks. This coloniality of power has been maintained over time as a result of bilingual policies that continue perpetuating a top-down development, selection, and use of the pedagogical materials suggested and proposed for EFL learning in different contexts (Canagarajah, 2005; Li & Xue, 2021; Mora *et al.*, 2019; Sercu, 2005). As explained by Miranda and Valencia Giraldo (2019), in Colombia, Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN) “and local authorities have so far invested important resources in curricular guidelines, textbook distribution and teacher development programmes, and yet these efforts are limited to a very few” (p. 288). In addition, bilingual policies continue homogenising EFL teaching and learning (Miranda, 2021; Miranda *et al.*, 2018) by creating a sense of dependence on Eurocentric pedagogical materials that are created based on external views that ignore direct learners’ needs, realities and concerns (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Correa & Usma Wilches, 2013; De Mejía, 2006; Gómez Sará, 2017; Li & Xue, 2021; Mora *et al.*, 2019; Morales Llano, 2022; Núñez-Pardo, 2021, 2022; Usma Wilches, 2009; Valencia Giraldo, 2006). In this regard, the aforesaid authors agree that the use of EFL textbooks responds to hierarchically and vertically policy-imposed decisions that ignore the specific needs of diverse contexts.

Generally speaking, González Moncada (2007) analysed how Colombian bilingual policies favour British English as the ideal variety of the inner circle. The author affirmed that “this is demonstrated by the CEF’s choice of British English, British authors, as well as textbooks, tests and test preparation guides produced by British publishers” (p. 317). The promotion of these policies overlooks the possibility for local students, teachers and researchers to co-construct consensual policies related to content-responsive pedagogies,

curricula and materials that promote possibilities to ponder, question, re-signify, and embrace diverse cultural worlds.

### Controlled Evaluation, Selection and Use of EFL Textbooks

The last tension refers to the supremacy of ministerial institutions and publishing houses regarding the evaluation, selection and use of EFL textbooks. From a critical intercultural stance, local authors have revealed decolonial criteria for the creation of contextualised and decolonized materials *otherwise* (Núñez-Pardo, 2020b, 2021, 2022) and criteria for initial language teacher education (Granados-Beltrán, 2018a, 2018b). There is also an increasing need to consider how to evaluate, to select, and to use the EFL textbooks available (Hsiang *et al.*, 2022) that sometimes serve as pedagogical materials provided by educational ministries and publishing houses. It is a real fact that EFL teachers lack the time, support, resources and expertise to embark on the journey of creating their pedagogical materials; reason why criteria to evaluate, select and use EFL textbooks might be considered.

The evaluation of materials such as textbooks, coursebooks or worksheets is a concern that has been addressed by different authors (Byrd, 2001; Cunningsworth, 1995; Grant, 1987; Harmer, 2007; Isik, 2018; Littlejohn, 2012; Litz, 2000; Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2008; Syairofi *et al.*, 2023; Ur, 1996) who have proposed different evaluation frameworks. However, the different instrumental and superficial grids, checklists, matrices, and frameworks—sometimes named principles—continue focusing more on mainstream aspects that evaluate the kind of activities in the textbooks, leaving aside other multimodal and intersemiotic elements that interplay in the materials (Álvarez Valencia, 2016, 2021, 2022; Stec, 2021). By considering intersemiotic resources (colour, font, sizes, distribution, layout, and iconography, among others) that have been traditionally relegated, the evaluation, selection and use of EFL textbooks might integrate a more holistic analysis that allows teachers and learners to become more critical intercultural subjects. Indeed, it is imperative to unsettle and disrupt controlled evaluation, selection and use of EFL textbooks in the glocal context.

### Conclusion

The revision of empirical studies conducted at the national and international levels permitted to reveal seven main tensions that prevail in the relationship between critical interculturality and EFL textbooks. The first tension showcases the possibility of conducting further qualitative research in which the voices of teachers and students need to be listened to. The second tension concerns two main views of culture, superficial vs. deep culture, and the increasing need to consider culture in the EFL textbooks with a deeper view as their activities continue perpetuating superficial cultural content. The third tension reveals that EFL textbooks maintain learning activities that privilege the knowledge that comes from English-speaking countries, showing that there are hegemonic cultural representations focused on European and North American knowledges. The fourth tension refers to the traditional ways of teaching throughout textbooks in which grammatical and lexical contents are presented without promoting critical literacy in students. The fifth tension unveils the prevalence of classist, racist, gender, and dominant representations in EFL textbooks which undoubtedly maintain and perpetuate the coloniality of being in the learners. The sixth tension showcases an ongoing hegemony in the policies that result in the impossibility that EFL teachers have to make decisions on the pedagogical materials they use in the classrooms. The last tension showcases the need to consider criteria for the evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks. As a

result, the identification, examination and analysis of these seven tensions allow us to confirm that the way EFL textbooks are used in different educational settings needs to be re-considered for language education.

To conclude, EFL teachers, as fundamental subjects in the teaching and learning of languages, play a pivotal role in developing learners' intercultural competencies. The review of recent studies around the world and in the Colombian context unveils the importance of making students aware that language cannot be conceived as an isolated component of communication. Living in this society implies knowing about one's own as well as other ways of conceiving and understanding the world. Accordingly, this allows us to state that critical interculturality is a need in the EFL teaching and learning processes (Oviedo-Gómez & Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2023). This represents the need to understand critical interculturality as the construction and repositioning of other ways of exerting power, knowing and being. Critical interculturality as a claim in education needs to be understood from a political, social, and ethical posture (Núñez-Pardo, 2020a, 2021, 2022; Oviedo-Gómez & Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2023; Tubino, 2005; Walsh, 2009b, 2013b, 2015; Zárate Pérez, 2014). Given this, critical interculturality from a political position implies understanding the other by recognizing and giving value to the cultural differences that facilitate an intercultural critical vision of the world. Subsequently, critical interculturality is not a new solution, it is a need in the present. Based on the literature, EFL textbooks continue perpetuating hierarchical, systematic, and vertical relations of power. This coloniality revealed in the analysis, allowed us to unveil the possibilities for further research in which the voices of teachers and students need to be listened regarding the role of critical interculturality in the evaluation, selection and use of EFL textbooks. Broadly speaking, despite the advances in empirical studies, there is a growing tendency that shows that critical positions towards education are required; a hard task for language teachers in charge of teaching not only a language but also teaching learners to become intercultural subjects. Finally, the evidence collected throughout this literature review suggests the need to develop qualitative research that tends to analyse teachers' and students' voices regarding critical interculturality in EFL textbooks used at schools in different contexts to unveil evaluation, selection and use criteria for EFL textbooks.

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