

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN A SOCIAL NETWORKING
SITE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

A thesis presented by
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A Thesis Presented

by

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Statement by author

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SIGNED: Alejandro Fernández Benavides

Dedication

To my fiancée Angela Cordero, my daughter Sophia Fernandez and my father Alejandro Fernandez Alvarado.

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Abstract

The emergence of technologies web 2.0 has sprung the variety of possibilities for online intercultural communication. As a consequence, the boundaries of time, space and nationality are no longer a limitation to engage in intercultural interaction. An example of this phenomenon is the interaction among people from different cultures on Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Particularly, Social Networking Sites for Language Learning (SNSLLs) have bridged the social dimension of web 2.0 sites with language learning. Given the sociocultural nature of online interactions on SNSLLs, it is important to understand the presence of the intercultural dimension on these sites and the interactions that happen on them. This research focuses on the SNSLLs Livemocha and analyzes the intercultural dimension of this site.

Based on the intercultural view of language teaching and the tenets of multimodal social semiotics, I analyze the semiotic design of Livemocha and the students' voices, perceptions and experiences with this SNSLL. This is a qualitative case study. The data was gathered during a semester through surveys, learning logs, focus groups, observations and screen recordings of the participants' activities on Livemocha. The data consisted of the site's documental information and the participants' voices. The semiotic design of Livemocha was analyzed by following the principles of multimodal social semiotics. And the students' commentaries were analyzed through discourse analysis in order to find indicators of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

The results suggest that Livemocha is a SNSLL that has the potential to promote ICC components such as attitudes, knowledge and skills of interpreting and relating and discovery and interaction. Both, the students' voices and the semiotic analysis of some of the learning units indicated that users could experience contact with other cultures through the contents of the site

and the possibilities to interact with members of other cultures. The findings of this study report pedagogical implications regarding the need of spaces for intercultural communication, development of critical skills and overcoming the current linguistic imperialism on language teaching practices.

Key words: Intercultural Communicative Competence, multimodal social semiotics, social networking sites for language learning, technology web 2.0 and online communication.

Résumé

L'émergence des technologies web 2.0 a fait surgir une vaste variété des possibilités en bénéfice de la communication en ligne. Par conséquent, les frontières de temps, espace et nationalité ne sont pas une limitation pour s'engager en processus de communication interculturelle. Un exemple de ce phénomène c'est l'interaction entre des gens de différentes cultures en Réseaux Sociaux de Communication (RSC). Particulièrement, les Réseaux Sociaux pour l'Apprentissage des Langues (RSAL) ont relié la dimension sociale des sites web 2.0 avec l'apprentissage des langues. À cause de la nature socioculturelle des interactions en ligne des RSAL, c'est important de comprendre la présence de la dimension interculturelle dedans ces sites et les interactions qui y se déroulent. Cette étude concentre sur la RSAL Livemocha et analyse la dimension interculturelle de ce site en ligne.

Être fondé les principes de la sémiotique sociale multimodale et une perspective interculturelle d'enseignement des langues, j'analyse ici le dessein sémiotique de Livemocha et les voix, perceptions et expériences des participants dans cet RSAL. Ceci est une étude de cas qualitative. L'information a été recueillie pendant un semestre de classe en utilisant des enquêtes, journaux d'apprentissage, groupes de discussion, observations et enregistrement des activités des participants sur Livemocha. Les données ont été les informations documentées de ce site et les voix des participants. Le dessein sémiotique de Livemocha a été analysé en suivant les principes de la sémiotique sociale multimodale et les commentaires des étudiants ont été analysées par l'analyse des discours afin de trouver indicateurs de Compétence Communicative Interculturelle (CCI).

Les résultats suggèrent que Livemocha est un RSAL qui a le potentiel de promouvoir des éléments de CCI telles qu'attitudes, connaissance et les habilités de savoir comprendre et savoir

apprendre et faire. À la fois, les voix des étudiants et l'analyse sémiotique des quelques unités d'apprentissage ont indiqué que les étudiants ont pu éprouver contact avec autres cultures par les contenus de ce site et les possibilités d'interaction avec membres des autres cultures. Les résultats de cette étude rendent compte des implications pédagogiques à propos de le besoin des espaces pour communication interculturelle, le développement des habilités critiques et de surmonter l'actuel impérialisme linguistique dans les pratiques d'enseignement des langues.

Mots clés : Compétence Communicative Interculturelle, sémiotique sociale multimodale, réseaux sociaux pour l'apprentissage des langues, technologie web 2.0 et communication en ligne.

Resumen

El surgimiento de las tecnologías web 2.0 ha originado una gran variedad de posibilidades para la comunicación intercultural en línea. En consecuencia, las barreras de tiempo, espacio y nacionalidad ya no son una limitación para iniciar interacción intercultural. Un ejemplo de este fenómeno es la interacción entre personas de diferentes culturas en las redes sociales. Particularmente, las Redes Sociales para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESALs) han extendido la dimensión social de los sitios web 2.0 al campo del aprendizaje de lenguas. Dada la naturaleza sociocultural de las interacciones en línea en las RESALs, es importante entender la presencia de la dimensión intercultural en estos sitios y las interacciones que ocurren en ellos.

Esta investigación se enfoca en la RESAL Livemocha y analiza la dimensión intercultural de este sitio. Basado en los principios de la semiótica social multimodal y en una visión intercultural de la enseñanza de lenguas, analizo el diseño semiótico multimodal de Livemocha y las voces de los estudiantes, sus percepciones y experiencias en esta RESAL.

Este es un estudio de caso cualitativo. La información fue recolectada durante un semestre mediante encuestas, diarios de aprendizaje, un grupo focal, observaciones y las grabaciones en pantalla de las actividades de los estudiantes en Livemocha. Los datos consistieron en la información documental del sitio Livemocha y los comentarios de los estudiantes. El diseño semiótico multimodal de Livemocha fue analizado siguiendo los principios de la semiótica social multimodal y los comentarios de los estudiantes mediante análisis de discurso con el fin de encontrar indicadores de Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural (CCI).

Los resultados sugieren que Livemocha es una RESAL que posee el potencial de promover componentes de CCI tales como actitudes, conocimiento y habilidades de

interpretación y relación y descubrimiento e interacción. Tanto las voces de los estudiantes como el análisis semiótico de algunas unidades de aprendizaje indicaron que los usuarios podían experimentar el contacto con otras culturas mediante los contenidos del sitio y las posibilidades de interacción con miembros de otras culturas. Los resultados de este estudio reportan implicaciones en cuanto a la necesidad de espacios de comunicación intercultural, el desarrollo de habilidades críticas y la superación del actual imperialismo lingüístico en las prácticas de enseñanza de lenguas.

Palabras clave: Competencia comunicativa intercultural, semiótica social multimodal, redes sociales para el aprendizaje de lenguas, tecnología web 2.0 y comunicación en línea.

Introduction

Recent advances in technological online educational trends have created new spaces and possibilities for language teaching and learning seen from the perspective of applied linguistics. Since the 80's CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) has allowed learners to support their learning process by providing them digital tools to get online tutorships, communicating opportunities, online exercises and activities and helping other learners and teachers at a worldwide scale, hence; several types of digital tools have been used to enhance language learning.

In the late 90's, this approach evolved to CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) which allowed learners not just to learn but to get a cultural communicative online experience based mostly on web 2.0 technologies. These web 2.0 technologies permit users to get in touch faster, easier through multimodal online platforms. Hence, in the early 2000's the emergence of SNS (Social Networking Sites) opened the possibility to establish online communities using digital platforms. Boyd and Ellison (2007) talk about the affordances that these sites offer to users: to create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to manage a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and to check, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

As an alternative use of these online platforms, SNSs were adapted to cope with the need of offering new digital spaces to learn languages; this need was fulfilled by the creation of SNSLL (Social Networking Sites for Language Learning) whose main difference from other SNS is that their purpose targets language learning and teaching specifically.

Web 2.0 technologies applied to language learning and teaching have given origin to new research tendencies which seek to analyze the role of SNSLL in formal educational contexts. In

this spirit, some researchers have argued the need to carry out deeper studies about the affordances of SNSLL in higher education level (Brick, 2011b; Clark and Gruba, 2010) and its benefits to learners (Alvarez, 2014a).

Despite the research about this digital phenomenon, there still remains the need to understand the intercultural dimension underlying these SNSLL. Previous research about SNSLLs have focused on the use, attitudes, behaviors and affordances of these digital platforms in higher education contexts, while, the intercultural dimension has not been widely addressed. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the intercultural dimension in the SNSLL Livemocha and the way learners develop their intercultural dimension. This research report consists of these main sections: the research problem, justification, research questions, previous studies in the field, theoretical framework, research design, results and discussion, conclusions, pedagogical implications and limitations of the study and further research.

Research problem

This study analyzes the intercultural dimension on the SNSLL Livemocha. In this work, I report the presence of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) based on the voices of a group of undergraduate students. The students were part of a language teaching program in Colombia and used Livemocha in one of their English classes during a semester. The interest here is to explore an alternative to use SNSLLs in higher education contexts and to fill the gap in the literature due to the lack of research about the intercultural dimension on SNSLLs. Since these two aspects have not been widely addressed, this research constitutes an attempt to explore them through an empirical study.

On the one hand, the nature of SNSLLs has not been completely analyzed (Brick, 2011a; Zourou, 2012; Clark & Gruba, 2010). As these sites represent a new kind of technology in language education, there are still several questions about their affordances in formal academic contexts and their usefulness to enhance students' language acquisition in online environments (Alvarez, 2014a). In a similar way, the intercultural dimension of SNSLLs has not been completely understood. Several studies have analyzed the learning content of SNSLLs (Alvarez, 2014a; Chotel, 2012), the experience of learners enrolled in regular language courses using these sites (Brick, 2011a) and the pedagogical affordances of this technology in formal language education (Loiseau, Potolia, and Zourou, 2011). Nevertheless, the presence of an intercultural dimension on SNSLLs still requires more research and that is exactly the research problem and focus of this study.

Consequently, this research studies possible presence and nature of the intercultural dimension on the SNSLL Livemocha. I consider it is problematic that, given the ubiquity of these informal learning spaces and the number of users that they attract, no research has focused

on how the cultural dimension is addressed on the website. It is relevant to understand if and/or what intercultural skills the semiotic design of Livemocha conveys to its users. Finding about this will inform about the pedagogical suitability of Livemocha in cases where educational contexts intend to integrate these virtual environments into their curriculum. My interest is to study the multimodal elements of the semiotic design of Livemocha and to analyze the participants' interactions with other members of Livemocha within a formal academic context. This information was gathered during a semester at Universidad del Valle and it followed a qualitative approach for the collection and examination of data.

Justification

This research purports to impact the field of applied linguistics in two ways: first, it would help to understand the nature of SNSLLs such as Livemocha from an intercultural view of language teaching. In doing so, we can explore how to integrate SNSLLs in language education programs. Second, it would offer a model to sample the development of intercultural communicative competence on a SNSLL. That is to say, this research intends to contribute to understanding how the intercultural dimension is evident or not in Livemocha (contents, activities and interactions among the members) and to provide a model to study the intercultural dimension in other SNSLLs.

Regarding the specific context (the language program of Universidad del Valle and the students of second year), this study contributes to the students because it informs them about an alternative to expand their learning process outside their language class. Particularly, it could provide them with opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence through their contact with other foreign language speakers on the website. Additionally, the work on Livemocha may provide a context for students to develop autonomous language learning behaviors.

Concerning the importance of this research for me as teacher and researcher, I can list three benefits. First, it has helped me understand how SNSLLs might be used in foreign language education. Second it has allowed me to explore an alternative to study intercultural interactions and possibly engage students in the development of it on virtual spaces such as Livemocha. Finally, the study provides me with methodological tools to conduct research on this area of CMC including other SNSLLs.

This research is justified because of its contribution to understanding new technological applications and the benefits for language teaching and learning. The use and study of digital tools for learning a second language, its relationship with intercultural communicative competence and the application of these sites in formal language learning contexts opens the doors for other teachers and researchers to improve or innovate language teaching. This research also has benefits for language teaching and learning because it implies a possible improvement in the intercultural communicative competence development through the usage of SNSLLs and their affordances. Furthermore, given the importance that the Colombian Education Ministry has acknowledged to ICT and web-based learning in bachelor of education programs, this study could contribute by providing a practical example of how to incorporate SNSLLs in the syllabus of a language course.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the general field of ELT and the participants of this study, who could receive academic assistance from an online platform for learning languages. It might also be useful for the languages professors, part of the languages faculty of Universidad del Valle, who could use this or any other similar SNSLL in their courses as an alternative tool for languages learning. And this research is important for the academic community due to the important theoretical and methodological contributions that may enrich the general understanding of SNSLLs.

Research questions

The questions that guided this study were:

- How is the intercultural dimension represented on the Social networking site for language learning Livemocha?
- What do the semiotic contents of the SNSLL Livemocha tell us about the intercultural dimension?
- Do students of fourth semester in an English language teacher program develop intercultural competence through the use of the SNSLL Livemocha? If so, what elements of intercultural competence are observed in their interactions on the website and their reflections about their learning experience?

The main purpose through these questions was to explore how the intercultural dimension materialized on the website. This is what the first question addressed. Consequently, to discover how Livemocha represented the intercultural dimension, I examined the semiotic design of Livemocha. In order to see the connection between the website's structure and the students' voices, I identified the manifestations of intercultural communicative competence in the participants of this study by examining the elements of intercultural competence observed in their interactions on the website and their reflections about their learning experience. In the next section, I explore the influence of previous research in this study.

Previous research in the field

This section describes some works related to the field of research of the current study and focuses on the areas of culture and interculturality in language learning, social networking sites for language learning and ESL contexts, and multimodality in English language teaching. Furthermore, I look at the relationship among these areas of study. I analyze how the referred studies interconnect regarding my research topic, context, scope, theoretical models and methodology. Below I start analyzing research about culture and interculturality in language teaching.

Culture and Interculturality in language teaching and learning

Here in the first part I explore research regarding intercultural communication in language teaching. I also focus on studies about culture and language teaching in formal educational contexts, language teacher education and the use of virtual spaces in the development of intercultural communicative awareness.

The area of intercultural communication in language teaching has been widely developed from the second half of the twentieth century (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Martin, Nakayama & Carbaugh, 2012). At this stage, the field of intercultural communication started its evolution by adopting a multidisciplinary view of this phenomenon (Alvarez, 2014b). Some of the disciplines that made possible the evolution of intercultural communication were communication studies, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics and psychology among others (Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002; Smith, 1966; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Lafayette, 2003; Pusch, 2004; Risager, 2007).

The emergence of new technologies, the role of English as lingua franca and globalization processes led to a new conception of intercultural communication in language learning (Jackson, 2012b; Alvarez, 2016b; Block & Cameron, 2002; Crystal, 2001). In this respect, some specialized encyclopedias and volumes have demonstrated the strong relationship between culture and language teaching. Examples of these compilatory pieces are the works of Byram, Nichols and Stevens, (2001); Jackson, (2012a) and Sharifian and Jamarani, (2013).

In this sense, some of the major themes derived regarding the intercultural dimension of language learning are: the relationship communication/culture (Agar, 2008; Risager, 2007; Mackerras, 2008), the role of language and identity in intercultural communication and intercultural competence in digital environments. In the paragraphs below I list some of the main topics in these major themes.

Language-culture relationship. The first theme addresses the study of linguaculture (Kramsch 2009; Risager 2006, 2007) and transnationality (Hannerz, 1992) as core elements in intercultural communication. This line of inquiry stresses the narrow interdependence of language and culture as complementing views of the communicative interactions (Mackerras, 2008; Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000). Another important topic in this theme is the analysis of intercultural rhetoric and intercultural communication (Connor, Nagelhout, & Rozycki, 2008; Hirvela, 2009; Matsuda & Atkinson 2008).

Other authors have studied the paralinguistic dimension of intercultural communication. Among these topics we find: facial expressions (Elfenbein & Ambady 2002; Matsumoto & Willingham 2009), cultural differences in expressing emotion (Ekman & Rosenberg 1998; Argyle et al. 1986), gestures (Pika et al. 2009; Hwang et al. 2010), gaze (Hall 1963; Watson & Graves 1966), voice (Sauter et al. 2010; Simon-Thomas et al. 2009), interpersonal space and

touch (Hall, 1973; Noesjirwan, 1978; Hertenstein et al. 2009) and postures and gait (Kudoh & Matsumoto 1985; Matsumoto & Kudoh 1987).

About the functions of speech acts, facework and politeness in intercultural communication, some authors (Morand, 1995; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984) have studied the cultural variability in speech act performance. Communicative acts of apology (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Nureddeen, 2009; Liebersohn et al. 2004), and complaint (Daly et al. 2004; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993) have been analyzed. In the same way, actions of compliment response (Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Tang & Zhang, 2009) and correction (Beebe & Takahashi 1987; Beebe et al. 1990) were studied within an intercultural approach. Following this line, greeting (Feller, 2007), promise (Egner, 2006), refusal (Nelson et al. 2002; Cho, 2007) and request (Ruzickova, 2007) were the center of studies about intercultural communication. Finally, the effects of impoliteness were addressed by other scholars (Bousfield 2008; Spencer-Oatey 2005; Limberg, 2009). In sum, all these topics highlight the interdependence of culture and language in communicative acts. They establish research lines to better comprehend the communicative nature of intercultural interactions.

Language, identity and intercultural communication. Research of intercultural communication has been supported by the study of the relationship between identity and language. Since these two elements are vital in intercultural communicative acts, some authors have dedicated their attention to study these phenomena. In this sense, issues of gender and identity (Menard-Warwick, 2004; Warriner, 2004; Ek, 2009) cultural identity, (Pepin, 2007; De Fina, 2003; Gillespie, 2006), intercultural communication in contexts of conflict (Bryant 2004; Bekerman, 2004, 2005) and intercultural contact (Bhabha, 2010; Pennycook, 2007) have also been the focus of intercultural studies.

All these works explored the connections of core topics such as language, identity and intercultural interaction. The result of integrating these elements was the understanding of intercultural communication as a socio-psychological process. In order to support L2 learners, teachers must be aware of these particularities and adopt peace education practices aimed at breaking the barriers of hostility and violence (Charalambous & Rampton, 2012).

Intercultural competence in digital environments. Recent research has focused on the sociocultural dimension of computer assisted language learning –CALL- and computer mediated communication -CMC- (Thorne, 2010; Blyth, 2008; Blake, 2011; Reinhardt, 2012). This has led authors to foster novel sociocultural approaches on CALL/CMC research (Warschauer, 2010; Kern, 2006).

In this respect, some of the main topics researched include the emergence of electronic literacies (Moser, 2000; Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000), the recognition of cultural influences on the internet (Reeder et al., 2004; Kim & Bonk, 2002), online students' behavior (Hanna & de Nooy, 2003) online communicative practices (Sayers, 1995) and online intercultural exchange (Weasenforth et al., 2002; Jeon-Ellis et al., 2005). Particularly, several scholars have focused on

the development of intercultural competence on online environments (Belz, 2003; O'Dowd, 2003; Thorne, 2003; Ware, 2005; Ware & Kramersch, 2005). Due to its focus on online intercultural interaction, Ware and Kramersch's (2005) work is relevant for this research.

Ware and Kramersch's (2005) study aimed at analyzing a situation of misunderstanding between an American and a German student. In this case, the authors discuss the challenges of online language teaching. The studied interaction was originated in a telecollaborative project of 12 German students learning English and nine American students learning German. The larger groups were divided in sub groups of three to five learners. The communication was asynchronous due to the schedule differences. At least two times per week the students exchanged messages changing of language in every interaction. The topics of discussion were messages regarding texts about culture, language and media.

Data was gathered through transcriptions of the online interactions, interviews and focus group sessions. In the particular situation analyzed, two students had an episode of cultural miscommunication due to their management of the topic. The interactional topic was related to recent German history and the type of questions and commentaries written by the American student caused a negative impression on his German interlocutor. From that moment, the reactions of both learners demonstrated a degree of misunderstanding and dysfunction. In fact, the contact ended abruptly.

The results demonstrated that among the challenges of online intercultural communication in language teaching, accepting otherness still requires attention. Furthermore, the presence of interactional flaws is an opportunity to engage learners in the real nature of interactions. In this sense, teachers need to emphasize the discursive nature of language and

promote spaces to foster intercultural interaction. Finally, CMC might enhance cross-cultural interactive processes from an intercultural view of language teaching.

This study is relevant for my research because of its focus on the interactive nature of online communication. In addition, Ware and Kramsch (2005) offer an intercultural view of language teaching and discuss the possibilities of CMC in promoting successful cross-cultural practices. These phenomena are also central in my study and the role of online intercultural interaction is a common element in SNSLLs like Livemocha. Moreover, Ware and Kramsch (2005) highlight the need to explore alternative spaces for online interaction that blend the intercultural dimension and digital affordances for language teaching.

In the case of Colombia, the research on culture and education has evolved from the decade of 1980 (Alvarez, 2014b). Based on Alvarez's revision of six Colombian journals, we find some main themes addressed by scholars. These themes are analysis of pedagogical material, usage of computational technologies, students' perceptions about the cultural view of language learning, the presence of culture in teacher education programs and critical perspectives in cultural research.

Regarding the role of teaching material in the classroom, Posada (2004), Bonilla (2008) and Arias, Campo, and Zuluaga (2001) demonstrated how didactic materials constitute a source of cultural representation for learners. Furthermore, the usage of new technologies and computer-based interaction has been the focus of some scholars (Jánica, Rey, & Rosado, 2006; Neva, Landa-Buil, Carter, & Ibrahim-Ali, 2010; Loaiza & Arenas, 2011). These authors have demonstrated the possibilities in using telecollaboration and multimedia materials as alternatives to promote intercultural competence in L2 learners.

Other authors studied the students' perceptions of the intercultural dimension of language learning and cultural practices in their own and the others' cultures (Campo & Zuluaga, 2000; Hernández & Samacá, 2006; Cruz, 2007; Mojica, 2007; Barrera & Cantor, 2007). These studies demonstrated the relationship between among cultures, the relevance of identity construction of language learners and the need to go beyond cultural stereotypes.

Research went further by addressing the presence of culture in Colombian teacher education curricula. In theoretical terms, Mejía (2006) and Galvis (2011) wrote about the role of the cultural dimension in language teaching. Furthermore, Quintero, (2006), Zuluaga, López and Quintero (2009) and Barletta (2009) researched the possibilities of addressing culture in language classrooms. Other scholars analyzed the state of language teaching programs and demonstrated the scant presence of culture in the curricula of language professionals (Cárdenas, 2009; Álvarez, Cárdenas, & González, 2011). These authors suggest that Colombian teacher education programs should go beyond a communicative view of language teaching. This means the integration of an intercultural view of language teaching in teacher education programs for language professionals.

Particularly, Alvarez and Bonilla's (2009) study demonstrates how the intercultural dimension can be explored on a pedagogical experience at the college level. Their collaborative work aimed at promoting a critical view of cultural manifestations in order to develop intercultural awareness. The researchers worked together during a semester teaching the subjects of Cultural Awareness and Mastering Language Skills. Each researcher was in charge of one of these subjects. The participants were seventh semester students of the Language Program at Universidad de la Salle (Bogota-Colombia).

Basically, the data came from the students' reflections and productions in their projects about subcultures (e.g. vegetarians, skinheads, body builders) from their own contexts, and an argumentative essay about the novel *A Room with a View* (Forster, 2003). Through the analysis of the students' voices in both subjects, the authors presented valuable findings regarding the critical dimension of intercultural language education.

First, this study demonstrated that an intercultural view of language teaching requires that learners adopt a critical stance towards their own and the other's culture. This agrees with Byram (1997) and Liddicoat's (2002; 2008) perspectives of intercultural competence in what concerns the attitudes of learners towards their own and the others' cultures. In addition, learners were able to identify how stereotypical conceptions of the others do not explain the reality of social groups. Furthermore, students could notice explicit relations between language-culture, the influence of consumerism in cultural practices and the effects of cultural shock.

These results led the authors to propose a model of critical intercultural competence that analyzes the relationship among individuals, culture and society. This model also promotes the development of a critical stance demonstrated in intercultural communicative processes mediated by critical awareness.

This work is valuable for my study since it represents a university experience encompassing intercultural communication and a critical cultural perspective. These elements are central in my study of Livemocha because on this SNSLL learners could engage in intercultural communicative acts and experience cultural manifestations. On Livemocha, the participants could also evidence the relationship between language and culture.

In general terms, Ware and Kramsch (2005) and Alvarez and Bonilla's (2009) studies helped me to understand the relationship of culture and language teaching in empirical research.

These studies show the need to adapt our teaching practices to the new intercultural shift and gave me a methodological model to analyze data. Moreover, these works highlight the increasing necessity to explore the field of intercultural studies in language learning and teaching.

Finally, the development of intercultural competence within contexts of computer mediated communication in Colombia has not been widely addressed. Taking into account the current trends in research of intercultural communication and CMC some authors have stressed the need for further research (Blake, 2008; Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Kramsch, 1998; Levine, 2008; Bauer et al, 2006; Furstenberg et al, 2001). For this reason, in the next section I focus research about digital technologies and language learning.

Social networking sites for language learning

The second part of this section analyzes previous research in the field of technology in the English language classroom. Departing from the concepts of telecollaboration (learning languages through virtual environments in the contexts of formal education) and teletandem (collaboration of learners within an informal framework), I review some academic works concerning social networking sites for language learning and the development of intercultural communicative competence. I also review some research carried out in Colombian and foreign universities and in teacher education programs.

Since SNSLLs were based on SNSs, I start here by showing some research focused on SNSs in order to unveil their features. Regarding the nature, usage and applications of SNSs there has been a wide spectrum of research. For instance, several studies have concentrated on the number of active users of SNSs (OECD, 2009), the time that users invest on those SNSs, (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010), the interaction between digital and social lives (Truly Global Industry, 2008) and the use of Facebook among internet users (Evangelista, 2010). These works

have demonstrated the way SNSs are shaping our interaction practices and use of digital tools in our daily life.

From its emergence in late 90's, SNSs have been the center of research studies in language learning (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; McBride, 2009b; Stevenson & Liu, 2010). Another line of studies has inquired about the use of general purpose SNSs in education (Cain & Fox, 2009; Lockyer & Patterson, 2008). Particularly, motivation (Antenos-Conforti, 2009; McBride, 2009a), autonomy (McBride, 2009b) and the general impact of Web 2.0 in language learning (BECTA, 2008; NSF Cyberlearning, 2008; Franklin & van Harmelen, 2007; Ala-Mutka et al., 2009; JISC, 2009; Redecker, 2009; OECD, 2009).

Concerning, sites that use web 2.0 technology, some research has been dedicated to discover their underlying learning theories (Mayes & de Freitas, 2007; Conole, et al., 2004; Koper et al., 2004; Kester et. al, 2006; Dalsgaard, 2006). These studies have showed that SNSLLs present features of learning theories for acquisition of language. Some of these theories range between behaviorist, cognitivist and social approaches to language teaching. Similar research has studied current digital spaces as new forms of learning environments (Keen, 2007; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Leadbetter, 2008; Surowiecki, 2004; Bruns & Humphreys, 2007) and the change of role of teaching and teachers (Downes 2005; Alexander, 2008; Bruns & Humphreys, 2007; Siemens, 2004). These studies demonstrate how web 2.0 technologies have impacted the practices of language teaching at the extent that teaching and teachers have acquired a role of mediators, guides and technological supporters when learning occurs on online environments. Analogically, students have also changed their roles and are at the center of their learning processes.

Since the focus of this research is on social networking sites destined to language learning, I center on how SNSLLs have been studied in language learning contexts and their affordances. Some authors have analyzed the novel online applications of SNSLLs such as interactions (Chotel & Mangenot, 2011; Develotte & Dervin, 2011) and affordances for language learning (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Mangenot, 2009). The authors listed above agree on the usefulness of these online sites for language learning programs and their possible contribution for learners around the world due to the feedback opportunities, contact with native speakers of the foreign language and information about the foreign culture.

According to Chotel (2012) there have been three main methodological trends on studies regarding SNSLLs. The first is a type of analysis focused on the proposed tools and the discourses underlying the SNSLLs (Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Potolia, Loiseau & Zourou, 2011). The second type analyzes SNSLLs from an ethnographic approach where the researchers become members and assess the sites' main concerns (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Chotel & Mangenot, 2011, Álvarez, 2016a, b, c). The third trend of methodological approaches for research on SNSLLs studies how learners use one or several of these sites. This kind of methodological approach uses information from several data collection instruments to observe the participants' reactions and perceptions towards their online experiences (Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Brick, 2011a; Lloyd, 2012).

In regards to studies of SNSLLs in formal academic contexts in higher education, I focus on the works of Brick (2011b), Alvarez (2014a), Loiseau, Potolia and Zourou (2011), Clark and Gruba (2010) and Chotel (2012). For instance, Brick (2011b) investigated the affordances of the SNSLL Livemocha in language learning processes in a descriptive case study in the University of Coventry (UK). His aims were to identify the ease of use and access of this virtual space, to

discover the positive and negative aspects of Livemocha's syllabus and to analyze the participants' attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards this SNSLL. In his study, Brick worked with seven undergraduate students from various L1 backgrounds enrolled in language courses (Polish, Portuguese and Spanish). The author collected the data using Log sheets, regular discussion meetings and field notes. Furthermore, he analyzed this information through discourse analysis (written and oral).

The results of this research show that these online sites offer some advantages such as the opportunity to practice oral skills with native speakers of the target language and to have immediate feedback. Nevertheless, the learning materials of these sites reported a focus on vocabulary and some users harassed the female participants called cyber-flirting. This research is very relevant for the current research due to its type of study, methodological design, analysis of the site Livemocha, type of participants, data collection procedures and focus on the students' attitudes, perceptions and behaviors.

Another study about SNSLLs that offers vital information about these learning environments is the one by Alvarez (2014a) who researched the concept of identity in the site Busuu. His objectives focused on analyzing the views of language and learning present in the semiotic design of the site, examining the positioning and creation of identity from the dynamic of participation in Busuu. This autoethnographic research used information from the site and a journal of the researcher. The data were analyzed through discourse analysis and multimodal semiotic analysis of the SNSLL's contents. The researcher was enrolled during a time of ten weeks as the only participant of this study.

The findings point out that Busuu is an ecological linguistic and social system composed of several sub-systems. Each of these sub-systems has a particular view of language learning

where users work and develop their conceptions and skills from these views. In consequence, the semiotic spaces of Busuu relate structural, interactional, and ecological views of language that work together to echo behaviorist, cognitivist, and constructivist theories of language learning. Hence, the construction of identity in this site is developed from the activities, the methodology and syllabus. The website encourages the users to become active users and to expand their linguistic repertoire through a system of rewards and the help of the community.

Another interesting work to study is the research of Loiseau, Potolia and Zourou (2011) who examined three SNSLL's dimensions: user roles, learning pathways and relation to content in order to determine the technical and pedagogical structure of these sites and their communicative affordances. This study followed a qualitative exploratory analysis in which the data were gathered using a battery of methodological tools to register the different dimensions of the three SNSLLs explored (Livemocha, Busuu and Babbel). The analysis was carried out through a web analysis based on three analysis criteria: user roles, pedagogical models and contact among users. The findings demonstrated that some of the sites encourage users to foster an active role. They materialized behaviorist and cognitivist approaches to language learning and some SNSLLs allow users to create and access online content. This last feature creates a closer relationship between the site and its users.

Similarly, Clark and Gruba (2010) developed an auto-ethnographic study regarding the use of SNSLLs in learning languages. The aim of this study was to explore the usage of SNSLLs in the process of learning a foreign language. In their study, one of the researchers registered as a regular user of Livemocha and followed a course of Korean. The main data collection techniques were self-aware participation (using note taking during the lessons), learner diaries and peer debriefing. The results showed that Livemocha presented elements that motivated students;

nevertheless, there were other factors that produced frustration and demotivation on the participant. Some of the factors that motivated learning on Livemocha were: the emotion of completing tasks, opportunities for using the foreign language, helping others and meeting native speakers of the foreign language.

On the opposite side, frustration emerged when the researcher had to deal with the design of the lessons. Livemocha lessons were based on decontextualized lexicon and features that resembled the audio-lingual method. Moreover, the level of interaction within the lessons was scarce. Furthermore, the treatment of Hangeul characters (writing characters of Korean), their transcription of figured pronunciation and inaccurate advice from other users were some of the flaws discovered on Livemocha. In addition, the research demonstrated that other aspects of Livemocha produced demotivation due to monotony of language activities, difficulty level of Korean compared to English, time consuming lessons, grading others' activities as a complex and time-extended activity and lack of support within the site. At the end, the researchers advised to overcome these issues by adapting the site's lessons and the type of interaction in order to make the website more dynamic.

In regards to Chotel's (2012) study about Busuu, she aimed at describing and comprehending the experience of three Chinese students engaged on Busuu as learners of French on an informal learning context. She followed a case study approach and gathered data from the participants' screen recordings of their online activities on Busuu, two questionnaires (at the beginning and the end of the study), learners' journals and interviews. The results of her study demonstrate that:

- a) Learners prefer online interaction instead of the learning lessons.

- b) The tools that enhance online communication happen through textual exchange, video and audio communication. Example of this are the Busuu online forums which allow asynchronous communication.
- c) Interaction spaces online promote change of interlocutor and enhances communicative activities among learners. She also reports about the difficulty of finding interlocutors online, although this was seen as an advantage rather than a weakness.
- d) Busuu lacks of support and follow-up of users makes difficult the emergence of meaningful communication for language learners.

In regards to the connection between SNSLLs and intercultural communication, the literature indicates that the topic of SNSLL requires further research (Alvarez, 2016b; Jee & Park, 2009; Liaw, 2011). Scholars who have studied the phenomenon of intercultural communication in virtual environments (Thorne, 2003; Bauer, et al. 2006) acknowledge the richness of intercultural contact and the possibility of engaging in cultural communication within virtual spaces as an alternative to language learning.

All the reviewed studies have helped me to have a clearer idea about the nature of SNSLL, their kinds of syllabi, roles of participants, pedagogical affordances and limitations. Brick (2011b) and Clark and Gruba's (2010) study contributed to this research. Their perspective allowed me to know better how to approach this site and to learn about the methodological design of these works. The data collection techniques used in the studies were useful to illustrate the way a researcher can gather and analyze the information in multimodal environments.

Furthermore, other authors have investigated digital spaces in relation to multi-literacies on digital environments (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Beetham et al., 2009). The particularity of these studies is the inclusion of multimodality as a phenomenon to take into account highlighting

the shift from paper to screen. The researchers agree on the idea that learners need to be able to identify, use and take advantage of multimodal elements on digital applications. In line with the current study, the next part of this review focuses on research about multimodality and social semiotics in language learning.

Multimodal semiotics and language learning

This last section describes research studies that analyze the influence of multimodal social semiotics (MSS) in language learning and communication. Multimodality has emerged as a novel conception of communication where several semiotic modes interrelate to create meaning in all kinds of communicative acts which range from face to face conversations to human-machine interaction (Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2005). This field of research has interested several authors who have envisaged the way MSS intersects with educative contexts (Farias, Obilinovic & Orrego, 2007).

Multimodality has studied different phenomena. Some researchers have focused on the multimodal nature of gestures and their interpretation (Kendon, 1996, 2000; Kipp, 2001; Martell, 2002), the conception of genre and layout design on multimodal texts (Allen, Bateman, & Delin, 1999, Bateman, Kamps, Klein & Reichenberger, 2001; Bateman, Delin, & Allen, 2000) and cross-cultural studies (Kita 1998; Özyürek & Kita, 1999; Seyfeddinipur & Kita, 2001).

In what concerns multimodal discourse and semiotic models of text interpretation, the field has been nourished by authors who have demonstrated how monomodal texts have evolved in online environments. Consequently, this change has created the need of using sophisticated models to interpret multimodal texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002; Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn & Tsatsarelis, 2001). Other authors have directed their studies on multimedia learning, its models and principles (Mayer, 2005; Mayer & Sims 1994; Schnotz, 2002, 2005). In a similar approach,

Warschauer (2002), Chapelle (1990, 1997, 2001) and Plass and Jones (2005) have inquired on the way CALL, multimedia documents and second language acquisition encounter and may support each other. These authors state that multimedia is a useful tool to use on language learning contexts. This means that learners and teachers must be able to identify and communicate using multimodal communication elements.

Hence, the impact of the multimodal revolution on reading and writing is another branch of research about MSS that has interested many authors around the globe (Jewitt, 2005; Kress, 2000). According to them, the processes of reading and writing have experienced a shift due to the inclusion of multimodal texts. Multimodal texts enhance the way of interpreting and creating meaning. Thence, the possibilities that multimodality offers are uncountable for learners and because of the versatile nature of multimodal texts, the barriers of monomodal texts have been overtaken.

Additionally, another area of research is the multimodal dimension of CALL/CMC in language teaching and learning (Alvarez, 2016 b, c; Guichon & McLornan, 2008; Astheimer, Neumann-Braun & Schmidt, 2011; Berglund, 2009; Betbeder, et al. 2007; Ciekanski, & Chanier, 2008). These authors state that learning a language implies the recognition of extra linguistic modes of communication. These modes of communication allow learners to identify diverse dimensions of language and to enhance communicative acts involving real-time conditions.

In sum, the focus of this review is the way multimodality and multimodal practices have the potential to enhance second language learning. Important experts have developed studies that rely on this idea (Ajayi, 2012; Early & Marshall, 2008; Miller, 2010; Alvarez, 2016 b, c, d; Aldana, et al. 2012). The works of these authors demonstrate that a multimodal perspective of communication is vital to understand the relationship of language and language learning/teaching

and how culture is involved in both elements. In the next paragraphs, I will review the studies of Callahan (2006), Bezemer (2008) and Michelson and Alvarez (2016). All these works share a common focus of study and their method is relevant for my own research.

The research of Callahan intended to discover the differences of design of University websites across cultures and to explore the insights that Hofstede's (1980) cultural model offered. In short, Hofstede proposes that cultural differences can be identified in five dimensions: power distance, individualism and collectivism, femininity and masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-short-term orientation. These dimensions are overlapped and interact with each other in the societies' practices. Based on this characterization, Callahan developed her analysis.

Callahan's study consisted in a multimodal semiotic analysis of educative web pages. In the data collection process, the author gathered graphical elements of a sample of university home pages from Malaysia, Austria, the United States, Ecuador, Japan, Sweden, Greece and Denmark. These web samples were analyzed with an emphasis on visual content and multimodal categories and following Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. The outcomes show that indeed cultures influence the conception of education and the visual elements of the university websites design are evidence of this cultural bias. In addition, Hofstede's cultural model demonstrated that frequency counts of interface elements were weaker than anticipated; the content of the sample followed the direction posed by the academic culture of the home country of the site. Callahan's (2006) work offers theoretical and methodological support for my current research given the type of analysis used, the sample of web pages with educative content and the type of cultural considerations underlying the multimodal semiotic analysis.

Bezemer (2008) studied the multimodal responses of a learner towards her teacher's instructions. The objective of this research was to explore the formation of frames, the

production of visual demonstrations of orientation and the positioning between a teacher and a ‘recently arrived’ student during a whole-class activity. The participant was a 15 year-old immigrant student in an English class in London.

Data were gathered through observations, journal, video recording, audio recording and interviews. The analysis focused on some fragments, sometimes only with vision, other times only with sound, and changing the speed of reproduction, in fast forward and slow motion. Additionally, the author used written transcriptions and recount of the class events, zooming on particular groups of students, diagrams focusing on the co-occurrence of changes in the activities and transcripts about the teacher’s speech and the student’s gestures. The results showed that in-classroom communication is basically multimodal; both teachers and students express through different modes of communication, supporting and expand the possibilities for language teaching and learning. In addition, the results showed that the student, who just recently had joined a foreign school, was able to recognize and use social and interactional communicative strategies.

This work has implications for other areas such as language teaching. From this point of view, Bezemer’s study demonstrates the multimodal nature of classroom communication. Therefore, this research evidences the potential of a multimodal view of communication in language teaching practices.

Finally, the research of Michelson and Alvarez (2016) about the multimodal representations on an institutional web site of a study abroad program constitutes an important research to review. This case study intended to examine the underlying meanings that the site of Arcadia University assigned to the experience of studying abroad. The researchers used Kress’ model of MSS to analyze the interaction of the communication modes on the website and their role in the generation and spreading of discourses about study abroad programs. Their method

consisted in analyzing Arcadia University's site focusing on each page. This analysis implied the identification of actors, their social roles, communicative actions and the design of the online site and its content.

Michelson and Alvarez applied the four components proposed in Kress' communication model (rhetor, design, ground, and interpreter). The authors conducted a microanalysis of the different individual pages. This microanalysis concentrated on the language, image, and layout order which showed underlying discourses communicated by the action of explicit and implicit messages. The analysis of the Arcadia University's College of Global Studies website in its *About Us* page, the program pages, and the student network showed that there is a prevailing vision of studying abroad as a touristic activity.

Basically, this discourse of tourism is achieved through the combination of diverse modes of communication particularly the visual mode (photographs and spatial layout), and the written language. The website appeals to the students' desire, pleasure and recreation to convince them to enroll in the study abroad program. Therefore, the users of this program aim to look for touristic "adventures" due to the experiences of other students and not an opportunity for academic development. This discourse of academic tourism is highlighted in the students' section of the website where the learners who had been part of this program narrated their academic experiences abroad as a recreation activity. As a consequence, this site implicitly supports discourses of capitalism, consumerism and market. The implicit message underlying these kinds of sites reflects the conception of education that business representatives and students have about international education.

All the studies reviewed in this section support the need of a multimodal approach to language teaching and communication. The perspective of multimodality in language teaching

implies novel theoretical and methodological approaches to data analysis. Consequently, the research reviewed here helped me to know some alternatives to manage and analyze multimodal data, to understand the interrelationship between semiotic resources and modes of communication in research on language teaching. Moreover, these studies offered me ways to work with online educational sites and to examine underlying messages departing from the semiotic design of digital educational spaces. Since one of my aims is to identify the intercultural dimension underlying the semiotic contents on Livemocha, the research reviewed helped me to adopt a methodological approach to understand the implicit messages on Livemocha.

All the background research reviewed leads to deduce that there is not research that addresses interculturality on SNSLLs drawing on a multimodal social semiotic view. In fact, all the authors cited here believe that research on SNSLLs is still incipient and therefore requires more empirical work (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Chotel, 2012; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Alvarez, 2016b). Furthermore, cultural issues on SNSLL have demonstrated to be a rich area for research that needs to be analyzed with more depth (Jewitt, 2005; Kress, 2000). Additionally, research on multimodal social semiotics is still limited and there is a need to expand the studies that address this view of language teaching (Alvarez, 2016c; Michelson & Alvarez, 2016; Faiola & Matei, 2006). For the reasons above, I aim to examine the presence of ICC on the SNSLL Livemocha and analyze its contents from a social semiotic and multimodal approach. The next section discusses the main concepts that support this study.

Theoretical framework

This section presents the most important theoretical concepts and models that support my research. I have divided it in three main sections: culture, interculturality and intercultural communicative competence, social networking sites for language learning and multimodal semiotics. Below I start with the section of culture.

Culture, interculturality and intercultural communicative competence

Here, I present a general revision of the basic concepts regarding culture, interculturality and intercultural communicative competence. Basically, I study here two perspectives: Byram's (1997) global perspective of intercultural citizenship and Liddicoat's (2008) pedagogical model of intercultural competence. The main concepts I address here are: culture from an intercultural view, interculturality, intercultural speaker and the models that I mentioned before.

Let us start with Byram's conception of culture as an ever changing entity which embodies the beliefs, knowledge, practices and products of a determined community, contextualized in a particular historical and geographical context. Byram also established differences between dominant elite culture and emergent societal cultures where the former represents the social groups of power within a community and the latter the citizens who do not belong to that community of privilege. Hence, he establishes relationships of communication and the need of a paradigm shift in language education where language and culture are studied as an ensemble with the social purpose of integration and inclusion in the current social system.

In turn, Liddicoat sees culture as the integration of symbolic systems and practices in an ever changing and evolving process that constitutes the core of culture as a human phenomenon. This phenomenon is developed in communicative interaction under historical and geographical particular conditions.

To understand culture for language learning in a way that unites symbolic systems and practices across a range of contexts, it is necessary to go beyond a view of culture as a body of knowledge that people have about a particular society. One problem for the integration of culture into language education has been that many of the early models on which culture learning has been based present culture as unvarying and composed of discrete, concrete facts that can be taught and learned as factual information (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013a, p, 22).

Under the intercultural perspective, culture involves the varying interactive character of human societies and principles that cannot be taught as regular content in the language classroom. Under Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013a) view, culture is the context where people develop their individual identities. This individual identity emerges from the judgment of the community towards personal decisions. As a consequence, individuals' acts represent their personal identities.

We see that Byram and Liddicoat's visions about culture adopt a complementary focus. On one side, Byram centers his attention on the interactive property of culture and the role of culture in human communication and highlights the role of nonverbal communication. He develops his model based on beliefs, knowledge, skills and attitudes that identify a culture. He expands these ideas to the field of democratic education and proposes that L2 teaching should adopt a perspective based on intercultural citizen education.

Liddicoat emphasizes interest in the way culture acts as the space where identity is developed and the role of individual actions that portray the essence of people. Moreover, he assigns a special value to symbolic systems and practices. Liddicoat also underscores the applicability of pedagogical strategies to develop intercultural communication (Liddicoat, 2008). The author acknowledges that communication is multimodal and in that regard the negotiation in

intercultural exchanges should be studied through looking at the different modes of communication composing interaction.

Despite some differences, both conceptions of culture go beyond seeing culture as factual information and understand it as a changing and adaptive entity forged by the actions of individuals. Both authors also relate culture with language as inseparable concepts stating that they influence and shape each other in everyday communicative and cultural situations. Liddicoat's understanding that communication is multimodal and semiotic clearly connects with the perspective assumed in this study in which the intercultural communication afforded by Livemocha is seen as a multimodal act. In what follows, I will primarily center on Byram's intercultural model which I have decided to adopt due to its wide application in different contexts and as stated by authors like Sercu, et al. (2005) and Liddicoat and Scarino (2013a), because despite some limitations, his framework has become an influential model.

An intercultural view of language teaching. Byram (1997) proposes a model of intercultural communicative competence based on his conception of culture, intercultural communication, the role of intercultural speakers and the five *savoirs* he proposes. After describing Byram's model, I explain the way I applied his intercultural view of language learning and an assessment methodology in Livemocha's analysis.

For Byram intercultural communication is a process that promotes interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds. People engaged in this process bring their societal, cultural and individual knowledge about the world. Therefore, intercultural communication aims at achieving an effective information exchange where individual and cultural differences and dysfunctions be solved through common agreement.

Consequently, this effective communicative act leads learners to be successful in exchanging information and maintaining human relationships. This process requires a high degree of awareness which allows learners to decenter from their cultural position and to see the other as a valuable individual. Additionally, this intercultural perspective requires knowledge about the other's culture, symbols, communicative procedures and manifestations and a set of skills that support these intercultural communicative acts.

Developing these "skills" requires the comprehension of the relationship between language and culture from the integration of an intercultural scheme for linguistic and cultural aspects of practice. In this sense, Byram's view agrees with Liddicoat (2008) who suggests that cultures are mediated by language and that in the communicative interaction some aspects are more linguistic and others are predominantly more cultural. These aspects are presented in degrees of linguistic or cultural dominance since the uses of language vary according to their purpose and function.

Regarding the definition of the intercultural speaker, this study builds on the perspectives put forth by Byram (1997) and Liddicoat and Scarino (2013a). Byram defines an intercultural speaker as someone who establishes relationships, manages dysfunctions and mediates in intercultural communicative acts actively engaged in acts including both interaction and communication. In other words, an intercultural speaker is able to exchange information effectively and maintain human relationships. Liddicoat (2008) defines intercultural speakers as learners who are able to understand their own language and culture facing other cultures and languages. These learners must be able to establish a dialogue recognizing, mediating and accepting the others from a reflective position regarding language and culture.

Liddicoat and Byram agree on the role of communicative cultural skills that learners need to demonstrate in real time relationships. They state that intercultural learners need a clear view about their language and culture and the other's language and culture in order to establish effective communication. Furthermore, both emphasize the active role of language learners since the communicative acts that intercultural speakers must carry out happen in authentic contexts and with none or little support of other speakers. The skills that intercultural speakers must demonstrate are evidenced in singular, independent effective communicative actions with people who belong to a different culture.

Byram and Liddicoat's views of intercultural speakers seem to be thought of mostly for situations in which interlocutors interact face-to-face. However, in virtual spaces speakers are faced with various modalities of interaction such as written chat, video chat or email communication. Speakers also semiotically interact with cultural products such as the contents presented on a language learning website. As has been pointed out by Álvarez (2016b), SNSLLs position users' identities through their semiotic designs. Thus, users negotiate or accept the intercultural identities imposed by the semiotic artifacts they interact with.

SNSLLs such as Livemocha afford intercultural negotiation at many levels because of its transnational nature where users from all around the world can communicate and access contents to learn a language. Livemocha follows the current trend of globalization and echoes Byram's interest in integrating the concept of intercultural citizenship. Though his proposal Byram supports the idea that people should feel "at home in the world" (Wilkinson, 2012. P. 296).

Intercultural citizenship and intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

Ichilov (1998) and Osler (2005) propose the concepts of bounded and cosmopolitan citizenship. Bounded citizenship refers to the feeling of individuals to tie their cultural sense of belonging to a political, national, social, legal system. Individuals need to link to a defined system because it provides them with the feeling of security and attachment. In other words, individuals experience the sense of being one with something bigger than them. Thus, they are invested with an imagined identity which assigns them social roles, duties and rights and a social bond with a society (Ichilov, 1998; Osler, 2005).

Moreover, cosmopolitan citizenship refers to the sense of engagement of learners with the promotion of democratic principles. Osler (1998, 2005) states that this vision of citizenship prepares learners to influence their own communities to enhance democratic conceptions of society. So, she argues for a global citizen that allows learners to be able to engage in cultural and social issues in a large variety of cultural contexts. From this conception, individuals are not bounded to a single nation or language, now the rule becomes the global, the world and the cosmopolitan, the capacity of mixing and changing other societies from the understanding of one's own culture and language.

These concepts raise the question, how can a language learner become an intercultural speaker and a global citizen? Byram answers this question by establishing his model of attitudes, knowledges and skills. Through these factors, as he defines them, language learners could have more chances to establish intercultural communication and play the role of intercultural speakers within an educative context with learning objectives different to the tourist approach and the commercial approach. In the next section, I will briefly discuss the factors proposed by Byram under his sequencing view.

Byram (2006) proposed a model of intercultural citizenship (See Figure 1). His vision fosters the nuance of global intercultural citizenship where learners do not affiliate to a single culture, but go beyond the linguistic and cultural boundaries in order to achieve a sense of belonging to the world itself. His perspective highlights the participation of language learners in social, cultural and democratic principles adopting a critical approach. In fact, one of Byram's skills refers to this intercultural behavior.

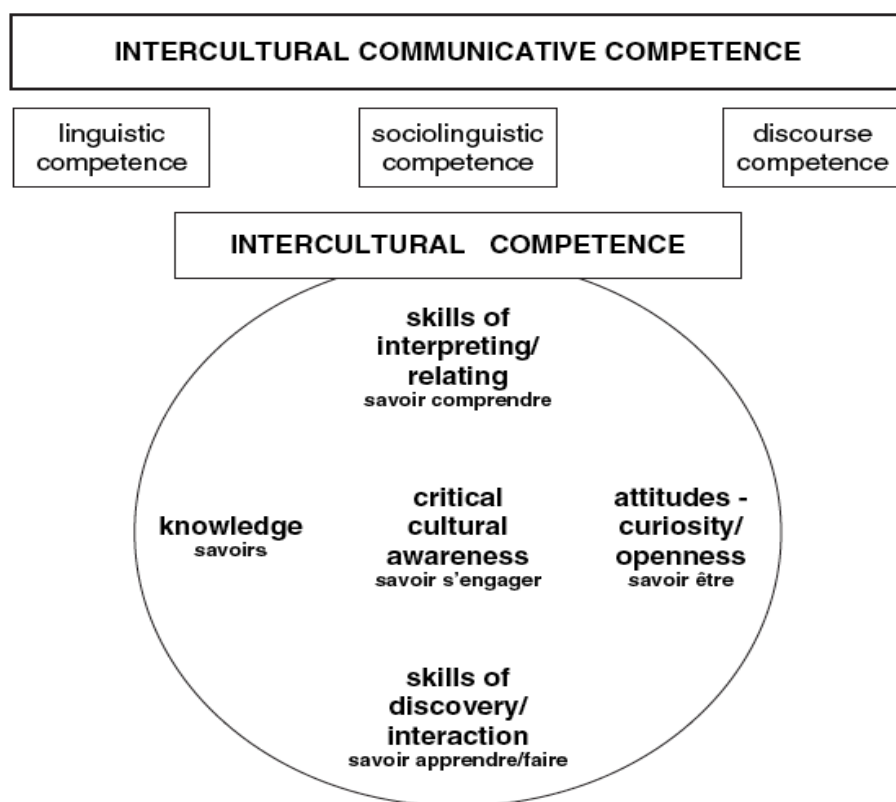


Figure 1. ICC Model of Byram (Byram, 2006, p. 34)

According to Byram (2006), the model of ICC connects with his view of intercultural citizenship (IC) in three aspects. First, both models aim at promoting intercultural communication beyond the boundaries of language, culture and political systems. This implies the acknowledgement of democratic values and acceptance of cultural differences based on respect and tolerance. Second, the models of ICC and IC stimulate the development of

intercultural speakers. The two intercultural views admit that intercultural speakers must be able to approach other cultures by establishing relations of equality, respect and acceptance. Usually, these relationships are achieved through the usage of language given the conditions of international communication and globalization.

Third, both views of intercultural communication imply the development of a critical dimension of cultures. In this vein, ICC and IC imply the development of skills to critically analyze documents and events. Through processes of comparison, mediation and negotiation learners are encouraged to recognize their own ideological heritage and evaluate their own and the others' actions based on clear criteria. This critical assessment guides learners to engage in intercultural practices and in democratic transformative activities.

In this sense, Byram (2006) proposes that ICC requires the development of four major competences (Figure 1): Linguistic: the ability to use the grammatical knowledge in real-time situations in order to produce and interpret spoken and written comprehensible utterances. Sociolinguistic: the ability to choose the appropriate language form according to contextual communicative situation. Discourse: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monological and dialogical texts. These three previous competences compose the communicative dimension of this model. Finally, intercultural competence is understood as the set of skills that allow people from different cultural contexts to establish and maintain effective communication and coexistence in a common space.

The four components described before compose the ICC model of Byram (2006) and make possible communication among people. The intercultural dimension of this model includes a set of five components (Table 1): attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and

interacting and critical cultural awareness. In the next paragraphs I explain every component under the intercultural view of language teaching.

Table 1

Factors in intercultural communication (Adapted from Byram 1997. p, 34)

GENERAL CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own
Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction
Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own
Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction
Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries

Attitudes (*savoir être*). Byram describes the attitudinal dimension as the first to be developed by learners who need to engage in an intercultural view of language learning. For him, attitudes towards the C2 must be based on “attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviors” (p, 34). This means that language learners must accommodate their perceptions toward the self-facing the others and to be able to accept what others have to offer and say in order to achieve a mutual relationship of respect and intercultural engagement. These attitudes are a prerequisite to develop

the skills that will allow learners to be part of effective intercultural exchanges. Table 2 shows how this component is supported with some descriptors.

Table 2

Descriptors of attitudes (Adapted from Byram, 1997, p. 50)

CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (Attitudes)
(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable
(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices
(c) willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment
(d) readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence
(e) readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction

These descriptors that Byram proposes support the application and assessment of his ICC model. Consequently, when we need to find intercultural behavior in terms of attitudes, we look for visible behavior that can be demonstrated. This component refers to some actions that learners must be able to perform in real time interaction, classroom activities or individual learning actions. This skill requires the presence of the descriptors or observable behavior listed above.

Nonetheless, having an appropriate attitude towards the other, his culture and his language is not enough to establish successful intercultural communication in real time

situations. Learners also need specific and factual knowledge about their and the other's culture and language. That is, according to Byram, the component of knowledge that I refer in the next lines.

Knowledge (*Savoir être*). Byram divides knowledge in two main categories: knowledge about social groups and their cultures in the native culture (C1) and the target culture (C2), and knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels. The first relates to the knowledge learners have about their cultural community and the “cultural target community” in general terms, and the second refers to the knowledge learners have about the way individuals interact and the societal implications of this kind of interaction. In Table 3, I show Byram's descriptors of knowledge.

Table 3

Descriptors of knowledge (Adapted from Byram 1997, p. 51)

CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (Knowledge)
(a) historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries
(b) the means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from, and the institutions which facilitate contact or help resolve problems
(c) the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins
(d) the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries
(e) the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country
(f) the national definitions of geographical space in one's own country, and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries
(g) the national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on

them from one's own
(h) the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and one's interlocutor's country
(i) social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's
(j) institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them
(k) the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country

The descriptors above show the particular knowledge that intercultural learners must master. Thus, in this skill, learners need to have factual knowledge about history, politics, social particularities, and the past and present relationships between their own and the target language culture. They also need knowledge about the means of accomplishing communicative contact with the L2 culture and knowledge about the causes and types of intercultural misunderstanding. Basically, this component refers to the type of knowledge about the learner's and the other's cultures (national memory, geographical features, social groups, social conventions) and the types of interaction means to achieve effective communication.

From an intercultural perspective, attitudes and knowledge require the support of other skills. Those skills will allow learners to use their attitudes and knowledge in real communication. Below, I study these skills and how they are assessed from Byram's intercultural lens.

Skills of interpreting and relating (*Savoir comprendre*). This skill allows learners to “decode” meanings from intercultural documents and events. In this skill learners interpret and relate the new information based on previous knowledge, experiences and reflections. By developing interpreting and relating abilities, learners will be able to relate the new knowledge to

their own vision of the C2. As a consequence, learners will have a clearer view of the events and will be able to relate their new knowledge in intercultural communicative acts (See Table 4).

Table 4

Descriptors of the skill of interpreting and relating (Adapted from Byram 1997, p. 52)

CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (Skills of interpreting and relating)
(a) identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins
(b) identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present
(c) mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

This list of descriptors refers to the ability to interpret and relate meanings from other cultures. Learners must be able to decipher, recognize and explain different cultural views in documents and experiences. Furthermore, they need to be aware of the possible misunderstandings and dysfunctional phenomena that may arise from intercultural communication. This allows learners to know how to handle intercultural conflicts arising from different positions about a particular situation. We can sum up this skill as the capacity of learners to understand the other's culture and tackle intercultural conflicts in order to establish effective communicative acts.

After learners have acquired intercultural attitudes of curiosity, openness and intercultural awareness, knowledge about the cultural meanings about his and the other's nation and the skill of interpreting and relating cultural knowledge and experiences, they need to learn how to interact with people in real time conditions or *Savoir apprendre/faire*.

Skills of discovery and interaction (*Savoir apprendre/faire*). Here, the author highlights the importance of discovering and interacting with the C2 to get closer to an intercultural model of communication. For him, learners need to discover through interaction and contact the cultural traits of the C2 from a critical view of the C1. This process might be mediated by social contact or by individual reflection. As he explains: “The skill of discovery is the ability to recognise significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meanings and connotations, and their relationship to other phenomena.” (p, 38). In other words, the skill of discovery allows learners to identify particular traits in the C2. Consequently, learners build up meaning and relate what they discover to other phenomena.

In a similar way, interaction plays an important role as source of learning, knowledge building and reflection. Byram states that in intercultural communication people undergo constraints of time, perceptions and attitudes. Hence, interactive skills let learners manage these constraints under the limits of the singular circumstances and interlocutors. In doing so, learners will be equipped to deal with intercultural and even communicative difficulties and to solve them keeping cultural awareness and a high level of tolerance towards the C2’s values, attitudes, beliefs and interlocutor’s views (See Table 5).

Table 5

Descriptors of the skills of discovery and interpretation (Adapted from Byram 1997, pp. 52-53)

CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (Skills of discovery and interaction)
(a) elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena
(b) identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations

(c) identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances
(d) use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country, culture and language and the extent of difference between one's own and the other
(e) identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society
(f) identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures
(g) use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture

Byram relates the skill of discovery and interaction with the usage that learners do of their attitudes, knowledge and understanding of intercultural behavior in real-time communication. This understanding of intercultural communication is evidenced when learners understand the other's values, position and conception of events and documents. Moreover, learners build a clear picture of the other and compare communication and behavior of their own culture and the other culture. They integrate their attitudes, knowledge and interpreting skills in order to maintain intercultural communication. This skill is tested in authentic interaction with the others and their cultural products. But, using intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills of understanding in actual communication requires a critical lens to analyze the meaning of experiences and documents. That is the next skill in Byram's model.

Critical cultural awareness (*Savoir s'engager*). Byram relates this component with the ability of learners to see the C2 from a critical view respecting it and taking into account a neutral perspective to engage in intercultural communication. He also establishes that education

and, in general, political education are requirements for learners to respect world-wide known values that direct a nation's' behavior based on principles of freedom, equality and justice for everyone. When learners understand cultures from this view, they will have the capacity to know, interact and adapt to the C2 respecting it and molding their own perspective of the world. Table 6 below shows Byram's descriptors for this component.

Table 6

Descriptors of critical cultural awareness (Adapted from Byram 1997, pp. 52-53)

CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (Critical cultural awareness: Political education)
(a) identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures (identify ideologies)
(b) make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria (ideology and politics)
(c) interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes (aware of value systems, beliefs and ideologies)

In a nutshell, this component empowers learners with the tools to pinpoint and decipher documents and event in their own and the other's cultures to analyze those events and documents and to intervene in intercultural communicative acts knowing the explicit rules of intercultural interaction. So, learners are not just imitators of a second culture, they adopt a cultural framework of thinking to analyze and inquiry about the nature of intercultural contact in order to follow democratic ways of action.

In this sense, critical cultural awareness and citizenship education are common in the way both understand society. Both views acknowledge the need to establish relationships based on

principles of democracy and freedom. In fact, Byram agrees on the recognition of the three elements of political education (cognitive, evaluative and behavioral) as part of the skill of critical cultural awareness. These dimensions establish the link between what a learner should know about democratic principles (cognitive element), assessment of documents and actions based on clear criteria (evaluative element) and how to act in particular situations (behavioral element).

Citizenship and critical cultural awareness have as a common goal the development of critical awareness and political engagement. For Byram, political engagement requires that learners be aware of the interactions between individuals and society. When they identify this relationship, they become active individuals and engage in political actions. Consequently, this skill focuses on the other, his language, beliefs, behaviors and values. These dimensions are known through language. For this reason, Byram's ICC model promotes, beyond intercultural communication, the formation of intercultural citizenship.

Finally, Byram (2006) states that there is not an assessment method for all intercultural manifestations and that intercultural competence might require the further development of another range of skills in both, teachers and learners. He along with Liddicoat and Scarino (2013a) suggests that intercultural assessment should be supported by non-traditional evaluative techniques. In order to evidence the development of ICC, new assessment tools need to be incorporated to classroom techniques. One of these alternatives could be online intercultural communication in virtual spaces such as Livemocha. Thence, Byram's intercultural model provides important tools to examine how intercultural citizenship and communicative competence unfolds in virtual environments such as SNSLLs. It is necessary to locate SNSLLs within the wealth of applications and terminology in the area of Computer Mediated

Communication and Computer Assisted Language Learning. The next session sets out to achieve such an aim.

Technology in the classroom and social networking sites for language learning in intercultural language education

In the field of applied linguistics the discipline of Computer Assisted Language Learning/Computer Mediated Communication (CALL/CMC) has focused on the relationship between computers and second/foreign language learning. More recently CMC has expanded the reach of the discipline by exploring digital applications used for language learning (e.g. mobile applications). The emergence of the internet gave way to synchronous and asynchronous communication and inaugurated the area of studies on telecollaboration, including teletandem. This entire dynamic has resulted in the creation of online sites dedicated to language learning (Language Learning Websites) which use technology of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. One of these sites for language learning is Livemocha which besides being a language learning website is also a social networking site for language learning (SNSLL). In the following paragraphs, I expand on the concepts just mentioned and how they informed the current state of the art of the relationship between computer applications and language learning.

Since the emergence of CALL in 1950s, the discipline has developed to create challenges and opportunities for language learners and teachers (Levy, 1997; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; Davies, et al. 2011). Hence, CALL is applied to research and language learning processes where the usage of computational applications is at the center of language teaching processes (Warschauer, 2001; Teeler & Gray, 2000; Rey & Rosado, 2000). The benefits of using technological applications in an EFL context have been reported by several authors (Liang & Bonk, 2009; Bañados, 2006; Clavijo, Hine & Quintero, 2008). The exploration of new digital

spaces for language learning has evolved and obtained response in the development of language skills, cultural contact and material design (Kost, 1999; Legenhausen & Wolff, 1990; Nelson & Oliver, 1999). In particular, the emergence of Web 2.0 has configured novel phenomena that impact language learning online such as social networking, online communities, and intercultural telecollaborative interactions (Thomas et al., 2013; Guth & Helm, 2010; Demaizière & Zourou, 2012; Lamy & Zourou, 2013).

CALL is now informed by developments in the area of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). CMC is defined by McQuail (2005), Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004) and Walther (1996) as a type of human communication occurring thanks to the usage of more than one electronic device. Considered a branch of CALL, CMC focuses on the communicational constraints, affordances, usage and evolution of computational applications aimed at enhancing communicative processes (Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Chapelle, 1994, 2001, 2007; Kern, 2006; Egbert & Petrie, 2005; Levy & Stockwell, 2006).

The multimodal and versatile nature of CMC gave rise to telecollaboration. Telecollaboration appears as a pedagogical practice that aims at boosting communicational opportunities in language learning. According to Zourou (2012), telecollaboration is a digital language-learning trend where teaching practices are directed by educators. The communicative exchange happens between two or more groups geographically distant who use a predefined kind of technological device. The interaction is usually secure and the role of teachers is to guide rather than control. Telecollaborative practices depend on the institutional framework of educational contexts (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006).

The current research study fits within the realms of telecollaboration because Livemocha makes available interfaces that allow users to collaborate from their own locations. Thus,

students in the class of English IV were able to establish contact with multiple speakers located in different parts of the world. However, this study also adopts characteristics of teletandem.

A type of telecollaboration is teletandem. Teletandem or tandem learning consists of the use of technology to establish language exchange in an informal learning space. This type of learning is based on the learners' autonomy where they look for "language partners" to support each other in their learning process. Usually, this model consists in the free work of two or more users who engage in communication with a native speaker of the target language (Appel 1999; Brammerts 1996, 1999, 2003; Kötter 2002, 2003; O'Rourke, 2005). In these learning contexts, users negotiate their discussion topics, activities and focus.

Back in 1990s, different applications were developed to provide informal language education. In this context, users of the Internet subscribed to teletandem programs to engage in informal language exchanges. Some features proposed in teletandem applications were later adopted by language learning websites and SNSLLs. Although, overall, LLWs and SNSLLs were initially created to afford informal language learning experiences, there has been a push to use these environments in formal learning environments. Such is the case of this study in which Livemocha is employed in the context of language teaching program. It is in the sense that this research and pedagogical experience combines elements of telecollaboration and tandem learning. On the one hand, it intends to provide a telecollaborative experience to students in the context of formal language class, but at the same time it aims at leaving the doors open for students to engage in language learning informally out of the classroom space.

Language Learning Websites (LLW) and SNSLL. The development of LLWs and SNSLLs has been marked by technological development in computer applications. In order to understand LLWs and SNSLL affordances, it is necessary to examine the concept of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Web 1.0 technology is known as the read-web. Sites using Web 1.0 technologies did not allow real-time communication, user generated content, multimodal media or sharing online data at high speed (Guth & Helm, 2010; Demaizière & Zourou, 2012). This technology worked following the patterns of search engines and information connectivity (Thomas, 2008). This kind of technology allowed the appearance of the first LLWs.

Web 2.0 has been called the social web or the read-write web because of the huge possibilities it offers for users to interact, share, create content and establish real time communication with other users beyond their geographical and cultural borders. Some of the particularities of these websites are that they are dynamic, interactive, democratic, user centered, volatile and adaptive. The content may be defined by the users who become digital content producers and not only consumers (Bennett, et al. 2012; Brown, 2012; Hemmi, Bayne & Land, 2009; Kocak & Guzin 2009).

Villanueva, Luzón and Ruiz (2008) highlight the hyperlinked and multimodal properties of Web 2.0 technologies. They state that these features open alternative ways of communication, interaction and learning, which do not follow a strict hierarchical order allowing users and cultures to connect. In turn, Felix (2005) highlights the networking possibilities allowed by Web 2.0. These kinds of sites permit users to easily access information and to acquire an active role in online communication in written, oral asynchronous and synchronous modes of communication. Now that we understand the type of technology that gave rise to sites such as Livemocha we can study the difference between LLWs, SNSs and SNSLLs.

Alvarez (2016d) defines LLWs as “online environment[s] characterized by offering language learners practice on some or all of the language skills” (p. 3). These LLWs usually contain vocabulary, grammatical, usage and sometimes, cultural explanations about a language, communicative tasks, drills and authentic material, either audio or video. As Alvarez clarifies, some of these sites organize their language material in lessons and courses following a sequence of learning and practice. Other sites simply make available didactic material, exercises and projects without any pedagogical sequence. Some LLWs were constructed drawing on the affordances of Web 1.0, while some others adopted the technology made available in Web 2.0. Many websites developed a hybrid between a Social Network Site (SNS) and a LLW.

Godwin-Jones (2005) defines SNSs as disruptive technologies where people find new ways of doing routinary tasks. Trusov et al. (2009) as cited by Pai & Arnot (2013) define SNS as electronic applications based on web technologies whose use establishes and maintains social and professional contact networks. Boyd and Ellison in Brick (2011b) list three potential applications of SNS:

1. Construction of a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system.
2. Articulation of a list of other users with whom they share a connection.
3. Viewing and traversing of their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Along this line of study, McBride (2009b) asserts that SNSs may transform language learning processes through the application of synchronous and asynchronous interaction and skills-based activities at a flexible time and space. This property makes SNS a powerful tool in the EFL classroom. From the application of web 2.0 technologies and following the interaction scheme offered by SNSs, some entrepreneurs around the world created social networking sites

for language learning (SNSLLs). These online sites combine the properties of user content generation, online connectivity and profile management to enhance language learning through an autonomous and ecological view of language learning (Ryberg & Christiansen, 2008; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Liu et al, 2013; Pélissier & Qotb, 2012). Usually, SNSLLs incorporate applications of LLWs to improve learners' language competence. Some of these applications are audio and video materials, exercises, dialogues, drills, chat spaces, blogs, explanations and tutorials (Liu et al., 2013; Harrison, 2013; Álvarez, 2016a, b). The emergence and application of SNSLLs in EFL contexts have allowed a wider development of language learning skills in online spaces. Especially, these virtual spaces have contributed to the application of teletandem and telecollaboration as online language learning strategies.

In this study, we can identify how LLWs and SNSLLs integrate in their focus on language learning, their interactive affordances and their online work as means to support learners around the world. Hence, Livemocha can be understood as a type of language learning website that supports users' language learning through online interaction and learning lessons.

Having explained the main concepts regarding SNSLL and technology in the EFL classroom, I describe in the next subsection the concepts about multimodal social semiotics helpful to understand the intercultural dimension in Livemocha.

Multimodal social semiotics

In this final section of theoretical discussion, I develop the concepts of multimodal social semiotics, semiotic design, mode, medium, semiotic clusters, intersemiotic relationship, semiotic resources and basic units. The rationale for introducing these concepts lies in their usefulness to examine a multimodal environment such as Livemocha.

Halliday (1978) proposes the concept of social semiotics (SS) as an approach emerged from his functional theory of language. According to this view, language goes beyond the linguistic manifestations and involves the construction and analysis of texts as “contextually situated signs” (Alvarez, 2014a, p. 26). In addition, Michelson and Alvarez (2016) state: “Social semiotics delves into how meanings are made and structured in processes of communication and acknowledges that semiotic acts and products are constituted and shaped through historical, cultural, and social uses of signs” (p. 2).

This means that language, understood as texts and signs, must be studied within their social contexts as cultural products (Halliday, 1978). This is what Halliday calls the meaning potential of language. He argues that language has three functions. Through the Ideational metafunction, Individuals express and represent their experiences in the world. The interpersonal metafunction allows individuals to relate with each other as receivers and producers of messages. The textual metafunction allows individuals to organize texts to form coherent textual units. Henceforth, SS focuses on the processes of meaning creation and meaning structuring in communication. Language constitutes social action and is multimodal (Kaltenbacher, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2004; Kress, 2010).

Principles of social semiotics. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), Kress (2010) and Jewitt (2009), Alvarez (ND) discusses the principles of social semiotics that can be summarized in the next five tenets:

1. The subject matter of study in multimodal social semiotics is meaning, meaning making, sign and signmaking. This implies the presence of makers of meaning and agency.
2. The different modes of communication are central to create meaning. The production, distribution and interpretation of semiotic meaning is materialized through the actions of modes.
3. Every one of the different modes of communication has a particular task in meaning making processes.
4. Cultural, historical and social uses transform and construct all semiotic acts and products.
5. The way people choose and construct modes determines meaning making. These constructions are derived from peoples' interests, motivations and life histories. People use semiotic resources according to the social conventions of their context.

In turn, Kress (2012) proposes a perspective to cross-cultural studies based on a social semiotic approach. He established two key dimensions in SS:

- a) Cultural/semiotic resources are shaped in a community by the semiotic work of members of that community. They are shaped in line with the requirements, concerns and needs of a community.
- b) The semiotic/cultural resources of a community, no matter its size, are the outcome of that work, and therefore always reflect the concerns, values, etc. of that community. One consequence is that 'culture' is not reducible to 'language': it

exists in and through all the semiotic resources of a community. These resources differ from community to community, even within one 'society'. (Kress, 2012. p, 382)

This means that communities modify cultural/semiotic resources through their semiotic work. Communities shape those resources based on their requirements, concerns and needs, resulting in the product of their semiotic work. Thence, culture embodies all the semiotic, linguistic, behavioral and symbolic dimensions of a society which vary from community to community.

What identifies this perspective is the social dimension of semiotic work which is the source and origin of actions that produce meaning. According to this, the social is the frame where the characteristics of communication and the production of cultural and semiotic resources emerge. Consequently, this social action enhances the process of identity creation by means of the interaction of cultural/semiotic resources. Hence, in order to relate cross-cultural issues we need to state and comprehend the social particularities and relations with their particular context where diverse communities interact (Kress, 2012).

Multimodality and related concepts. Bezemer, et al. (2012) sustain that in the various domains of the social world meanings are constituted of diverse communication modes (gestures, objects, writing, images, gaze, posture, and much more). These modes operate in group and every one of them offers specific affordances for communicative purposes. In educative settings, multimodal communication has sprung the myriad of possibilities to study teachers and students' interactions. These possibilities have also been potentialized by multimedia use (Farías, Obilinovic & Orrego, 2007).

The previous fact leads us to see multimodal discourse as the communicative products that implement diverse codes to construct social meaning. The challenge then is about understanding the connection and interaction of the different semiotic resources and communicative modes within a set of signs that construct an idea about the world.

In combination SS and multimodality (multimodal social semiotics-MSS) refer to the field of study that inquires about the understanding of socially constructed signs, their contextual meaning and evolution within social reality. The particularity of this approach is the acknowledgement and focus on a wide variety of communicative modes. Here the non-linguistic dimension of communication gains relevance since this social semiotic theory attempts to explain the creation of meaning from all the different means for meaning making. SNSLLs belong to the category of multimodal spaces because of their use of multiple modes of communication where linguistic texts, visual resources, multimedia elements and the organization of these modes imply a multimodal vision of communication. In examining multimodal communication, MSS has developed a battery of concepts that will be presented below.

The first concept is semiotic resources. In Van Leuween's (2005a) words, semiotic resources are:

the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically – for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures – or technologically – for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software – together with the ways in which these resources can be organized. (p. 285)

In other words, semiotic resources are everything that people use to create meaning. These resources can be material (texts, documents, speeches) or immaterial (ideas, thoughts, reflections, icons) and they build and materialize signs. On Figure 2 we observe that Livemocha used semiotic resources such as pictures and texts to show a lexical element part of the language lesson. These semiotic resources are organized in semiotic clusters (C1, C2, C3, C4). In this case the word coworker is supported by the picture of people working together as builders in a construction site observing a map. However, semiotic resources usually do not work isolated, they are used in group within multimodal texts.

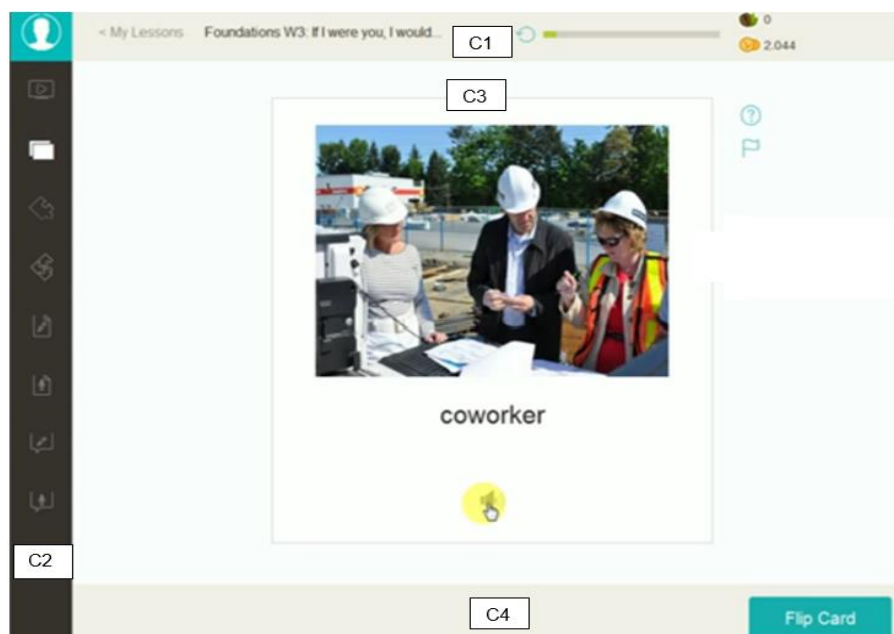


Figure 2. Multimodal elements on a Livemocha screenshot

However, understanding the way semiotic resources are used on Livemocha does not explain all the complex relationship on a SNSLL. We need to understand the *modus operandi* of other elements present in digital communication. Another important concept that allows us to understand the semiotic dimension of Livemocha is mode. Jewitt (2003) states that modes are organized sets of semiotic resources that articulate social meaning. These modes are the consequence of cultural action that shapes material ideas in representational resources. Alvarez (2016, b) indicates that “The grouping of certain semiotic resources is called modes of communication or modes of meaning” (p. 101). This explains the way semiotic resources are grouped and used to construct meaning. The classification of modes provided by The New London Group (1996) is interesting. On Table 7, we can observe that the London Group divides modes of communication in five categories: linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural and visual. Each category is composed of particular elements that make possible the creation of meaning within a multimodal text.

Table 7

Classification of Modes of Meaning (Adapted from The New London Group, 1996, p. 83)

Multimodal: Such as the integrated meaning-making systems of electronic multimedia texts					
Mode of meaning					
	Linguistic Design	Audio Design	Spatial Design	Gestural Design	Visual Design
Mode of meaning	Elements of linguistic meaning including:	Elements that constitute:	Elements that constitute:	Elements that constitute:	Elements of visual meaning such as:
Some design elements	-Delivery -Vocabulary and metaphor -Modality -Transitivity -Normalization of processes -Information structure -Local coherence relations -Global coherence relations	-Music -Sound effects - Etc	-Ecosystemic and geographic meanings -Architectonic meanings - Etc	-Behavior -Bodily physicality -Gesture - Sensuality -Feelings and affect -Kinesics -Proxemics -Etc	-Colors -Perspective -Vectors -Foregrounding and backgrounding Etc

For instance, on Figure 2 we observe the interaction of different modes of communication. We see groups of linguistic texts (name of the lexical item introduced, name of the lesson, profile menu, number of mochapoints and credits and command button) that help learners to navigate and identify the functions of some elements. In addition, the visual mode is

reflected in the organized usage of icons, a picture and color to focus the learners' attention, help them to navigate the lesson and enhance their learning experience.

Another important concept in multimodal studies is base unit. Bateman (2008) defines base units as: "everything which can be seen on each page of an analyzed document" (p. 110). On picture two the base units present are the profile picture, navigational icons, lesson menu, name of the lesson, progression bar of the section, amount of mochapoints and credits, vocabulary picture, the lexical item and the command button. All these base units compose the multimodal text and together carry meaning regarding the learning of a lexical item.

The organization of these base units and the modes of communication is achieved through a semiotic design. Semiotic design is the way the different modes are organized in a semiotic space. The design determines the function and interaction of these semiotic modes. It is defined as the base of any semiotic entity. Semiotic design includes the modes and the compositional elements used in a semiotic entity, their organization and their interrelationship with a cultural context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Alvarez, 2016c). Design is one of the first necessary concepts to understand how meaning is made and its role in communication.

In the case of this study, Livemocha uses a semiotic design where modes such as text, audio, video, hyperlinks, images, linguistic elements and spatial arrangement are combined in a pedagogical way and interact following the pattern of most LLWs and SNSs. On Figure 2, for example, we see the interaction of linguistic, visual and spatial modes of communication to explain the meaning of the word coworker and to help learners to navigate on the section and the site. Therefore, sites like Livemocha allow the creation of meaning through its semiotic design which portrays a particular conception of language and language learning through the way its elements are organized (Alvarez, 2016b, c). In addition, this site offers the opportunity of

interacting through online chat with members from other countries. In this way, the semiotic design on Livemocha assigns value to interaction as a mean to achieve communicative competence.

Many multimodal designs require groupings of elements to facilitate their analysis. Usually modes are grouped in semiotic clusters. According to Alvarez (2014a) semiotic clusters are sets of multimodal elements. For example, on Figure 2 we observe a set of four semiotic clusters (C1, C2, C3, C4). Particularly, the first semiotic cluster is composed of some base units such as the profile icon, the texts of lesson menu, lesson identification, the progression bar and the rewarding system (mochapoints and credits). In this cluster we see also the interaction of visual and linguistic modes of communication in the use of texts, color and icons.

Meaning making does not only emerge from the analysis of semiotic resources or modes in isolation, it emerges from the interaction between the different components of a semiotic design or what Royce (1998) and Jewitt (2009) term: intersemiotic relationships. An intersemiotic relationship is the relationship among semiotic resources, modes and underlying meanings in a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2010, Royce, 1998; Jewitt, 2009). In Livemocha we can observe intersemiotic relationships in the way the site organizes the modes in and across the different sections of the lessons.

Figure 2 shows this relationship among semiotic resources and modes in a flashcard on the vocabulary section of a lesson. In the center of the screenshot we observe how the usage of a picture with a text below explains the meaning of the word coworker. In this case the written language establishes an intersemiotic relationship with the image (visual mode). This relationship materializes by showing people working with helmets and revising blueprints of what seems to be a building project.

The last concept relevant to understand the study of multimodal texts is medium. Jewitt (2003) defines medium as the form used to disseminate texts. It is to say, the path through which multimodal texts are shared and travel to generate multimodal communication. The medium might be paper, visual channel, broadcasts, digital materials (CD and DVD and Blue Ray) or computational applications. Particularly, Livemocha uses the medium of digital online communication because all activities can only be developed online through computers.

In this research, the social nature of Livemocha, its use of different modes of communication and its potential to create and modify the meaning of some signs allowed me to integrate a multimodal social semiotic perspective. This multimodal view of communication helped me to better understand and analyze the semiotic meanings and interrelationships within Livemocha. Likewise, this relationship between multimodality and Livemocha can be applied to similar language learning websites and SNSLLs.

The section of theoretical framework has provided the central concepts that illuminate the understanding of the dimensions of culture on a multimodal environment with characteristic of a social network site. In the next section, I introduce the methodological foundations of this study.

Research design

Positionality

This study is part of a macro project developed by professors and students of two Colombian universities: Universidad del Valle and Universidad Javeriana in Bogota. The macro project examines the potential of integration of SNSLLs in teacher education programs and the affordances of SNSLL for the development of language competence. In the context of the broader study, I set out to explore the potential of Livemocha, the SNSLL being examined in Universidad del Valle, to develop intercultural communicative competence. I worked under the supervision of the main researcher of the macro project who taught the classes and designed the syllabus of the English course where I collected the data. Although I participated in the classes providing assistance during the data collection, my role as a researcher was non-participant observer.

As a non-participant observer, I did not control any variables in the study and I had low involvement with the participants. In the role of non-participant observer, I described, explained and analyzed the participants' actions, behavior, and reactions in their natural environment focusing on the development of intercultural communicative competence. The nature of the study allowed a better understanding of the way the participants' described their experience within the SNSLL Livemocha and the extent of the development of their intercultural communicative competence.

Type of study

This is a qualitative, non-experimental, phenomenological case study. In terms of method, this is a qualitative study. Knowing that qualitative research analyzes in depth non-numerical data, describes events, phenomena or situations in their natural context, is synthetic,

holistic, heuristic, and it has none or low control of the research environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006), it is clear that this research fits within the realms of a qualitative study. This approach was chosen due to its emphasis in interpreting human behavior. As Denzin and Lincoln (2006) state:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. (p. 3)

In this sense, this research embodies a clear example of a qualitative type of study given its nature, aim, data collection tools and scope because this study tries to describe and interpret the participants' meaning drawing on traditional analytic techniques and elements from multimodal social semiotics. This multimodal semiotic kind of study takes into account varied modes of communication that take place on online interactions besides the traditional linguistic modes (Kress, 2003).

This study is descriptive and explanatory in nature and it belongs to the category of non-experimental research. Since this study intends to explore, describe and interpret the immediate experience of a group of students who engaged in the use of the SNSLL Livemocha, a phenomenological approach was chosen. According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2013) phenomenological approaches are required when analyzing people's experiences, meaning construction in their lives, relationships between the events and participants' perceptions of them and similarities among participants' behaviors and attitudes.

All the previous aspects were regarded when studying how the participants reacted after their experience on Livemocha. In this case study, the phenomenon was working on a SNSLL in the context of a regular English course for future language teachers. Hence, the focus and scale

of this study guided me to choose a phenomenological approach and to explore the meaning of the lived experience of using a SNSLL in a regular English course.

In order to focus the analysis on intercultural issues, this research adopted a case study. According to Creswell (2002) and Cohen and Manion (1994) a case study is a type of explanatory method which intends to deepen into the understanding of events, activities, processes and participants. A case study is limited in sample and intends to go deeper in the analysis of categories. In line with this, I focused my research on a particular sample of participants and centered my interest on one aspect: the identification of the presence of intercultural behaviors and indicators of ICC in the participants and the website.

Context

The study was conducted at Universidad del Valle, located in the south of the City of Cali, in the neighborhood Melendez. The university curriculum aims to train competent and engaged professionals who contribute to the improvement of the nation. The School of Language Sciences, where this research was developed, belongs to the School of Humanities of the University. The School of Language Sciences offers the Bachelor Degree in Foreign Languages. This academic program is aimed at the education of languages teachers and is offered in a morning and afternoon shift.

In the English Department the number of teachers who work with the undergraduate program are around 15. The English professors teach two kinds of English courses: the mandatory English language track: Integrated English Skills (from first to fourth semester), Oral skills –speaking and listening- (in fifth semester), English reading (sixth semester), English writing (seventh semester) and English literature (eighth and ninth semester). Moreover, other courses offered are called professional English courses: English listening and pronunciation (two

levels), reading texts in English, and English grammar. The training in English goes from first to ninth semester and is mandatory for the students to take three professional courses to complement their linguistic training.

The course where this study took place was the course of Integrated Skills in English IV. In this course, students take English lessons aimed at developing communicative skills and the university gives teachers the freedom to develop the syllabuses for their own courses. In the course chosen, the professor developed a syllabus based on three intercultural projects that guided the class activities and assessment. Each project had a final written paper related to academic and cultural issues worked by the students during the semester. There were two evaluations, in the middle and at the end of the course, and the professor also graded other small assignments. The course was scheduled three days per week (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) from 9:00 to 11:00 and the classes observed were the ones of Wednesdays because the work on Livemocha was developed only on this day.

Given Livemocha's purpose (to encourage users' interaction, support and development of communicative skills through multimedia material), this SNSLL fitted within the description of the course syllabus because of its potential to promote intercultural skills, the practice of communicative abilities and the support for the English IV class projects. In these three aspects Livemocha could support the students' work in their regular classes. These class projects consisted in reading an English-written novel and writing an essay about it, recording a video about the experience of studying abroad and preparing a speech based on academic research.

Particularly, the use of Livemocha offered the students an opportunity to compare their perspectives towards a novel with a foreign interlocutor's view. By doing so, they could enhance the writing process of their essay and contact other students around the world to ask them about

their experience of studying abroad. In this way, the use of Livemocha complemented the syllabus and expanded the students' possibilities to better comprehend their learning process.

Population. Nineteen Spanish speaking students of fourth semester enrolled in the course of English Integrated Skills in the program of Foreign Languages (morning shift). Their language competency was estimated in B1 according to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference. Most of them were young adults from low and middle socioeconomic strata. They participated voluntarily in this research during the second semester of 2015 and beginning semester of 2016 (see [Appendix A](#): Consent form). The participants' identities were protected by using only their initials at the end of their commentaries.

Generalities about Livemocha. Livemocha was founded in September 2007 with the aim to improve the experience of online language learning (Clark & Gruba, 2010). This was the first site of its kind and incorporated several language courses, activities and a virtual community of users able to support each other's learning process (Brick, 2011b). Livemocha's courses were divided in levels and lessons and the lesson had several activities and multimedia material to work on the four communicative skills. The site managed the concept of freemium. This means that some of its contents were free to the public and other functions had a fee (Froberg 2014). Livemocha highlighted the opportunity of contacting native speakers around the world and get online support. Livemocha closed in April 2016 and it is now part of the community Hellolingo. With 35 language courses, Livemocha reached 16 millions of users worldwide during its time online (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Brick, 2011a; 2011b; Livemocha, 2016).

The ten most represented countries on this site were: Brazil, United States, China, Colombia, India, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, Senegal and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the five most

learned, languages on this site were: English, Spanish, French, German and Italian (Livemocha, 2016).

Regarding Livemocha's structure, this SNSLL was divided in three spaces.

(a) Language courses: The site offered courses to learn 35 languages (Figure 3). Users had free access to these courses. Livemocha's interface allowed users to develop online exercises and to measure their learning progress in terms of course completion. Language courses encompassed levels, activities, lessons and online digital material. The courses had different denominations such as Foundations (Figure 4). Students choose their courses at the beginning of their registration process and could change it at will when they wanted to enroll in another course.

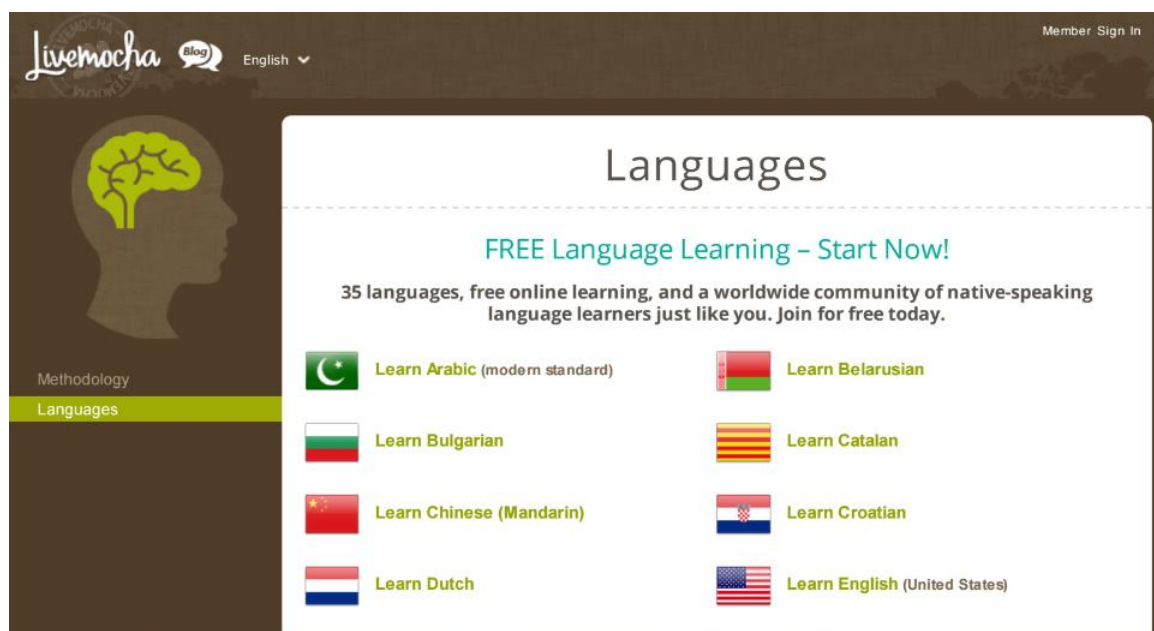


Figure 3. Languages offered on Livemocha

Each language course was divided in:

(b) Levels: They varied in difficulty and users could identify them according to a code of letters and numbers (Figure 4). The first letters of the alphabet identified the beginning levels and the last letters of the alphabet were assigned for the advanced learners. The same system was used with numbers within the levels to identify the lessons.

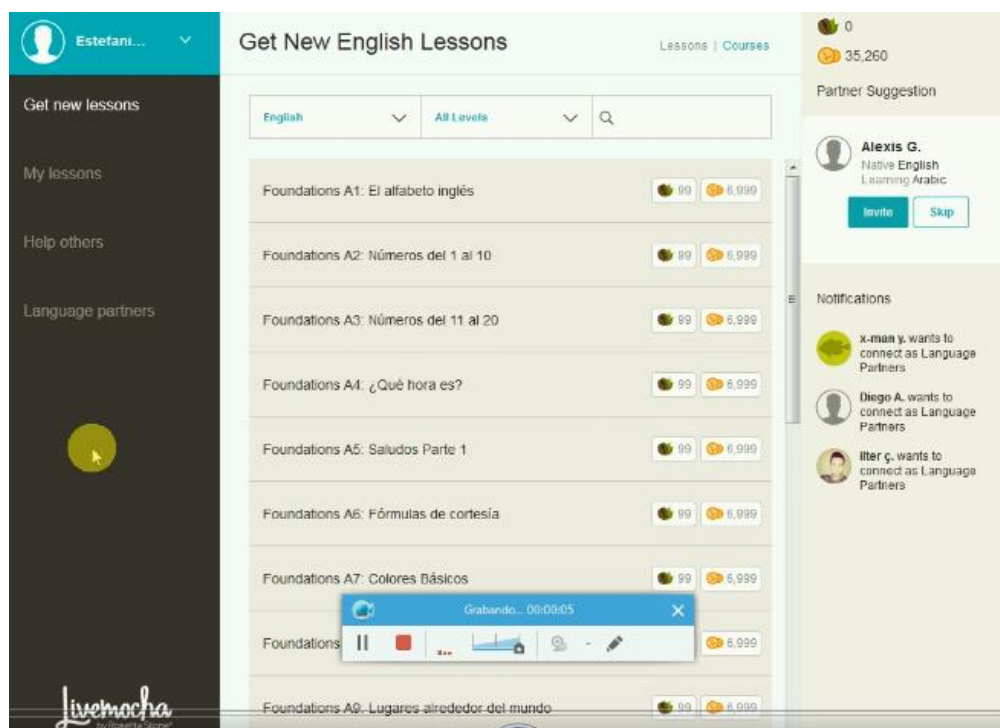


Figure 4. Livemocha's Interface to get lessons within levels

Figure 4 shows how users could buy their lessons within a level. In this space, learners acquired their language lessons by using Livemocha points. Users also had the freedom to choose the lesson or level they desired no matter their actual language level. Furthermore, the site allowed users to follow and check their own language learning process by using a system of rewards and progress. Figure 5 gives us a glimpse of Livemocha's order of courses and levels. The levels were divided into active courses, basic courses and new Livemocha experiences. All levels were entirely composed of language lessons.

Active Courses	Basic Courses (101-202)	New Livemocha experience
Starter Courses/Level 1	101-102	L1: FundamentalsL2: IntroductionL3: Beginner
Intermediate Courses/Level 2-3	201-202	L4: Intermediate
Upper Intermediate Courses/Level 4		L5: High Intermediate
Advanced Courses		L6: Low advancedL7: Advanced
		L8: High Advanced
		L9: Superior

Figure 5. Course and level organization on Livemocha

(c) Language lessons. These were the building bricks of Livemocha language courses. In each language lesson users followed a general structure that integrated the four skills under a communicative focus. Language lessons on Livemocha were full of pictures, audio documents, examples, readings and exercises in the target language. Some of the content on the lessons could be translated by clicking on a command button at the lower side right of the screen.

These were the three main pedagogical spaces on Livemocha related to language learning online programs. In the next paragraphs I present the structure of a lesson on Livemocha.

Structure of a language lesson on Livemocha. Introduction: All language lessons started with a short video related to the lesson topic. In this video, the site presented a communicative situation with two or more people speaking. Other types of videos were compositions of slides with pictures that were explained with voice-over narration.

Vocabulary: In this section, students watched flashcards with pictures on one side and a definition with examples on the other side. The page offered also the pronunciation of the vocabulary when students clicked on the flashcards. The site also allowed users to switch the flashcards and to review them all the times they required it.

Usage: Livemocha supported this space by using flashcards that showed the explicit rules of the grammatical topic studied in the lesson. The rules were accompanied by examples and users clicked a command button to move to the next explanation.

Practice: Here, Livemocha presented some interactive questions regarding the grammatical topic studied. Usually, the page used multiple choice questions in reading, listening or completion exercises.

Read/Write: Here, users read a short text where the site presented a communicative situation. Then, users had to write a short composition following the instructions of the communicative situation proposed.

Read/Speak: In this space, users had to read a text that presented a communicative situation. Based on the prompts, learners had to record their voices and speak in order to solve the situation.

Listen/Write: Here, Livemocha users had to listen to a prompt of a communicative situation or a question. Then, they wrote their answer or personal position about the instruction given.

Listen/Speak: In this last section, users listened to instructions, communicative situations or an audio document. After listening to it, learners had to record themselves speaking about the proposed topic and offering their own opinion.

The particularity of these spaces was that after completing the tasks, Livemocha demanded that users submit these responses to the online community. Users needed to spend

Livemocha points if they wanted other users of the community to review their submissions and provide feedback.

Chat interface. The chat interface (Figure 6) was used to communicate with other Livemocha members. It had three main elements: an identification space with the name of the user on top of it, a space to see the posts made and a space to write and send messages. Each message could only contain a maximum of 250 characters that users sent by hitting enter or clicking on the send message command button. The chat tool did not allow sending hyperlinks or other types of elements such as pictures or audio messages.

Once the users sent messages, they had to wait for their interlocutors' responses. The interlocutors' responses usually appeared on the right column of notifications and on the messages space just below the previous message. However, the communication was slow and the messages took long time to be delivered and received. Some of these flaws will be discussed later with more depth in the conclusions and limitations of this research.

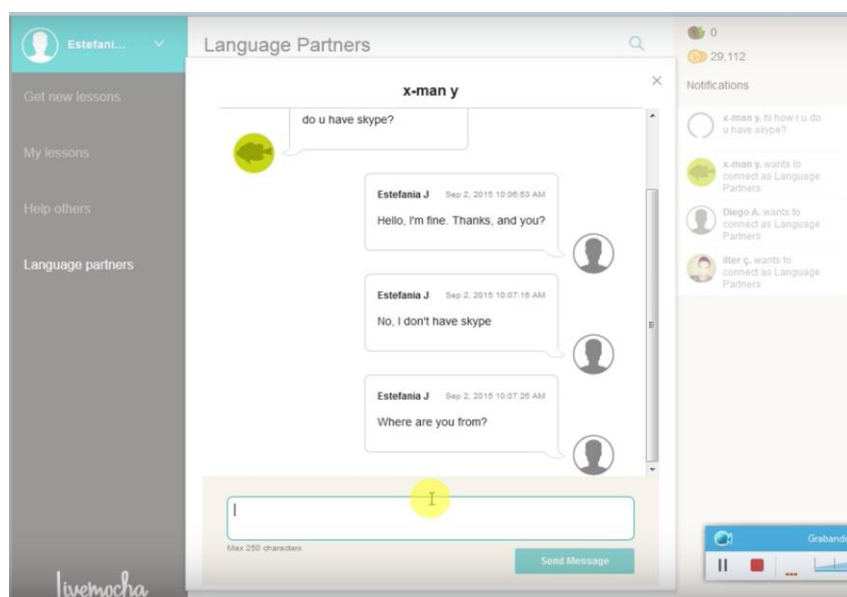


Figure 6. Chat interface

Activities on Livemocha during the project class by class. In the next paragraphs, I show general information about the work on Livemocha during the time of the project organized in sessions including the lesson, learning objective and activities.

Session 1: In this class the participants worked a basic lesson that they choose freely. The objective was to familiarize with the platform and to try the chat tool. The activities consisted in the presentation of the project with Livemocha, explanations about the functioning of this SNSLL and reconnaissance of the site itself.

Session 2: The lesson worked this class was *X2: Studying abroad in the summer*. The aim of this class was to development of the lesson and use of the chat tool. The activities consisted in working the Livemocha lesson, using the chat in order to contact other users from different countries and to complete the demographic survey for the project.

Session 3: The lesson worked in this class was *V4 Who's that song by?* The aim of this session was to continue the work of the course with the Livemocha's lessons (the previous one that could not be completed by some students), to practice the oral comprehension through a listening activity and to add the classmates as language partners on Livemocha. The agenda of this session consisted in the completion of the previous learning log and completion of the previous lesson, the development of a listening activity: Rasputin's biography and to befriend with the classmates on Livemocha's chat.

Session 4: In this class, the students did not work on a Livemocha lesson; instead the objective was to develop a listening activity about a report of education in Finland and to use the chat tool to complete this activity. The class consisted in the analysis of the video report and the completion of the comprehension questions using Livemocha's chat tool. This activity was carried out in pairs.

Session 5: In this session, the participants worked the lesson: *X8: The ozone is being depleted*. The objective of this session was to use actively Livemocha's chat in order to complete a paragraph and send it to the teacher. The activities consisted in the development of lesson X8 and after finishing the activities of the lesson the students had to write a paragraph about an environmental issue. They had to explain the issue and propose a solution. After writing the paragraph, the students had to send it to their teacher for a revision.

Session 6: The lesson worked this session was *W2: How could she tell my secret?* The ultimate aim of this class was to explore the chat tool with classmates and language partners in order to observe the differences of communicating with people of the same country and other nations. In this session the students completed the lesson W2 and then used the chat during 30 minutes.

Session 7: The lesson worked this class was *W3: If I were you, I would...* The objective of this lesson was to encourage students to use Livemocha's chat to peer review the students' speech for their class project. Hence, the class started with the work on lesson W3 and finished with the peer revision of the participants' speech. At the end the learners sent to the professor their peer review.

Session 8: This class the students worked the lesson *W9: Holiday celebration with friends*. The class' aim was to observe some cultural behaviors of other peoples and to compare them with the students' activities in Christmas by using intra and extra class chatting. For this reason the participants developed first the lesson W9 and then they interacted with two users of other countries and one of their classmates to ask them about how they celebrated Christmas.

Session 9: The students worked in this class the lesson: *X10: That was then, this is now*. The learning intention was to link the content of Livemocha with a class exercise and to support

the project of the essay through the writing of a paragraph. The session consisted in the development of lesson X10, the discussion of the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins and the writing of a paragraph where students had to write how they had changed since childhood. When they finished their paragraphs they sent them to the teacher and to a classmate in order to get feedback.

Session 10: The lesson worked this class was V9: *Is he the one who was in Titanic?* The aim of this class was to motivate the students to collaborate with each other by transcribing the introduction video of the lesson V9 using Livemocha's chat tool. The class was divided in three stages: first, the teacher gave some feedback about the paragraphs that the students wrote the previous class. Then, the learners developed the lesson V9 and finally, they transcribed the introduction video of the lesson. They had to complete the activity in pairs using the chat tool and supporting their peer. At the end the students sent to their teacher the transcription.

Session 11: In this class the students worked the introduction of the lesson V9: *Is he the one who was in Titanic?* The objective of this session was to bridge some cultural elements of Livemocha with the students' interpretation of some movies. For this reason the students started with a discussion regarding the cultural elements observed in the video of the lesson (Gender roles portrayed in movies and media), then they chatted with two foreign language partners about the students' essay of the book *Animal Farm*.

Session 12: The lesson worked was V10: *It could mean?* The aim of this class was to discuss more cultural elements on Livemocha and encouraging the students to engage in chat conversations with other users in order to discover some politeness formulae to address a social issue in a letter. In this class the students discussed about the meaning of the Superbowl for American people, worked the lesson V10, wrote a letter discussing the smoking policy in a

hospital. The students had to write a letter to the hospital administrator who prohibited the employees to smoke during their work time. In order to write the letter the students had to consider formality and register to use. After having wrote the letter the teacher instructed the students to discuss this issue with a foreign language partner to get advice, revision and to consider their interlocutors' discursive strategies.

Session 13: The lesson worked in this class was *W6: Polite Requests*. The aim of this class was to close the project with a final activity on Livemocha and a chat intraclass exercise to compare how students used polite requests in their daily life. The class begun with the final survey about culture on Livemocha, then the students developed the lesson W6 and finally, the teacher encouraged the students to chat with their classmates using the Livemocha chat and answer the next questions:

If your mom tells you: "please make a cup of coffee! Is this a request? Is this polite?

If a friend is making noise while you are reading, what kind of request would you use?

a. I can't hear myself think (to point at indirect polite requests)

b. Be quiet! (to point at direct polite requests)

What aspects do you consider when you make requests?

Do you find in differences in the way you make requests in English and Spanish?

After this chat activity, the sessions of the project with learners ended and the research team begun the organization and analysis stages.

Data collection techniques and procedures

The participants had English class three times per week. The data was collected during 16 weeks each Wednesday when students used the computer laboratory to work on Livemocha. The students' activities online were collected through screen recordings using the digital application

A powersoft and then they were saved in a hard disk and uploaded to Google Drive. Finally, at the end of each lessons students completed a learning log (see [Appendix B](#)) (online forms filled up at the end of the sessions) about their experience on the virtual platform and their personal impressions regarding their work on it. In the next paragraphs, I will describe the use and design of each data collection instrument (Learning logs, survey, focus group and screen recordings).

Learning logs. Hurst (2005), Chotel, (2012), Heuser, (2005) and Lloyd (2012) define learning logs as a reflective technique with multiple applications in language learning. These applications range from the introspection of a routine activity to the assessment of pedagogical experiences. Learning logs usually lead learners to think about their experience regarding a particular phenomenon. This tool has the potential to support the creation of knowledge through the analysis of personal experiences.

In this particular case, learning logs (see [Appendix B](#)) were online forms that students filled up every week after their work on Livemocha (either in class or out of class). Students registered insights about their activities, attitudes and their learning process on the SNSLL. The form included questions and encouraged students to write their comments with total freedom in English. The learning logs had five main sections: general information about the session (class, date, time on the site), activities developed on Livemocha, new learning, communication with other members, cultural aspects and difficulties regarding understanding of the web site, contents, and interaction

Survey. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) surveys are descriptive research methods used to describe the nature of current conditions, identify standards to compare those conditions and establishing relationships among particular events. In this sense, a survey is a set of questions envisaged to provide information by answering written questions or statements used with large groups of participants. The objective is to obtain responses, reactions, opinions, judgments or beliefs about a particular topic or experience (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2003).

During the research, the participants completed two surveys. The first one (see [Appendix C](#)) was applied at the beginning of the course and its objective was to discover the familiarity of students with SNSLLs. The second survey ([Appendix D](#)) was administered online near the end of the course. This survey aimed at assessing the students' perceptions, attitudes and insights about their experience on Livemocha regarding the development of their intercultural communicative competence and the spaces on Livemocha that afforded intercultural content. The research team used this method to get a general view of the participants' opinions regarding Livemocha, culture and learning.

This survey was divided in three sections: personal information, culture, and Livemocha. It consisted of 18 questions including data of personal information. In the section of personal information students were asked to provide information about gender, age, name and semester they were taking. The cultural section consisted of six questions; two open questions, two hierarchy questions, one multiple answer question and a single-answer question. Finally, the section of Livemocha consisted of three single-option questions, two multiple-choice questions and two open-answer questions. In total, this survey had 13 questions about the experience of the participants on Livemocha and five concerning demographic information.

Focus group. A focus group is a type of group interview with defined features in terms of proposal, size, and composition. Usually the objective is to enhance the participants' interaction with each other so they can discuss their opinions and ideas. There is a moderator who is in charge of the discussion. His role is to stimulate and control the debate and exchange of ideas (Freitas, Oliveira, Jenkins & Popjoy, 1998; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).

We, as the research team, decided to use a focus group because of the advantages in time and scope. Instead of interviewing every single participant, in the focus group sessions more students participated and their interactions with each other generated data about opinions, attitudes and perceptions of Livemocha and its intercultural dimension. The discussion in the focus groups was a key element to reflect students' experience and to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' ICC. We divided the participants in two groups in order to hold the focus group session. Thus, two focus group sessions were held: the first one with eight students and the second one with 10 students. The preparation and construction of the protocol for the focus group sessions included the piloting of the protocol with two groups of students; one from Universidad del Valle and the other from Universidad Javeriana.

Each focus group lasted one hour and 45 minutes and was audio and video recorded. The focus group protocol ([Appendix E](#)) was divided into four sections: the first one dealt with generalities about the use of Livemocha as part of a formal language course for a teacher education program. The second section of the focus group focused on the learning theories underlying the design, lessons, courses and activities of Livemocha. The third section aimed at exploring the students' perceptions of the site in regards the intercultural dimension of learning. In the final section of the focus group the students shared their opinions about affordances of SNSLLs on formal education contexts, the influence of Livemocha on them as language learners

and future languages teachers and their general opinion about this site. In total there were 26 questions all of them open and focused on Livemocha and the students' behaviors on the site.

Screen recordings. Screen recordings were video archives that recorded the students' actions on the computer during the Livemocha sessions. We used this technique because we needed to keep track of the students' online actions on Livemocha and their chat conversations with members of the site. This instrument gave us important data about the presence of ICC in the students' online behaviors and voices (chat conversations, order of activities, coping with intercultural issues, understanding cultural elements). The recordings also provided information about the semiotic design of this SNSLL and the presence of cultural content across the different multimodal texts available on the platform.

Observation and journals. Observation is a conscious, systematic and reflective process which intends to describe people, events, behaviors, settings, artifacts, routines and the social reality around the research context (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2010). Through observation researchers are able to explore, describe and understand human relationships, to identify behavioral patterns and issues and to generate hypotheses for further studies (Grinnell, 1997; Patton, 2002; Jorgensen, 1989 and Daymon & Holloway, 2010).

We opted for this data collection technique because we needed to understand the participants' practices on Livemocha and their behaviors in class during their experience with the online site. Moreover, observations allowed us to notice patterns in the students' actions, their opinions about the site and the way they reacted to Livemocha's activities, chat tool and lessons.

Observation unfolded in two ways. We used the screen recording technique as a way to observe students' virtual behaviors. Likewise, we used field notes to record our observations of students' behaviors while they were working on Livemocha. Each time the Livemocha session

took place every Wednesday the course professor and I focused our observations on the students' behaviors, commentaries, attitudes, acts and work in class. The field notes were used later to compose the narratives in the researcher journal that both the main researcher and I wrote about the students' work. In my particular case, I followed a general format to write my journal which consisted of writing the date of the session, the activity and commentaries about the phenomenon that I observed. This instrument gave me insights about the way students engaged with Livemocha.

Data analysis

Type of analysis. Due to the nature of the study, the research situation, the instruments used to gather information, and the type of data collected, the analysis approach was qualitative, although some quantification techniques were adopted. I intended to combine an inductive and deductive type of analysis because in part some of the analytical categories were already established since I adopted Byram's ICC model; however, I was open to explore possible emergent categories.

In order to establish the presence of intercultural elements of Livemocha, I created two matrixes including Byram's ICC components. The first was the ICC matrix (as I named it) which generated results in terms of frequencies, patterns and themes from the data collected. Regarding the multimodal nature of Livemocha, I designed another matrix where I categorized and included the multimodal elements of the web site to later analyze them and establish intersemiotic relationships among them (see the sub section of multimodal analysis). In the next subsections I explain the process of systematizing, organizing and processing data, the creation of the ICC matrix and its application on the collected information.

Systematization and first glance to the data. The first step to approach the data was the systematization and organization of all the information. In the next lines, I explain how all this data was organized and the type of processing used on each instrument.

Learning logs: After each class the students filled up their learning logs, all the files were saved automatically on an online Google Drive folder which had the name of each participant. This process lasted all the semester and when the English course finished the research group only had to go to the students' online folder and select the learning logs to examine the relevant data.

Survey: The students developed an online survey using the online application e-encuesta.com. This site processed the students' answers and generated automatically a report of results. These results were stored on the online application. E-encuesta created two types of final reports: a general report of the whole group of people who developed the survey and individual reports of the participants' answers.

The survey reports collected all the information about the participants' demographic data. The open answers and the students' choices gave information about the participants' view of culture and ICC. The application tabulated all the student's answers quantitatively, except for the open answers. The open answers were analyzed in the ICC matrix.

Focus group: Both the video and audio recordings were checked to establish their quality. It was decided that the video recordings were going to be used to do the transcription. See Table 8 below with details about the characteristics of the recordings.

Table 8

Organization of videos of the focus group

Focus group	Shift	Participants	Length	Format
Session 1	Morning	3	1:55:59	Video

Session 2	Morning	8	1:29:56	Video
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Screen recordings: The videos were organized in the students' folders on Google Drive.

They were later downloaded and organized by name, date, length on a matrix. This helped me establish the level of participation of students since in some cases they did not upload their recordings or did not record. In some other occasions because of technical issues students lost their recordings.

Sample selection. Focusing on particular data to compose a case study was not an easy task. I had to simplify the information collected and select the participants that could generate and illustrate rich categories. With more than 100 pages of learning logs, 15 statistical reports of the surveys, three hours and a half of focus group recording with their respective 50 pages of transcription and 294 hours of screen recordings, the task of finding evidence of intercultural presence in the participants' voices in this sea of data would have been overwhelming. For this reason, a sample selection process was necessary in order to limit the data to be examined and to deepen into the explanation of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. Here I explain how I selected the sample of participants and data.

Participants' selection. I opted for selecting ten students, as I explain above, because of the amount of data collected. The criteria for selecting them included that they had completed the course, attended to the focus group session, completed the survey about culture, completed more than ten learning logs and screen recordings. The sample was selected after a first examination of the data gathered. In order to achieve this, the research group created a matrix (see Table 9) where all information collected from the participants was displayed and compared.

Table 9*Systematization of data collected from participants*

	Screen recordings			Learning logs		Surveys				Focus groups			
Student	Recording #	Date	Length	Date	Yes/No	Yes/No	Type	Date	Number of surveys	Yes/No	Session	Date	Length

Selection of data per participant. In order to organize the data in a way that would facilitate the identification of the components of ICC proposed by Byram, I created several matrixes for each instrument.

In regards to the learning logs, I looked for the students' voices about culture, online contact on Livemocha, cultural knowledges and perceptions about the usefulness of this site in their intercultural process. To get these fragments I read extensively every student's learning log (these learning logs were chronologically ordered) and then I selected the important information regarding the cultural dimension. I focused mainly on the questions that asked students to write about their perceptions of Livemocha, problems experience during the Livemocha session, the use of the chat, and their cultural contact with other members of the site (see Table 10).

Table 10*Selection of information from learning logs*

Student name	Date	Question in log	Answer

With regards to the survey I choose all the open answers and moved them to the matrix created for each student. Doing so, I could select important data about the students' perceptions, opinions and reflections regarding Livemocha in order to relate them to the descriptors present in Byram's model (see Table 11). A similar process was followed to organize the data obtained from the focus group. Discursive excerpts related to topics such as culture, interaction and communicative exchanges held on Livemocha were systematized in another matrix. Concerning the analysis of the video recordings, I designed a matrix that allowed me to record information about the students' chat interactions since I concluded that it was the best space where elements of ICC could be observed.

Table 11

Matrix for selection of information from survey

Topic of the survey	Question number	Students' answers
Culture	1.	

Moreover, the aim of using screen recordings was to analyze the students' chat interactions with other members of Livemocha. In order to select the chat conversations and videos necessary, I selected 21 videos, two per each participant (except on the case of one participant because she only had one video containing chat conversations with other Livemocha members). Among these videos, I choose one video of the first weeks of the course and another one of the last weeks of the course to see a possible evolution in the participants' intercultural perceptions and behaviors in the chat. After the selection, the chat conversations were transcribed with a total number of 46 chat interactions.

Procedure of analysis after the systematization of data. Once the data were arranged mostly in matrixes, I conducted two analytic processes based on the two research questions. The first analysis procedure aimed at answering if the participants of the study developed ICC through the use of Livemocha and to discover the elements of intercultural competence observed in their interactions on the website and their reflections about their learning experience. This first analysis consisted of using a matrix where excerpts from the different instruments were grouped and then counted in order to quantify the number of occurrences.

The second analysis addressed the question regarding the presence of the intercultural dimension in Livemocha's semiotic contents. To conduct this analysis, I followed Alvarez's (2016d) method for multimodal semiotic analysis. In the following paragraphs, I describe the two stages of analysis mentioned above.

Creation of matrixes to examine evidence of ICC in data collected (Survey, focus group, learning log, screen recording). I designed a matrix based on Byram's intercultural skills and descriptors (see Theoretical framework). This matrix (see Table 12) included information about the name of the student, a number assigned to each statement uttered by the participants, the question (when the data came from a survey, focus group log or chat conversation) and a column for the excerpt or response from the participant. On the upper-right hand of the table I placed the components of ICC (e.g. attitudes) followed below by the descriptors that compose it. The purpose of the matrix was to match the students' voices (commentaries, reflections and declarations) to the corresponding ICC descriptor they connected to. A matrix was created for each ICC component and served to analyze the survey, focus groups, and learning logs and students chat interactions. The complete matrix with all the ICC components appears in the section of appendixes (see [Appendix F](#)).

After having examined all data doing discourse analysis in search of descriptions, reflections and ideas about the cultural dimension, several excerpts were extracted from the data collection instruments and classified in the different matrixes of ICC. The next step was to calculate the frequency of themes and patterns by component of ICC and descriptors within each component (see Table 13).

Table 12*Use of ICC matrix*

Name	Date	Declaration #	Question #	Excerpt	Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own				
					(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable	(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices	(c) willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment	(d) readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence	(e) readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction
XX	Sep/2/15	1	What did you learn about your own and other cultures from your experience on Livemocha?	Yes, they were very interesting for me because I always want to know what kind of strategies use foreign people to learn Spanish and what kind of difficulties they have in the learning process		Yes, they were very interesting for me because I always want to know what kind of strategies use foreign people to learn Spanish and what kind of difficulties they have in the learning process			

Table 13*Analysis matrix for ICC descriptors*

		GRAPHIC: CULTURAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA(Attitudes)				
		(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable.	(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices	(c) willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment	(d) readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence	(e) readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communicati on and interaction
Total of Intercultural declarations: 79	Total of intercultural declaration per descriptor	15	51	1	0	1
TOTAL OF DECLARATIO NS PER SKILL	120	68				

As we see, the matrix generated the frequencies that allowed me to discover the patterns of skills and descriptors present in the different data collected. Below each descriptor we can also see the number of declarations that matched for each descriptor. After having done this process with all the three Intercultural matrixes, I created statistical graphics to illustrate these results which was the fifth step of the application of the matrix.

Triangulation. Since I examine the presence of each of the components of Byram's ICC model in each instrument, the next step was to establish how each of the components and their descriptors compared across the instruments. For instance, I compared how the component of attitudes and its descriptors were present in the learning log, the survey, the focus group and the chat sessions. By doing this, it was possible to conduct data triangulation (Rothbauer, 2008; Bogdan, & Biklen, 2006) and strengthen the validity of the findings. The process of triangulation permitted me to determine research categories which were connected to components of ICC that were more frequent in students' utterances.

Multimodal semiotic analysis of Livemocha

The second analysis conducted was a multimodal semiotic analysis of the design of Livemocha. In order to examine the website from a multimodal perspective, it was necessary to adopt elements from the social semiotic approach introduced above in the section of theoretical framework. I followed the analytic proposal of Alvarez (2016d) to examine multimodal texts. His proposal consists of four steps: Examination of conditions of productions and use, identification of base units, description of modes and their functions, and analysis of intersemiotic relationships (Figure 7). The four steps proposed by Alvarez are not linear, as he says: "Although I conducted the analysis following the steps in a linear way with a specific point of departure, Figure 2 shows that the text provides different points of entry and possibly various

manners of combining the four steps” (Alvarez, 2016d; p.102). This procedure may be conducted in different order and can be applied to different kinds of texts. I decided to use Alvarez’s proposal because of its focus on multimodal elements and its applicability to websites such as Livemocha.

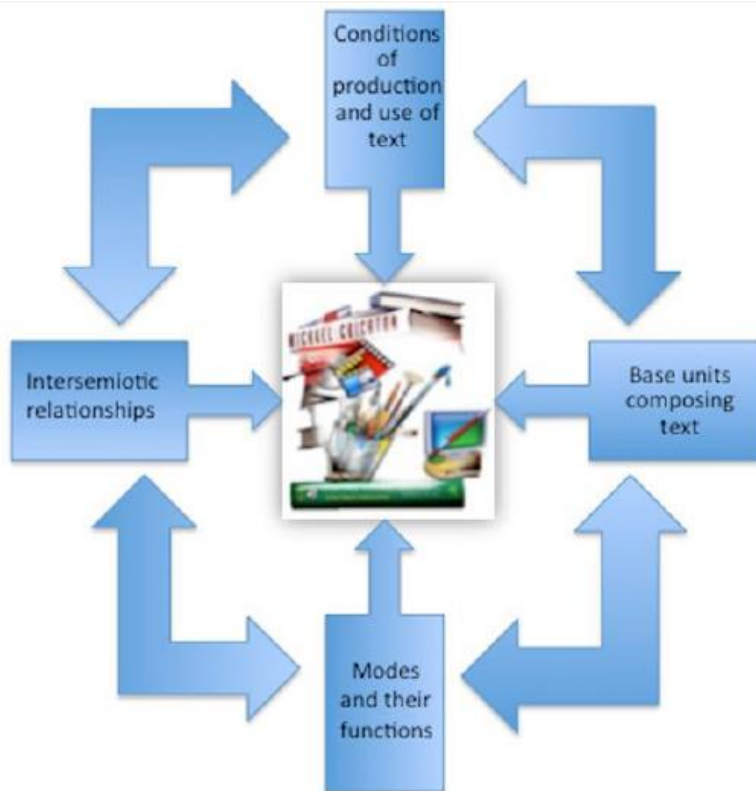


Figure 7. Steps of multimodal analysis (Alvarez, 2016d. P. 102)

Steps in the process.

1. Conditions of production and use. In this stage of the analysis the researchers are required to explain the social, cultural, historical and materials conditions under which a multimodal text is produced and disseminated. In the analysis I provide below, I described the generalities regarding Livemocha, its pedagogical and social affordances based on the experience with the participants of the study (taken from the focus group, the survey and the learning logs) and what appears on the About Us section of Livemocha. Particularly, I depart from the concept of English as a lingua franca and CMC in language teaching. I focused on the concepts of telecollaboration, tandem learning and imagined communities and discussed their interrelationship on Livemocha.

2. Identification of base units. In this stage of the analysis, the analyst identifies and describes the base units of the multimodal ensemble. As presented above, base units are the elements present in all the pages or sections of a multimodal document. In the analysis, I identified the base units in different lessons reaching the conclusion that the semiotic design of the website is repetitive. As will be seen below in the second part of the Findings section, I focus particularly on the lesson *Foundations W9 Holiday Celebration with Friends*. Furthermore, I studied all the components of this lesson. Doing this action allowed me to discover some of the patterns of cultural knowledge and manifestations of the intercultural dimension present on Livemocha. I studied navigational aids, iconography and linguistic elements that directed the position and actions of the user within the lessons.

3. Analysis of modes and functions. In this stage, the analyst establishes the semiotic modes and their functions in the multimodal composition. To identify modes and explore their functions on the semiotic design of Livemocha I used the classification of The New London

Group (1996). They divide the modes in five categories: linguistic, visual, spatial, audio and gestural. Each mode includes specific elements that enhance the creation of meaning. In the case of the lesson of Livemocha that I explored, I listed and then grouped the different modes present and identified their navigational, pedagogical and interactional functions by watching how the students used these modes in their interaction with the site.

In order to identify and analyze the base units, modes and their functions on the language lesson W9, I followed the next steps. First, I took screenshots of all the different slides presented in the language lesson (Figure 4). In total, I analyzed 47 screenshots. These screenshots show the material used by the site and its composition in all the spaces of the lesson (vocabulary flashcards, examples, exercises and the slideshow used in the introductory video). After having these screenshots, I organized them according to the section on the lesson. Second, I identified the presence of intercultural aspects such as promotion of intercultural attitudes, cultural knowledge (declarative or procedural) and indicators of the skills of interpreting and relating in the screenshots and in the activities of the lesson W9. Third, I identified the base units of each section, its modes of communication and the function of each base unit (Table 14). With the aim of deepening into the analysis, I also transcribed the audio material used in the lesson (introduction video and listening exercises) and classified the types of exercises and communicative tasks used in lesson W9.

Table 14

Example of identification of base units, modes and functions

Base units	Modes	Function
Vocabulary ítem (Big, black, boldface type font)	Linguistic-spatial	Introducing new vocabulary

Picture	Visual	To present and define the vocabulary item
Off-voice	Audio	To provide oral representation of the lexical item presented
Space between the elements of the screen	Spatial	Emphasis on the picture
Background behind pictures	Spatial-Visual	Emphasis on the pictures- Aesthetic (white color)
Audio command button (Icon of a speaker)	Spatial-Visual	Controlling the reproduction of the pronunciation of the vocabulary
Command buttons (Medium, blue and White Font on White or blue background located at the right lower corner of the screen)	Visual-Spatial	To stop the video and continue to the next section of vocabulary or to change of section when the video has finished

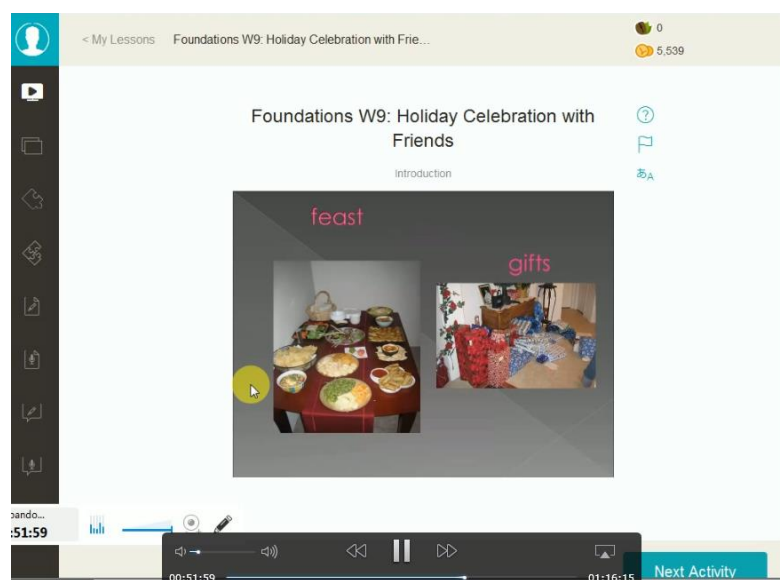


Figure 8. Example of screenshot used in this analysis

4. Intersemiotic relationships. The last stage of the analysis requires that the analyst identify the relationship between the different modes of communication that compose a semiotic design. I identified and analyzed the meanings and the semiotic relationships made by the different pages that compose one lesson of Livemocha. In exploring the semiotic spaces or pages of Livemocha I could read the underlying message emerging from the relationship of the semiotic elements of the lesson. I explored all these intersemiotic relationships in terms of Halliday's (1978) functions (ideational, interpersonal and textual). By developing the analysis I could discover the semiotic coherence of the multimodal elements present on the Livemocha's lesson and I could also identify elements that indicate how the (inter)cultural dimension manifests in the semiotic design on the website.

This section has presented in detail the process of data analysis conducted. There were two main processes of data analysis focused on two sets of data. The first one was the analysis of the voices of the students by looking at the several instruments such as the surveys, logs, screen recordings and the focus group. The second analysis concentrated on the website itself and its semiotic design. It is in this part of the section where a multimodal analysis was instrumental. Below I present the first set of findings which target the analysis of the participants' voices. The second part of the section addresses the semiotic analysis of Livemocha.

Results and discussion

The results that I present here answer two research questions of this study. The first one, regarding the presence of the intercultural dimension on the site Livemocha; and the second one, concerning the development of ICC in the participants of the study. I have divided this section into two main parts. In the first part I rely on Alvarez's (2016) model for multimodal semiotic analysis in order to unveil the intercultural dimension on Livemocha. In the second part, I discuss the presence of ICC in the participants' voices according to Byram's (1997) ICC model. In the next section, I start with the multimodal analysis of one of Livemocha's learning lessons.

The intercultural dimension in the semiotic design of Livemocha: A multimodal social semiotic analysis

In this section, I will examine if the intercultural dimension materializes in the semiotic design (content and structure) of the website and also what elements of Byram's model can be identified. Here, I conduct a multimodal semiotic analysis following Alvarez's (2016c) proposal to analyze multimodal texts. In what follows, I start by analyzing the presence of intercultural elements on Livemocha's semiotic design.

The intercultural dimension on Livemocha. One of the sources of the purposeful integration of the intercultural dimension on Livemocha is the information found on Livemocha's blog and information pages such as About Us and Frequently Asked Questions. Initially, Livemocha does demonstrate that there is a relationship between language and culture in the process of language learning. The Livemocha blog more explicitly puts forth that in Livemocha: "We are dedicated to helping individuals, corporations, libraries and schools remove the barriers to effective communication and cultural exchange" (About Us Livemocha).

In the page of Frequently Asked Questions, the blog explains that in the Usage section, students "Learn new language concepts (grammar, culture tips, etc.) using a series of flashcards. The flashcards will include language rules, example, etc." This relationship between language and culture can also be observed in some Livemocha spaces such as the introductory video, the vocabulary section, the examples provided and the communicative tasks assigned. In these spaces, the site showed native speakers discussing about cultural topics such as the super bowl (*Lesson W10 It Could Mean?*), a very famous American movie, the Titanic (*Lesson V9 Is he the one who was in Titanic?*) or showing slides of some important celebrations around the world (*Lesson W9 Celebrating Christmas with Friends*).

The evidence suggests that the cultural component is indeed considered as a component of language learning on Livemocha. What needs further exploration is what kinds of cultural aspects are targeted and if their treatment underlies the development of intercultural competence. In order to account for this, I examine a sample of lessons (Table 15) and focus on unit W9 Holiday celebration with friends with the purpose of looking into how the semiotic design of the website contributes in deploying (inter)cultural content.

Table 15

Sample of lessons analyzed and their cultural topics

Lesson	Cultural topic
Lesson: W9 Holiday celebration with friends	Celebrations (Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannukah, Chinese New Year)
Lesson: V10 It could mean?	Super Bowl
Lesson: X2 I am excited about studying abroad in Spain this summer	Study abroad processes
Lesson: V9 Is he the one who was in Titanic?	Movie the Titanic
Lesson: W2 How could she tell my secret?	Revealing someone else's' secrets: Reactions

As we can observe in the table, these units had cultural content regarding facts, behaviors and products. As an example, I present the analysis in detail of one of lesson *W9 Holiday celebration with friends*. This analysis appears on the next subsection and follows the steps proposed by Alvarez (2016).

Multimodal social semiotic analysis of the (inter) cultural components of Livemocha

Conditions of production and use. Livemocha is an online site dedicated to language learning in a format of social networking site. The conditions of production and use of this online platform displays some issues related with a common language around the world, the role of virtual education and social interaction in the XXIst Century. Here, I analyze how Livemocha corresponds to a sociocultural context characterized by a push for English as a lingua franca, the integration of new technologies in language teaching (particularly online education) and new ways of socialization brought about by online environments.

Livemocha reflects the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca. In fact, Livemocha's general information appears in English. Also, the sociocultural context in which Livemocha is immersed demonstrates that English is imposed as a lingua franca. The domains covered by globalization include education, technology, commerce, culture and entertainment (Garcia, 2009; Alvarez, 2016b). Consequently, Livemocha, as other SNSLLs emerged as the result of this English-spoken society that seeks to impose English as the predominant language. The content and the pedagogical orientation of Livemocha and other SNSLLs portrayed a western view of language teaching and learning, as has been pointed out by Alvarez (2014a).

As a matter of fact, Clark and Gruba (2010) stated that in Livemocha some learning material was just “translated” from English without previous pedagogical consideration: “The design of the lesson content did not seem to be appropriate for the needs of the learners. Translating decontextualised classroom materials across a range of languages goes against the work of most pedagogical theory” (p. 5). This shows that some of the material available on Livemocha was adapted from a predetermined syllabus base on the English language typical grammar topics and did not take into account some cultural or contextual needs inherent in some

of the languages taught on the platform. This choice of material provides evidence about the dominant role of English and the logic of learning and teaching it in SNSLLs.

Livemocha fits within the context of a global trend towards the development of online education. Particularly language teaching has been impacted by virtual education and the use of new technologies. Since the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, the affordances for online language learning have been expanded (Alvarez, 2014a; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Some of the new possibilities are the secularization of education, autonomy of learners and the creation of virtual learning communities (Anderson, 1991; Alvarez, 2016b; Norton 2000, 2001; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

Since Livemocha was based on the affordances of Web 2.0 technologies, the type of education offered turned around virtual environments that enhanced dialogue among people from different origins (Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Chotel, 2012; Potolia & Zourou, 2013). The creation of identity and the types of interaction online have evolved and allowed the emergence of telecollaboration and tandem learning among users of different languages (Livingstone, 2008; Maloney, 2007; Thorne, 2010). Under the conditions of these learning tendencies, users are able to support each other and establish online contact with other people within the frame of equality and mutual help.

Web 2.0 technologies hoisted the advent of social networking sites exclusively dedicated to language learning. In the case of Livemocha, the interconnectivity among users and the learning affordances of the website have also changed the ways of socialization among people. This change leads us to the third issue here studied: how Livemocha appears in the context of societies where social interaction has diversified.

Livemocha addressed the concerns of communication among users and the possibility of socialization in nontraditional spaces such as online environments. By adopting the semiotic structure of SNS like Facebook, Livemocha adapts to the dynamics of the social web in terms of providing users with diversified forms of socialization, interaction and identity construction. Livemocha emerges at a time where areas such as applied linguistics and particularly disciplines such as CALL/CMC advocate for more socially oriented views to language learning (Reinhardt, 2012, Álvarez, 2015; 2016c). Particularly, Livemocha stressed its social nature in its online design, the interactive tools and the learning spaces (see the previous section of results). To illustrate this point, Livemocha, in its section of About Us, emphasized the role of global communication, online practice and interaction with native speakers of the target languages (Livemocha, 2016).

Given the social nature of Livemocha, the site also offered a controversial view about the role of native speakers (which in part relates to the global dominance of English language). One of Livemocha's main promises was the possibility of establishing contact with native speakers of the target language (Street-mart language learning, 2009). The role that Livemocha assigns to native speakers has discrepancies within current language teaching trends (Mahboob, 2010; Cook, 2002; Alvarez, 2014a). Among these flaws is native-speakerism. Several authors (Holliday, 2005; Pennycook, 2000, Kubota, 2001) have pointed at the contestable "innate" skill of native speakers to teach their mother language and their limitations in connecting interculturally with other people. Nonetheless, the interaction of native and nonnative speakers on Livemocha allowed people to engage in relationships of mutual learning support and create an imagined social affiliation.

Despite the criticism about the promotion of native speakerism, Livemocha was successful in creating a sense of belonging among its members and to attract more and more people during the time that it was available. The statistics and length operational time are proof of its success (Brick, 2011a; 2011b; Clark & Gruba, 2010, Zourou, 2013; Chotel, 2012). Consequently, the members of Livemocha could be considered an imagined community. Alvarez (2014a) states, that on SNSLL learners from different origins who are able to establish a spiritual link based on learning experiences and mutual support develop alliances and become part of an imagined community of transnational language learners. This engagement in imagined communities leads to the investment in the target language, the negotiation and transformation of the users' imagined identity (Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011).

The emergence of Livemocha was informed by the different social and cultural changes that technological development brought about. English has become a profitable industry and Livemocha, taking into account the role of English as a global language, found an innovative way to connect people and profit from language learning online. This connection between speakers and materials through language courses and interaction on Livemocha created the potential for developing intercultural competencies.

Moreover, the use of social media, particularly chat tools in the design of Livemocha allowed learners to establish intercultural exchanges. In fact, Livemocha promoted the interaction among learners and encouraged users to help others through revisions and advice. Although Livemocha's social media gave way to intercultural exchange, we need to remember that this exchange is not the same as developing intercultural competencies. Developing ICC skills requires a process of decentering and reflection that is not achieved just by simple communicational exchanges (Byram, 2008; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013a). Therefore, we need to

understand how the relationship of contents and functions permitted learners to display intercultural skills. In the following subsection I analyze the relationship between the semiotic design of Livemocha and the intercultural dimension of this site.

Identification and analysis of base units and modes of communication. The second and third steps of Alvarez's (2016c) method for multimodal semiotic analysis consist of the identification and functioning of base units and modes of communication. In this section, I describe the semiotic composition of some spaces on the lesson: *W9 Holiday Celebration with Friends* and analyze its functions and meanings.

First, we need to understand that Livemocha is a big multimodal space composed of subordinate semiotic clusters (Language courses, levels and lessons). In this case, I focus on one language lesson and its multimodal composition. A language lesson as a whole can be considered a semiotic cluster that is divided into other smaller semiotic clusters, which on the website are called sections. Each language lesson is divided in learning sections (Introduction, vocabulary, usage, practice and production tasks; read/write, read/speak, listen/write and listen/speak). Each of these sections is in turn composed by elements that we have defined above as base units (Bateman, 2008). Hence, I start by identifying the basic elements of a regular Livemocha lesson (semiotic clusters, modes, and base units). Then, I analyze and discuss the types and functions of the modes of communication on the lesson W9.

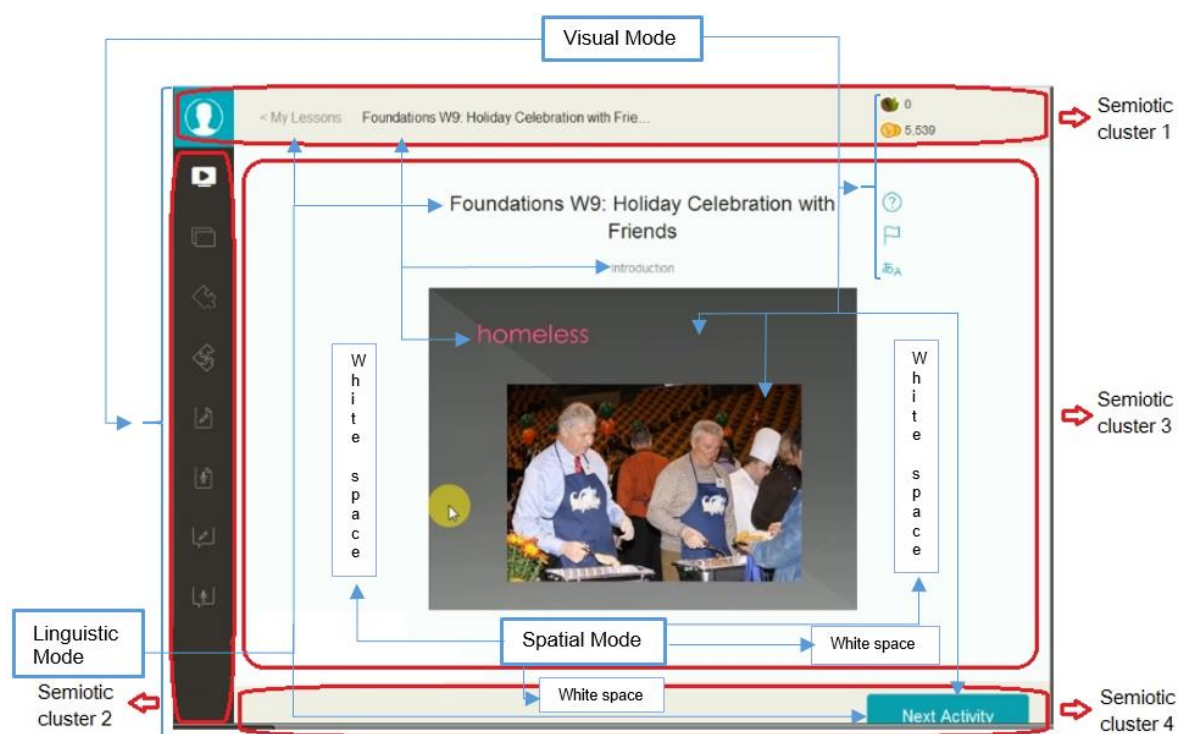


Figure 9. Semiotic clusters and modes of communication on Livemocha

In Figure 9 we can observe the semiotic division of each section in Livemocha's language lessons. The sections are divided into four major semiotic clusters. Cluster 1 is dedicated to display the user's identity, to provide access to the user menu, to show the lesson in course and to exhibit the learners' rewards in Livemocha. These rewards are showed in terms of Mocha points (small brown fruits) and Mocha credits (coins) with their respective amount next to them. In the other sections of the lessons, an update icon and a progression bar appear next to the lesson title.

The semiotic cluster number two locates users in the language lesson and gives them the option to navigate within the lesson sections. Each section is represented with an icon. The semiotic cluster number three presents the learning material to study the lessons and develop the exercises. In this cluster, we find the title of the learning lesson, the name of the current section

within the unit, the learning main element and three support buttons at the right side of the semiotic cluster three.

Finally, the semiotic cluster number four offers interactive options for users to advance, continue or leave the current activity. Learners can decide by clicking on one of the small command buttons dedicated to this function. This cluster is located at the bottom of the screen. All the semiotic clusters are divided by a different background color behind the visual and linguistic elements on the screen. This distribution of base units and semiotic clusters is part of the semiotic structure of Livemocha's lessons. On Table 16 I present the functions of each base unit and the modes present on Figure 10.

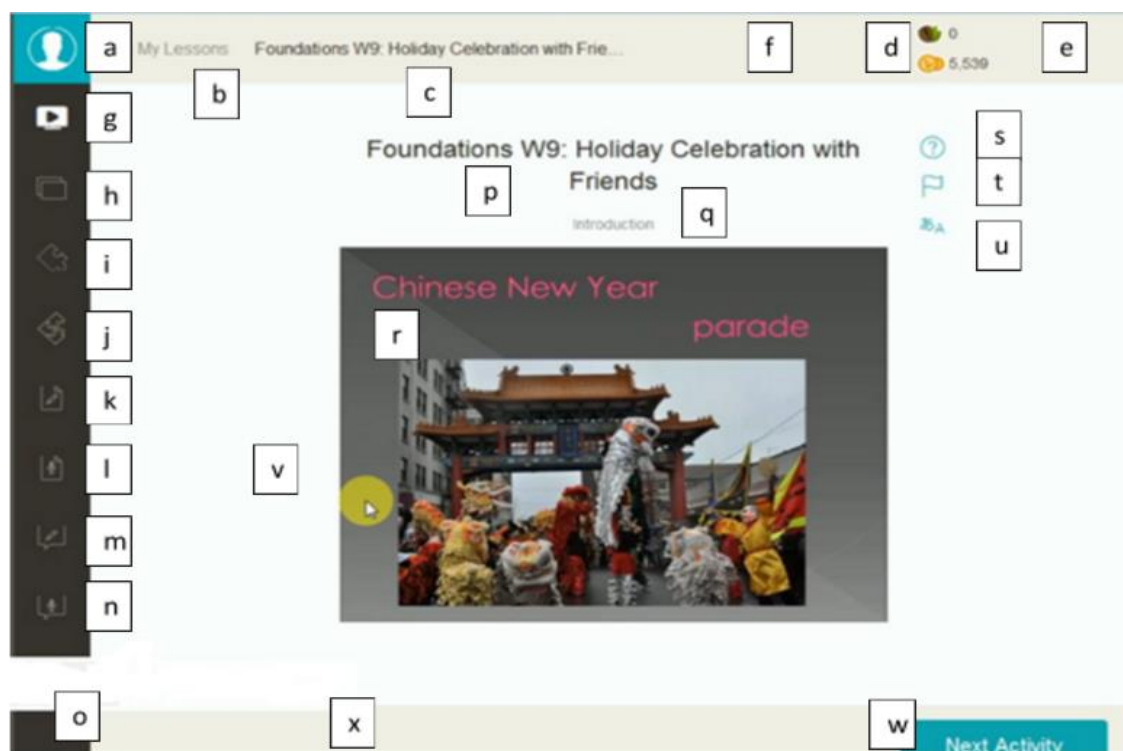


Figure 10. Base units on Livemocha

As we could observe in Figure 9, there are three main modes of communication present on Livemocha's lessons: linguistic, visual and spatial. These modes are composed of base units that enhanced Livemocha's semiotic design. On Figure 10 above, we identify all the base units on a regular Livemocha lesson. These base units appear described on table 16 with their functions and they are classified according to their semiotic cluster. Most of base units were visual elements that guided learners through the learning content of Livemocha. The linguistic base units identified the spaces on the lesson and provided pedagogical information regarding the topic of the lesson.

Table 16

Base units and modes on Figure 6

Semiotic cluster	Base units	Mode	Function
User and unit information	User's profile photo (a)	Visual	To display the visual identity of users
	Icon of users' lessons (b)	Linguistic-Visual	To provide access to learner's lessons
	Title of the language lesson (c)	Linguistic	To display the name and code of each lesson and to contextualize the lessons in terms of linguistic or cultural information
	Mocha points (d)	Visual	To show users their reward in mocha points and to encourage them to get more points
	Livemocha credits (e)	Visual	To show the users' reward in Livemocha credits and to encourage them to get more credits
	Background (f)	Spatial	To focus the users' attention on the learning material at the center of the screen

Unit progression	Section Icons (g-n)	Visual	To allow users to navigate within the section of the lesson
	Background (o)	Visual-Spatial	To show users that this is a separate space where they can move within the language lesson
Section learning material	Title of the lesson (p)	Lingusitic-Spatial-Visual	To contextualize the learning material as part of a language lesson. Use of pink color in title to call attention to the topic of the unit
	Title of the lesson section (q)	Lingusitic-Spatial-Visual	To contextualize the contents on the slideshow and to inform about the topic of the lesson
	Slideshow (r)	Visual-Linguistic	To introduce the lesson through a show of slides related to the main topic of the lesson
	Support options (s-u)	Visual	To offer support options online for the users (Help, language, translation)
	Background (v)	Spatial-Visual	To focus the learners' attention and make them aware of the different spaces on the screen
Interactive elements of the lesson section	Command buttons (w)	Visual-Linguistic-Spatial	To provide interactive options to continue the activities or sections of the lessons
	Background (x)	Visual-Spatial	To focus the learners' attention and make them aware of the different spaces on the screen

In semiotic terms, the main modes of communication used in Livemocha were linguistic, visual and spatial. Figures 9 and 10 show how these modes interacted in the semiotic design of language lessons. In what follows, I explain how the modes of communication created meaning within Livemocha structure.

The first mode used on Livemocha was the linguistic mode. On the lessons, the functions of this mode were to identify the lesson and its spaces, to provide linguistic explanations and

input and to guide the exercises and activities. The linguistic mode appeared in written and oral texts. In written texts, the linguistic mode used some semiotic resources such as type of font, color (which also belong to the visual mode) and spatial distribution. In the next paragraphs, I explain the functions of the written design.

One of the elements that enhanced the functions of written text was font. The font was used depending on the type of information presented. On Livemocha the predominant font type used to identify the lessons and spaces was Arial (Figure 10). The site linotype.com describes Arial as a family of typefaces versatile for all-purpose (reports, presentations, magazines, newspapers and promotions). In this sense, Livemocha used a typeface easy to read, casual and comfortable. Therefore, the choice of Arial was appropriate for users to make them feel at ease with the language content and get their attention. On Figure 10 we can also see other type of font, Century Gothic in the slideshow. This typeface “is useful for headlines and general display work and for small quantities of text, particularly in advertising” (linotype.com). For this reason, Century Gothic is appropriate for the slideshow elements; it is easy to read and is useful for short vocabulary items. The selection of these typefaces creates an adequate environment of learning and addresses learners’ need to easily understand the new vocabulary.

According to Van Leeuwen (2006), typeface relies on weight, expansion, slope, curvature, connectivity, orientation and regularity. These typographic elements determine the use and affordances of font and allow readers to create meaning from the written design. Arial and Century Gothic are typefaces with a simple, curved design that communicate a casual appealing style. As Van Leeuwen (2006) states: “Roundedness can come to signify ‘smooth’, ‘soft’, ‘natural’, ‘organic’, ‘maternal’ (p. 411), appropriate for young learners and beginners.

Regarding these elements, on Livemocha there were two factors that characterized the use of font: size and thickness. In this sense, big font was used for displaying titles in the semiotic cluster 1 (See Figures 9 and 10), lexical items and examples within the language lessons (Figure 11). Medium font appeared in the options of the exercises and in the descriptions of lexical elements. Finally, small font was utilized for details, instructions, grammatical explanations, options in some exercises and identification of the lessons.

In these cases, we see how the type and size of letter showed relevant information. Big font was utilized to highlight some elements and to help users to navigate on the site. For instance, big font was used for examples and exercises while small font was used for grammatical explanations. Similarly, color and thickness were used to classify the information on the language lessons. Color and thickness of letters served to categorize and present information and to facilitate the navigability. In this sense, colored big bold font was used to emphasize on important and navigational elements within the language lessons.

In general, on Livemocha bold letters are used for titles, lexical elements, definitions, examples and exercises (see Figures 10 and 11). Similarly, color was used in slideshows and in videos to present the lesson and the vocabulary to contextualize the lesson (Figure 10). For instance, in Figure 10, the words Chinese New Year and Parade appear big and in magenta color. This semiotic design was chosen to highlight the meaning of the vocabulary and to make it appealing.

On Livemocha the font had a semiotic intention. In some spaces font was wide and thick for a pedagogical purpose. As Van Leeuwen (2006) and Martin and White (2005) stressed it, the types of font, the space between letters and the typographic design have the potential to give

prominence to certain elements within a text. Van Leeuwen (2006) describes the communicative affordances of typeface and the myriad of messages that the typographic design can express. Some types of font can communicate seriousness, freshness, salience, relevance and more (Van Leeuwen, 2006). Livemocha used the typographic design to create a comfortable atmosphere that allowed learners to feel free to interact and explore the site. In addition, the color of fonts and background provided an intrinsic connection with the learning material and the pedagogic intention of the site.

In general terms, the combination of font and color indicate a relationship between multimodal semiotic elements and the cultural dimension. Our interpretation of color and typography are culturally constructed. For instance, the semiotic design of Livemocha materializes a western pattern of reading (up to down, left to right). As Kress (2010) states it, semiotic resources are not universal and their meaning depend on the cultural lens they are seen through. Furthermore, Livemocha uses a combination of semiotic elements drawing on the cultural patterns that characterize users-language learners of Western countries.

Alongside with font, numbers were also used on Livemocha's language lessons (Figure 10, elements d, e). Numbers appeared on upper the right side of the screen and showed users the rewards they had obtained for their work. Additionally, at the end of the sections of vocabulary, usage, practice the site displayed statistics with a summary the work done in the sections and the results of the exercises done in the practice section.

Another semiotic resource used on Livemocha was audio recordings. These oral documents aimed at preparing learners for the new topics of the unit, presenting input of pronunciation and offering practice opportunities in some exercises. Through the use of audio

recordings Livemocha allowed users to develop oral skills and to interact with the site. Nevertheless, Livemocha's semiotic structure did not rely only on linguistic modes of communication. The visual mode was the most used in this SNSLL. The use of visual base units is discussed below.

On Livemocha the visual mode appeared in the form of pictures, drawings, icons and colors. The pictures supported the learning lessons (in the vocabulary section), helped to navigate the site (icons in the navigation semiotic cluster) and presented cultural elements (in the introduction videos). Most lessons used pictures in their introduction (as slideshows), vocabulary sections (flashcards), in all listening activities and in some production activities. Pictures and drawings combined elements of color, size and location. In this respect, almost all the pictures on Livemocha were in full color.

The combination of color, size and spatial distribution was used to highlight lexical elements, to attract the learners and to provide meaningful input during the lessons. We can observe this relationship in Figure 11 where a picture of potato latke (a special food) is showed to illustrate an important element concerning cultural celebrations (the topic of the lesson). The usage of color, the size of the picture and its location at the center of the screen called the users' attention and helped to understand the meaning of this food. This image also conveyed cultural meanings relating to tradition, ethnical heritage and peaceful coexistence. These values were the main elements highlighted in lesson W9 about celebrations.

In semiotic terms, the use of pictures had the purpose of complementing the meaning represented through the linguistic mode of communication. On Figure 11, for example, we see that the new lexical item Potato Latke is introduced both linguistically and iconically. Therefore, the construction of meaning is achieved through the relation of text (linguistic mode) and graphic

(visual mode), as Van Leeuwen said: “the content of the image adds further information to that of the text and vice versa” (Van Leeuwen, 2005a, p. 230). This type of relationship was present on Livemocha’s semiotic design and especially served to enhance further understandings of language that connected to the cultural dimension.

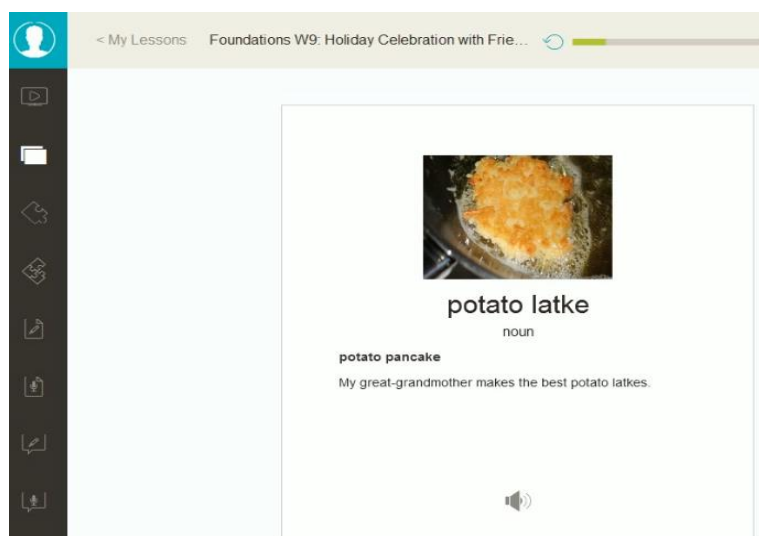


Figure 11. Example of use of type font in vocabulary section

Regarding spatial distribution, we see that the name of potato latke is below the picture (see Figure 11). The definition and an example of this food used in a sentence appear after the name of the lexical item. The spatial distribution of these elements not only helped construct meaning in a multi sensorial way, but also created coherence and cohesions in the multimodal design. In these lessons, the biggest semiotic resource was usually the picture. In Livemocha’s language lessons the main topic was supported by visual (pictures, drawings). These visual elements were strategically located at the center of the flashcards. Therefore, through the use of visual elements, the lessons introduced the contents of the lesson, and focused the learners’ attention on the central meanings.

Besides the use of pictures, color played an important role in creating a learning atmosphere on Livemocha. In most language units there was predominance of three colors: white, brown and blue. White was used mainly for the background of the lessons and some command buttons as we can see on Figures 10 and 11. Brown appeared in all the sections of the language units on the left side of the screen. This was the panel of navigation within the language lessons. Finally, blue was used as background for some command buttons and for the background of the users' icon when there was not any picture on it. In addition, some icons used a different color in order to be easily found. This appeared too in Figure 10 where the background of the slideshow was in two nuances of gray with crossed lines that gave it a sense of perspective and movement (element r on Figure 10). These elements highlighted the picture and centered the users' attention on the illustrations.

Relying on multimodal theory, some authors (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002; Van Leeuwen, 2010; Machin, 2007) have delved into the meaning of colors and their potential to create meaning. In this sense, the three most prominent colors in Livemocha's semiotic design (white, brown and blue) were pivotal in the construction of meaning and interface development of this SNSLL. Since Livemocha aimed at presenting a young, comfortable and reliable space for language learning, the choice of color had to portray the managers' interest in showing a fresh image of the site. Hence, I explain below the meaning of white, brown and blue.

According to Van Leeuwen (2011) white color is associated with purity, peace and tranquility, brown represents tradition, quality, neutrality and it is ideal for backgrounds. Concerning blue this color "has been associated with science, truth and knowledge. Blue has also been associated with royalty, as in royal blue" (Machin, 2007, p. 70). The paramount selection of these colors on Livemocha's semiotic design shows the cultural representation of this online site.

Analyzing color as a meaning making resource, we can infer that Livemocha's design portrayed this site as a learning space where users could feel relaxed when learning a language (white color), find access to new knowledge and science (blue) and where seriousness could also be reflected in the order of lessons (brown color).

Interestingly, the most predominant color on Livemocha's lessons was white. This indicates that Livemocha had the potential to evoke feelings of peace and tranquility on its users. Nevertheless, this is the meaning assigned to white color by the Western culture. In other cultures, white could have a different meaning. Let us remember that color, as any semiotic resource, is culturally constructed (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996; Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Machin, 2007). Livemocha presents in its semiotic design the presence of Western cultural representations within its learning spaces.

The visual mode was also supported by the use of icons. Icons facilitated the navigation and the use of Livemocha highlighted some interactive elements and offered possibilities for the work on the site. As we can observe in Figures 9 and 10, the icons used in the language lessons appeared in all the semiotic clusters. These icons were visual aids that represented some functions on the site. For instance, on Figure 10 we can see the most important icons appearing on each lesson section. In the order of semiotic clusters or panels we find:

Panel 1(user and lesson information): User profile (a), mocha points (b) and mocha credits (c). The functions of these icons were to display the users' identity either with an icon or a picture (according to the learner's choice), to display the main menu of the students' profile and to show the rewarding system of learners.

Panel 2 (language lesson navigation): Introduction (d), vocabulary (e), usage (f), practice (g), read-write (h), read-speak (i), listen-write (j) and listen-speak (k). These icons served to identify each section within the language lesson, to guide learners along the unit, to display the users' advance along the unit and to help them to move across sections as they prefer.

Panel 3 (language material): Support icons; help (l), language (m) and translation (n). These icons offered online support regarding usual difficulties, information about the language used in the lesson and translation of some elements in the unit.

These icons were supported by color, size and spatial distribution. Icons were located on a contrastive background color so users could easily identify them. The size of icons served to distribute them along the sections and to make them fit in a harmonious way on screen. Icons were strategically placed on the semiotic spaces as useful interactive tools. The location of these icons also permitted learners to find them easily and identify their functions.

In general terms, the semiotic design of Livemocha demonstrates a focus on the visual mode. This reliance on the visual explains the dominant role of images in the western culture, or what some authors denominate ocularcentrism (Jay, 1993). As Gillian (2001) discusses 'the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary western societies' (p. 6). It means that our everyday communication makes extensive use of visual elements to build our cultural practices. Particularly, in online communication we observe how this phenomenon influences the design of virtual spaces (Michelson & Alvarez, 2016). Livemocha, as a product of the western culture, develops a view of communication based on the visual mode of communication. The adoption of visual elements as the prime mode of communication demonstrates how Livemocha is part of the visual turn in online interaction (Kress, 2010).

The use of visual elements to carry meaning and construct the social identity is one of the features that Livemocha shares with other ocularcentric spaces. As Michelson and Alvarez (2016) discuss it, some web pages follow this principle. In their research, Michelson and Alvarez demonstrated at what extent images and their composition communicated the idea of study abroad as pleasure and commercial activities. In the same way, the visual design of Livemocha shows how the turn to the visual in Western cultures constitutes a source of cultural dissemination and transmission of values in online environments.

Finally, the spatial distribution of elements on Livemocha allowed learners to navigate within the site. In this case, the spatial mode followed a Western pattern of reading (from left to right). As discussed by Michelson and Alvarez (2016) the design of a web page materializes the cultural view of the culture of origin of the product. In this case, the structure of Livemocha is an indication of how Western cultures read language and images. For example, on Figure 11 Livemocha shows on the left side the given information (sections of the lesson and information about the lesson) and on the right side appears the new information on the flashcard (image, definition and example of the lexical item).

The reading path suggested on Livemocha follows the concept of ideal and real reading paths characteristic of the West (Kress, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2005b). Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and others have shown that in designing visual composition the ideal (that which is desired) is located on the top of images, while the real (that which is attainable) is located at the bottom of visual compositions. On Livemocha's lessons the ideal materializes through the promise that seems to be conveyed through the title of the lessons such as *Holiday Celebration with Friends* that suggest that the learner will master the content related to this topic in the L2.

Below the ideal sphere, the semiotic design presents the real sphere. We observe that the real sphere materializes through the flashcard. Through this semiotic resource, Livemocha tells its users that in order to achieve the ideal sphere (master a language and the topic proposed on top of the lesson), learners should first learn the basics of the vocabulary or grammar elements provided on the flashcards (real sphere). Remarkably, the flashcard on Figure 11 shows that Livemocha delivers three types of information: the definition of the lexical item, its classification and an example. Particularly, on this figure, Livemocha displays cultural knowledge of the L2 through a picture (Potato Latke) and an example presenting a cultural practice (a grand-grandmother who cooks potato latke). The inclusion of cultural knowledge might suggest that Livemocha acknowledges that learning an L2 requires besides linguistic and functional knowledge, a basic understanding of cultural elements. In the example provided with the new vocabulary, we also see that Livemocha shows how the new cultural element can be used in communicative acts.

The spatial mode of communication also drew on other resources such as color to mark distinction between different semiotic clusters. Basically, two background colors were used to divide the panels and to support the spatial distribution: white and brown. On Figure 9 the brown background served to differentiate the panel of navigation (Cluster 2) from the rest of the panels and the white color in two tones divided marked the boundaries among the panels of the lesson material (Cluster 3), the interactive space (Cluster 4) and the user-lesson information (Cluster 1). By using white color, Livemocha created empty spaces to divide the screen and focus the users' attention on the center of the spaces. In addition, the white color in clusters 1, 4 and 3 was different to distinguish them from the other semiotic clusters. This distribution had the potential

to focus the users' attention on cultural aspects and by doing so, at a certain degree it promoted discovery of cultural declarative aspects within the language lessons.

In short, the mode of spatial distribution was supported by the use of color to distinguish semiotic elements, assign importance to base units and focus the learners' attention on the main topics of the lesson. The analysis of the design of some spaces demonstrated how the combination of modes and semiotic resources had the potential to promote covertly and overtly cultural elements (reading patterns typical of Western culture, events, products and behaviors) and to provide spaces to interact with cultural manifestations of the target language.

In the same way, the linguistic and visual modes of communication were enhanced by the use of semiotic resources such as size, color, type of font, spatial distribution, pictures, icons and recordings. These semiotic resources assigned relevance to some base units, supported the users' navigation on the site and showed users their progress in the lessons. The relationship between these modes reveals Livemocha's priorities regarding communicative tasks and the cultural dimension on it. The presence of cultural elements and the intercultural dimension can be better understood in the analysis of intersemiotic relationships along the sections of language lessons. In the next sub section, I analyze how the different modes and base units worked together to construct a cohesive and coherent multimodal text.

Intersemiotic relationships among the different components of the semiotic design of a lesson on Livemocha. After describing the semiotic design of one lesson and its components on Livemocha, I will turn my attention towards the connection between the different semiotic resources that compose the structure of a lesson or what has been defined as intersemiotic relationships. The analysis intends to shed light on how the semiotic design of Livemocha integrates elements of the intercultural dimension either in its contents or the way contents are arranged. Although I present the granular analysis of a lesson of Livemocha as an example, I conducted the analysis of five more lessons whose general results will be presented at the end of this section. For a close examination of a lesson, I chose lesson 9 titled *W9 Holiday Celebration with Friends*.

Section of introduction. The section of introduction in Lesson W9 was a slideshow with a woman telling an anecdote about the way she celebrated Christmas with some friends who belonged to different cultures. In this slideshow, the site presented 10 pictures related to cultural elements of different celebrations. I analyzed the underlying cultural elements in each picture of the slideshow. I identified a possible topic and also the intercultural component that seemed to be foregrounded in each picture (see Table 17).



Figure 12. First picture on the slideshow of introduction section of lesson W9

Table 17

Cultural elements identified in pictures of Slideshow of Lesson W9

Slides	Cultural element	ICC component
1	Celebrate-Holiday	Knowledge-Attitudes
2	Caftan	Knowledge-Attitudes
3	Feast-gifts	Knowledge-Attitudes
4	Fruitcake	Knowledge
5	Hanukkah	Knowledge
6	Kwanzaa-Kinara-Umoja-Unity	Knowledge-Attitudes
7	Homeless	Knowledge-Attitudes
8	Purpose-serve	Knowledge-Attitudes
9	Chinese new year-parade	Knowledge

10	Cultures-celebrations	Knowledge-Attitudes
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From all the pictures showed, five represent cultural celebrations (1, 5, 6, 9, 10), two refer to food (3, 4), one was about traditional clothing (2) and two show charity actions common in Christmas (7, 8). The pictures showed portrayed people celebrating together and objects related to their celebrations. A pattern in these pictures was that the presence of ICC skills such as knowledge and attitudes of openness and curiosity can be inferred. The pictures in the section of vocabulary showed elements with potential to cause intercultural reactions, attitudes and behaviors.

Throughout the present analysis we will see how Livemocha in lesson W9 seems to implicitly pinpoint in reiterated times the importance and advantages of intercultural contact based on attitudes of recognition and openness. To demonstrate Livemocha had the potential to promote intercultural attitudes and knowledge, I analyze all the sections of unit W9 and explain how some base units and their modes interact cohesively in order to promote some ICC skills such as attitudes, knowledge and interpreting and relating. The study of these elements evidences the intersemiotic relationship that Livemocha establishes when different sections of the lessons and within the lessons are analyzed for semantic and semiotic coherence and cohesion. Basically, four base units evidenced the intercultural dimension on the slideshow: the title of the lesson, the picture, the words appearing on the upper side of the slide and the voice-over- narration that introduced the lesson.

The first base unit of this lesson with cultural elements is the title: *Holiday Celebration with Friends*. This title combined with the other elements introduces the general topic and the promoted message of the unit. In this title and the images accompanying it, Livemocha proposes that celebrations are opportunities to interact with other people, that friendship might occur

among people from different cultures and that the interaction resulting from this relationship leads to relationships based on attitudes of equality and acceptance. In this way, the linguistic mode evidenced the presence of cultural elements on Livemocha's language learning program. Through images, Livemocha transmitted covert intercultural values.

Other manifestations of the covert representation of cultures on Livemocha appear on Figure 12. In this figure gesture and gaze are used as part of the semiotic composition. Both elements communicate covert intercultural message of attitudes of openness. The young people on Figure 12 are smiling while hugging each other. This gesture invites users to establish a relationship of social affinity and acceptance (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). When we observe people from different cultures (wearing their traditional clothes and with different physical complexion) smiling and hugging friendly, the site suggests that learners accept others.

Concerning gaze, the young people on Figure 12 are looking directly to users on the other side of the screen. In semiotic terms, this means that something is demanded from the viewer (Michelson & Alvarez, 2016). By posing in this way, the actors are to some extent asking learners of Livemocha to share their joy and implicitly are transmitting the idea of valuing others regardless of the cultural differences identified in clothing or race. The smiles on the actors' faces support this idea of intercultural coexistence. Through this type of semiotic compositions Livemocha transmitted covert intercultural content and potentially promoted attitudes of acceptance of other cultures. Here compositional elements of gaze and gesture helped to build this meaning. In the lines below we will see how other elements contributed to provide users spaces for intercultural reflection either covertly or overtly.

The title of this unit did not work alone. To enforce the cultural dimension present on this lesson, the picture played an important role. In this case, the picture 45 was the opening image for the lesson W9. By having this image as the first glance on the lesson, Livemocha offers us its view of what culture, friendship and celebrations imply.

In terms of Halliday (1978), the ideational meaning of this picture reflects the encounter of various cultures coexisting in peace and harmony. We observe this in the way people from different cultures (evidenced in the differences of clothing and physical traits) share with joy a celebration without any sign of difficulty due to the cultural differences. The behavior showed in this picture transmits a message of acceptance, decentering and tolerance towards the other going beyond stereotypes and dysfunctions. From an intercultural perspective of language teaching, these values are fundamental to acquire communicative skills and to be part of a dialogue with the other in everyday relationships.

The message of peace, joy and friendship is reinforced too by the two words that appear above the picture: *celebrate* and *holiday*. These words, in magenta color, emphasize the message of the picture and establish an intersemiotic relationship not only at the level of the topic or content but also at the level of conveying the feelings of charm, kindness, joy, harmony and balance, feelings that in popular culture have traditionally been associated to pink (Heller, 2000).

The narration that is played as the slideshow is presented also invites to think about the possible inclusion of the intercultural dimension on Livemocha. The narration tells the story of a woman who celebrates her holidays with some friends. In this narration, she tells how her friends shared with her their different holiday rituals and how the cultural differences among them did

not hinder their reunion. She also explores some cultural elements present in the different groups mentioned. Below, I present the transcription of the narration.

Holiday celebration with friends.

This year my friends and I decided to celebrate the holidays together since we were out of school for three weeks. My mom said that we could celebrate it at our house. When everyone arrived, my mom and sister had on red caftans. They looked so pretty. That night, we had a big feast and opened gifts. My mom and aunts made turkey, dressing, rolls, green beans and much more. My grandmother made her famous fruitcake. Everyone loved it.

After we ate, we opened gifts like we normally would on Christmas.

Since Hannukah started before we left school, we honored my friend Chris by giving him blue and white gifts since those are Hannukah colors. Hannukah does not always fall on the same day like Christmas and Kwanzaa.

The next day was the first day of Kwanzaa. So, we gathered around the table while my aunt lit the first candle on the Kwanzaa. The first day of Kwanzaa is called Umoya which stands for unity. We all went out to serve food to the homeless that day to represent unity. My name is Nia which comes from the fifth day meaning purpose. All of my friends tell me it's my purpose to serve them on that day. They are funny. We really enjoy the holidays together. When we get back to school, we will have a big Chinese New Year parade. I love how we can all embrace our different cultures and share our celebrations with each other. This was a wonderful holiday.

In this narration there are three elements that evidence the presence of intercultural elements: the inclusion of different cultures, the description of their holiday traditions and the reiteration of positive actions aimed at joining people in peaceful celebrations. First, the narrator of this anecdote, Nia, mentioned three cultures: African American, Jewish and Chinese. The first

two cultures were developed with more depth; the third one was mentioned briefly. In the introduction the story focuses on the holiday of Nia with her friends and her reflections about being part of a diverse cultural group of people.

The description of different celebrations begins with Nia's familiar traditions. Regarding the African American culture Nia presents some cultural elements such as dressing with African traditional clothing (*my mom and sister had on red caftans*), holiday special activities (*After we ate, we opened gifts like we normally would on Christmas.*) and food (turkey, dressing, rolls, green beans...fruitcake) that are also common in mainstream American culture. It is interesting to see how Nia also mentions usual Christmas activities as part of her own culture that are similar to the general American tradition. Due to the proximity of both celebrations (Christmas Day is celebrated on December 25th and Kwanzaa begins on December 26th) the narrator talks about important cultural behaviors and customs of her African and American origins. This fact indicates how her African heritage influences the American culture and the coexistence of both systems in her family lead to strengthen affective links.

Part of the cultural illustration given on this section is about some particular elements related to African celebrations. These elements mentioned were the name of the end year celebration: Kwanzaa, the activities developed at the beginning of Kwanzaa (*we gathered around the table while my aunt lit the first candle on the Kwanzaa*), the meaning of the first Kwanzaa day (*Umoja which stands for unity*) an important action reflecting the spirit of Kwanzaa (*We all went out to serve food to the homeless that day to represent unity.*) and the meaning of the narrator's name (purpose). It is interesting to note that along all these cultural elements, the idea of a peaceful coexistence is promoted. Activities like sharing food with people in need, gathering in family, explaining the meaning of unity and sustaining that there is a

purpose in helping others is an indicator of how Livemocha had the potential to promote the idea of coexistence.

When Nia talks about Chris (her Jewish friend), she says that Hannukah is an important celebration and talks about the colors of this festivity (blue and white) and the days when it is celebrated (the days of Hannukah are not fixed as it happens with Christmas). By telling these facts, Nia demonstrates what Byram (1997) defines as cultural knowledge about the national memory of other people. She also said that Chris was honored by receiving gifts of this color. By doing this, Nia accepts the importance of people from other cultures and embraces intercultural attitudes of integration.

Finally, Nia comments that when coming back to school, she will witness the Chinese New Year parade. She recognizes that for her, it constitutes a meaningful opportunity to share with people from other cultures. In fact, she declares: *“I love how we can all embrace our different cultures and share our celebrations with each other. This was a wonderful holiday.* The emphasis on positive intercultural experiences and the way Nia describes her holiday demonstrates the interest of Livemocha in promoting cultural interaction among its members. This is part of Livemocha’s purpose aimed at showing positive elements of each culture and suggesting learners from the entire world to appreciate the best of others.

The main topic of unit W9 was cultural celebrations. The section of introduction demonstrated the presence of intercultural skills of attitudes and declarative knowledge. These skills were promoted through the use of semiotic resources such as pictures, written text and an audio narration, which together establish intersemiotic relationships because they all articulate to construct meaning the modes that permitted this construction of meaning were visual, spatial and

linguistic. A deeper analysis on the next section will give us a better idea of the internal cohesion and coherence of Livemocha in terms of the intercultural dimension of language learning.

Vocabulary section in Lesson W9. In the section of vocabulary, the cultural presence appeared in the lexical elements that are showed and defined. In Table 18 we find the different lexical elements present in the section of vocabulary and the ICC skills inferred from the semiotic design.

A glimpse to this table allows us to see that the site presented cultural knowledge in the flashcard pictures and examples. The cultural items displayed were divided in five categories: Festivities (Kwanzaa, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Christmas and Hannukah), clothing (caftan), cultural objects and symbols (kinara, dreidel, menorah, Santa Claus, Christmas tree), food (potato latke, fruitcake) and actions (to pray). There were also two words without a picture (discipline, to display), however one of them (to display) had an example related to a cultural element (*the presents were displayed under the Christmas tree*).

Table 18

Lexical elements in the section vocabulary

Number	Vocabulary Slides	ICC skill
1	Kinara	Knowledge
2	Kwanzaa	Knowledge-Attitudes
3	Dreidel	Knowledge
4	Potato Latke	Knowledge
5	Ramadan	Knowledge
6	Discipline	
7	Fruitcake	Knowledge

8	Chinese New Year	Knowledge
9	To display	
10	Caftan	Knowledge-Attitudes
11	Menorah	Knowledge
12	Santa Claus	Knowledge-Attitudes
13	To pray	Knowledge-Attitudes
14	Christmas	Knowledge-Attitudes
15	Hanukkah	Knowledge
16	Christmas tree	Knowledge-Attitudes

From the information above we can observe that Livemocha used the visual and linguistic modes of the flashcards to present cultural elements promoting declarative knowledge and intercultural attitudes. Generally, the pictures of the flashcards in this section showed people sharing together, cultural symbols and activities as positive representations of how the others live. An example of this positive representation of the other can be observed in Figures 13 and 14 below.

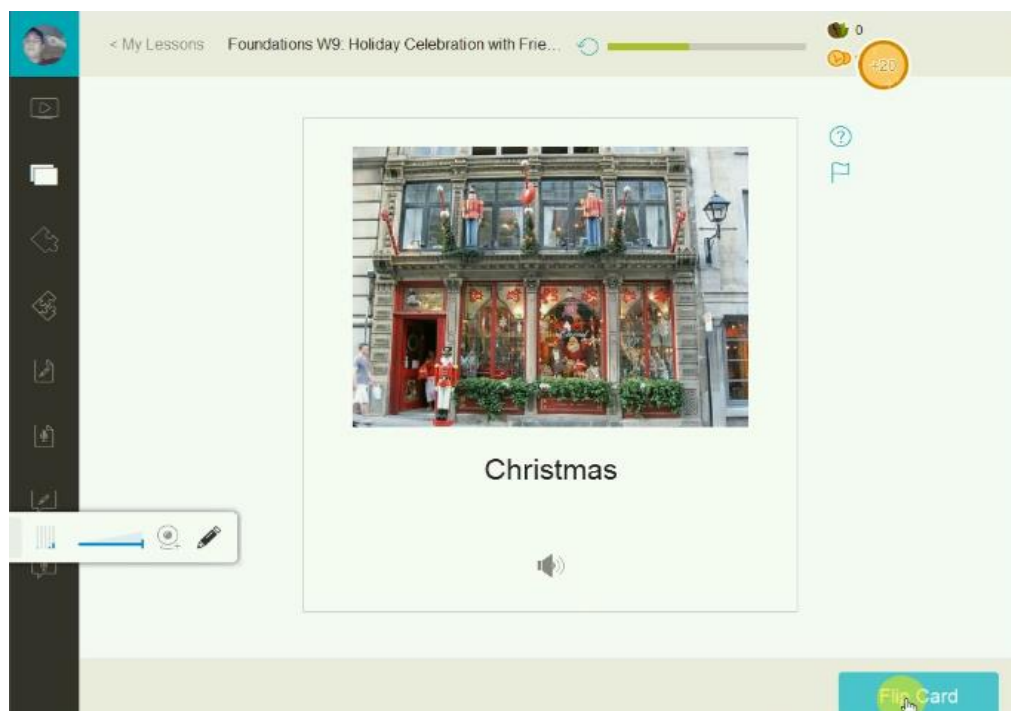


Figure 13. Christmas flashcard (side a)

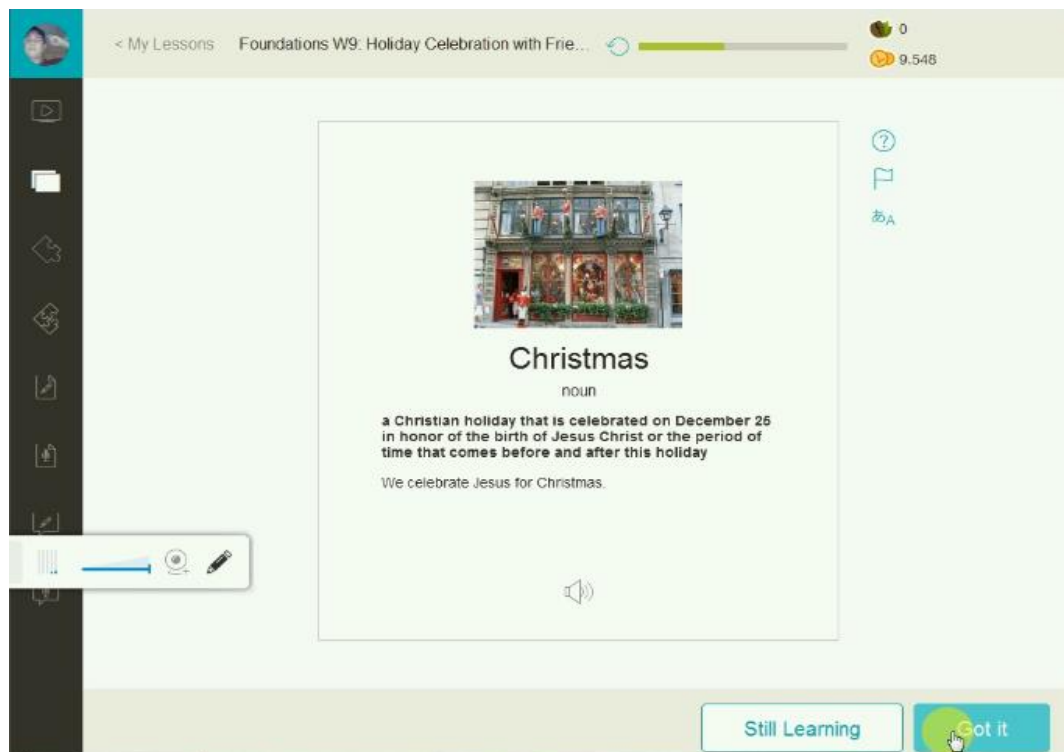


Figure 14. Christmas flashcard (side b)

I chose this flashcard because of its close relationship with the lesson's topic (Holiday Celebration with Friends). The picture represents the celebration of Christmas and establishes coherence with the content of the lesson. Here we can see how the visual mode operates as a transmitter of content and a creator of meaning. For instance, we observe that Livemocha evokes the idea of Christmas by using the façade of a colonial building decorated with XIXth century type of wood, soldiers wearing red jackets in the style of British army uniform of the Napoleonic wars (Bruce, et al. 2008) and the nutcracker. In the windowsills we see leaves of mistletoe and the windows are decorated with stained glass representing Christmas figures of Santa Claus and red leaves. Additionally, the red color appears in all the decorative elements of this façade.

Regarding the symbols used to represent Christmas Livemocha uses pictures of Santa Claus, mistletoe leaves and statues of Royal British soldiers. Furthermore, the red color also is predominant in this picture and symbolizes Christmas. Therefore, the symbols used to portray the idea of Christmas come from a Eurocentric perspective with Santa Claus as its semiotic sign. In this sense, there is incoherence with the explanation and the example presented to illustrate the ideas of Christmas. In Figure 14, we note that the definition of Christmas remarks the birth of Christ as the reason of this celebration and the example also transmits this idea: *We celebrate Jesus for Christmas* (Livemocha, 2016). Putting face to face the linguistic (definition and example) and the visual (Christmas picture) modes we find that there is not cohesion between the meaning of both elements. The picture does not show any symbol related to Jesus Christ and the definition does not mention Santa Claus. This leads us to think about the predominant cultural view on Livemocha and the semiotic symbols used on this site.

Despite this conceptual lack of coherence, the picture and the definition themselves presented declarative knowledge about Western cultures and might move people to adopt

attitudes of curiosity and openness towards the others. In addition, the vocabulary section was coherent in showing different cultural representations through visual and linguistic modes (Table 18) and in maintaining the internal thematic coherence. In fact, the topic of Christmas addressed cultural celebrations and the mention of other festivities such as Kwanzaa or Hannukah followed the idea of the entire lesson: holiday celebrations. Moreover, the notion of celebration present in the title, introduction section and now in the vocabulary section is an indicator of how Livemocha potentially stimulated skills of attitudes and declarative knowledge through its semiotic design.

Usage section in Lesson W9. The intercultural dimension in this section is reflected in the way the grammatical rules are exemplified (Figure 15). The example says: The party will be cancelled only if it snows. Only if it snows, will the party be cancelled (Livemocha, 2016). Here there is a connection with the rest of the unit in terms of the topic used. Since the topic of the lesson was celebrations and holidays, the example presented had as topic the celebration of a party and a cultural element representative of European and North American countries. In this example two cultural behavioral elements appear: snow as part of northern hemisphere countries and the celebration of parties. What we can see here is again the representation of the American culture and the weather factor as a reason to cancel a party. The way Livemocha presented cultural conduct about parties and common behavior regarding celebrations is worked again in the rest of the unit. In the next section, I show how the intercultural dimension was reflected in the practice section.



Figure 15. Cultural elements on usage section

Practice section in Lesson W9. The section of practice encouraged users to apply the grammatical rules, vocabulary items and thematic elements in exercises. In this case, the exercise consisted of listening to a short sentence and choosing among the four options given the sentence with the same meaning as the one that learners had listened to (Figure 16). Below I present the transcription of the activity and the screenshot.

Prompt: Choose the sentence with the same meaning as the example.

Options:

You can go to the dinner tonight

You can go to the dinner if you have reservations

You can't go to the dinner tonight

If you don't have an invitation you can't go

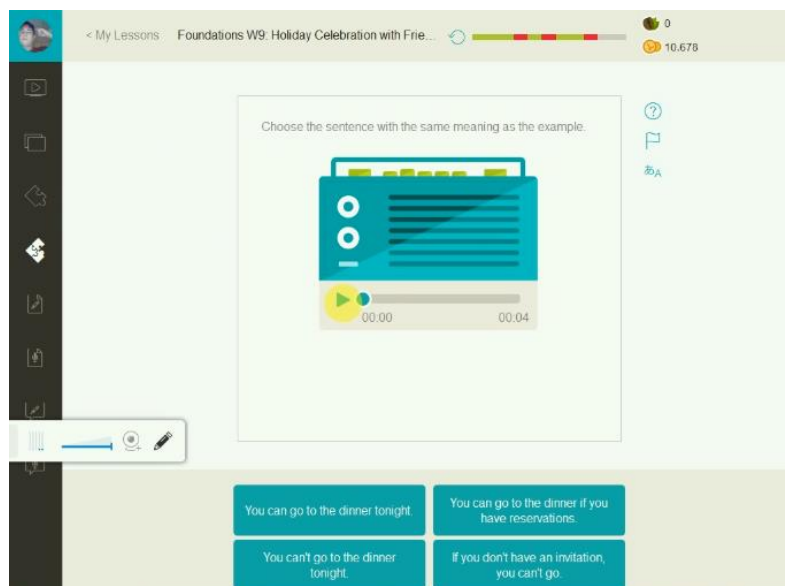


Figure 16. Listening exercise in Practice Section

The first cultural manifestation appears in the recording: *“You have to have an invitation in order to go to the dinner”*. Therefore, this activity is coherent with the main topic of the lesson because presents a cultural situation related to a celebration and an activity usually shared with friends like a dinner. Consequently, the aim of the activity is to show learners cultural behavior related to the rite of attending a dinner. This exposure begins with the mentioning of a dinner invitation. The audio recording says that guests need an invitation if they want to attend the dinner. This means that Livemocha presents cultural practices common to possibly many communities. This cultural practice is connected to rituals of politeness.

In terms of Byram’s (1997) ICC model, this type of knowledge is considered procedural. Since the presented situation offers a lesson about what to do in a social situation such as a dinner. The behavior referred to is not related to factual information but to interaction rules. This learning material also promoted the development of the skill of cultural knowledge. Furthermore,

by telling the users that in a dinner they need an invitation, the listening activity on Figure 16 might stimulate attitudes of respect towards the other by informing learners that in other cultures one cannot attend to a dinner without an invitation (*“You have to have an invitation in order to go to the dinner”*). In the recording, the narrator says that a requirement to be part of a dinner is having been invited.

Read-speak section in Lesson W9. In this section, learners had to see read a prompt that was accompanied by an image. They recorded a message answering the questions provided in the prompt (Figure 17). From a multimodal perspective, the section of read-speak highlighted the linguistic and visual modes of communication. The linguistic mode included the instructions to develop the activity and the interactive options below the picture. These base units were composed by size, color, location, and font type. The functions of these base units were to guide learners in their communicative task and to assure the interactivity within the section.

The cultural dimension in the linguistic mode of this section is presented in two elements of the instructions. The first part of the instruction encouraged learners to interpret the picture (*Read the prompt and respond with your OWN response. Describe what the people are doing at this celebration*). In this part, learners must be able to interpret the picture as a representation of cultural behavior, to identify the communicative situation and the social context. In Byram’s ICC model, learners need the skill of interpretation to understand how the other culture works and to comprehend the social procedures that embed communicative situations (Byram, 1997).

Read the prompt and respond with your OWN response.
Describe what the people are doing at this celebration. What
would you be doing if you had an invitation there?



Figure 17. Exercise in Read-speak section

Livemocha encouraged learners to interpret the meaning of the activity performed on the picture. By doing this, users had to identify the type of meeting presented, and the type of behavior and clothing of the participants. These actions are reinforced in the second part of the task where learners had to complete the exercise by telling what their reactions in a situation like the one presented would be.

Furthermore, the instruction finishes by explaining the users that they had to adopt a position derived from their interpretation (*What would you be doing if you had an invitation there*). This second part of the activity makes learners situate in the circumstance showed and to decenter from their own situational environment to explain what they would do in an event like

the one presented. By telling what they would do, learners should also foster intercultural behavior based on what has been studied in the lesson. If we remember, during the entire lesson, there was insistence in recognizing cultural elements of other peoples as valuable expressions and to know how to behave in some social events mediated by rules of politeness and respect. In this way, we notice the development of skills of relating.

The skill of relating allows users to understand documents and events and to relate them to their own personal situation by positioning themselves as competent intercultural speakers (Byram, 1997). Therefore, the activity on Figure 17 had the potential to encourage users to decode a cultural situation of the target culture and to relate it to their own culture. In this case the picture could lead users to discuss about social issues and to identify cultural behaviors.

The visual mode of communication provides context to the task. This picture used affordances of color, size, distribution and cultural elements. The function of this picture was to illustrate the exercise and to guide the task. From an intercultural view, the picture has a lot to say. First, the picture is part of the main theme of the lesson and presents the topic of cultural celebrations. The situation presented is a meeting of people in a restaurant enjoying a formal dinner. In this picture, there are several cultural traits reflected in the participants (people with Western physical traits), their clothing (formal), and the landscape of the picture reflecting a panoramic view of a city at night with skyscrapers as part of the background.

Another element present in this picture is cultural behavior. In this scene, we see people behaving properly with good manners, and moderated gestures and deference towards others. The picture portrays everything clean and there is not any sign of disorder or dirt in the place or the attendants. By observing this scene, learners are able to interpret patterns of cultural

behavior. On one side, we identify that the picture shows an example of the correct cultural behavior in a dinner, one of the several types of social encounters among people of the target culture, their clothing used for formal events, the spatial distribution of attendants and even the distance that they maintain towards each other. Moreover, the picture on Figure 13 shows a dinner in a ship, that is another of the particularities of the way Livemocha portrayed culture. This activity is not precisely common in the West, but the picture shows a stereotypical image of Americans as white, wealthy people. Although Livemocha just tries to communicate typical images of the target culture, a teacher could use these images to explore some stereotypes and address critical themes.

All these cultural details make part of what Byram (1997) denominates procedural knowledge. Even though procedural knowledge is not reflected explicitly, it appears as a way to behave in the picture that users had to interpret and relate with their own reality. Consequently, the picture displays a common behavioral pattern in formal dinners and establishes a link between learners and the development of skills of knowledge and interpreting and relating.

Listen-Write section in Lesson W9. In this final section of lesson W9, users had to listen to a short narration and then write their own response (Figure 19). This section was mainly composed of linguistic and visual modes of communication. The linguistic mode materialized through the instructions of the activity and the recording. The linguistic base units were supported by affordances of spatial distribution, size, color and interactive tools. The function of the linguistic mode was to guide the activity and to provide the essential material to complete the exercise.

In terms of intercultural competence, the recording and the instruction present evidence of skills of attitudes, knowledge and interpreting and relating. The base unit with more cultural

content was the audio prompt. To explain the cultural elements in this base unit, I present below the transcription of the prompt.

Transcription:

I love spending the holidays with my family. Everyone must bring something to the house. My grandmother can only come if she makes her famous fruitcake and my cousin can only come if he brings the kinara for us to like. If we have enough gifts to pass around, then everyone would get one. Describe the time you required your family to bring something to your house for a celebration. Use some of new vocabulary words in your response.

The topic of this exercise is coherent with the main topic of the lesson and portrays the cultural dimension of holiday celebrations. As we analyzed in the other sections, this topic was recurrent and established intersemiotic relationships with other sections of the lesson in terms of the theme (celebrations) and the vocabulary presented in the introduction and the vocabulary section. The prompt is divided into three main parts. First, the narrator presents the way she celebrates holidays with her family. She starts by saying how much she enjoys this family time. Second, she offers an example to develop the activity by telling how her grandmother and cousin must bring something to share with the others. Finally, the prompt invites users to describe a time in family following the example presented.

The inclusion of particular cultural elements in the narration teaches learners some cultural details about the target culture. For instance, that it is common in the target culture that hosts request guests to bring something for a party or celebration. It is well-known that in societies like the North American, a typical cultural practice is a potluck in which each of the guests of a meal or party contributes a dish. Thus, when the narrator mentions the objects that

their relatives have brought (fruitcake, kinara) both with a cultural meaning and the ritual in the holiday (to bring something and to pass the gifts), she discusses declarative and procedural knowledge about her culture. Vocabulary like fruitcake and kinara appeared in the sections of introduction and vocabulary. The purpose of being presented here is to establish intersemiotic relationships that reinforce the vocabulary presented before and the cultural information related to it.

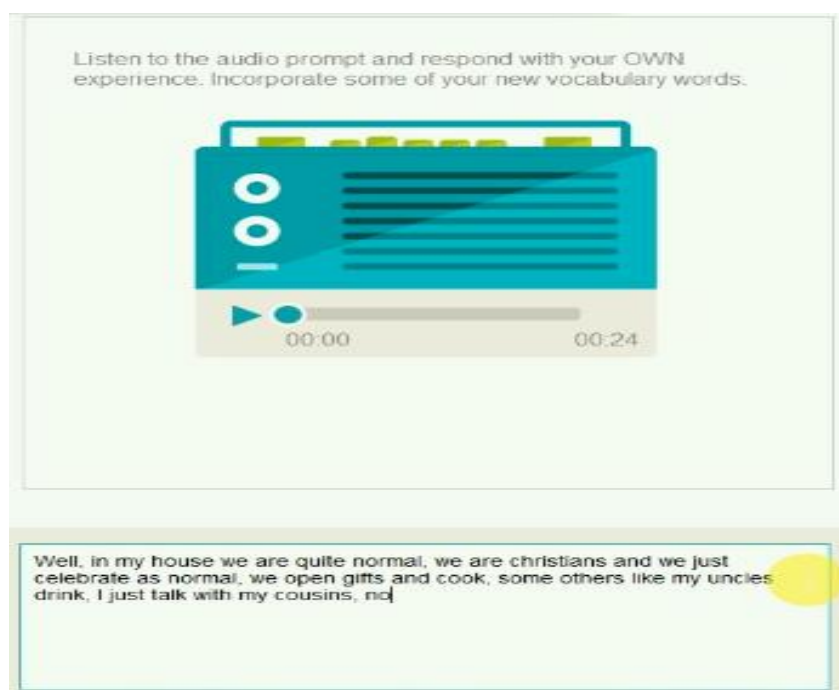


Figure 18. Exercise in Listen-write section

Another intercultural skill present in this section of the lesson was the skill of interpreting and relating. The final part of the prompt invites users to write about a similar experience when they had to bring something to their families in order to participate in a celebration. This type of activity shows that Livemocha encouraged learners to establish intercultural comparisons. This task leads students to think if this type of cultural practice is common in their own culture or in what situations it would be acceptable. By asking learners to describe a situation similar to the

one of the example, they had to interpret and find possible ways of relating to the type of cultural practice presented based on their own life stories.

The semiotic content of Livemocha presents several facets of the target culture, which is assumed to be an Anglo speaking community, mostly American because of the accent of speakers in all audiovisual material. Particularly, most imagery displays white wealthy people with privileges. On a critical note, this reference constructs the idea of a homogeneous American culture concerning social classes. On Figure 17 we see how only white, wealthy people appear enjoying a dinner. Therefore, the meaning construction sometimes fails to reflect the variety of social classes and ethnicities in the C2.

However, some contents invite users to reflect about how others live and in many cases, establish comparisons with their own ways of living. Interestingly, in the activity of listen-write (Figure 18) there is a hint about another dimension in the C2. In the recording, the speaker says: *If we have enough gifts to pass around, then everyone would get one.* This explains that Americans were not showed as only white wealthy people. In this example, the narrator suggests that not everybody is rich enough to give presents to all the family. This message might allow learners to be aware of the existing social classes in other countries. Users could compare the picture on Figure 17 (wealthy white people enjoying a dinner) and the recording of Figure 18 (a familiar dinner where everybody has to contribute). Different people are portrayed and a message of cultural social stratification might be noticed. Nevertheless, most examples, pictures and recordings in the learning material of Livemocha depict wealthy people.

In sum, the multimodal semiotic analysis of the sections of the lesson W9 demonstrated that cultural knowledge (mostly declarative) was transmitted covertly through images, recordings

and texts (examples and exercises). Procedural knowledge was taught overtly through written text (usage and examples) and in the recordings that indicated users how to interact with others using the grammar topics of the lesson. Especially, the images had a pedagogical objective and covertly supported the construction of an intercultural attitude implying acceptance towards the other (Figure 12). Some of the compositional elements used in within the images to convey cultural openness were gaze and gesture. When we look at the lesson, we find intersemiotic communication. The modes, base units and the semiotic resources develop the proposed topic (*Holiday Celebration with Friends*) through iconography and the suggestion of positive attitudes towards other cultures throughout the different sections and exercises. The lesson creates intersemiotic relationships at thematic level and at the level of the semiotic design. All the sections have the same semiotic design, address similar aspects (cultural, grammatical and communicative contents) and all rely on the same type of multimodal content.

At a macro level, when we analyze the semiotic composition of other lessons, we realize that the intersemiotic relationship can be found in the overall design of Livemocha. All the lessons have the same order and type of sections and all the sections rely on the same types of modes of communication. This intersemiotic relationship also appears in other units as will be discussed below in regards to the lessons analyzed.

Lesson W9 in relation to other lessons in Livemocha. As explained above, my analysis of Lesson W9 intended to present a granular examination of a semiotic space of Livemocha. It also aimed to exemplify how the different semiotic resources utilized in each section of the lesson contributed and connected intersemiotically and in a pedagogical manner to convey the meanings (vocabulary and grammar) about the topic of celebrations. Given that the lesson lent itself for the inclusion of cultural elements, this analysis looked at how the components of ICC fared in the entire lesson. A general finding was that despite the focus on cultural aspects, their treatment focused on declarative and procedural knowledge, intercultural attitudes and skills of interpreting and relating, in terms of Byram's model (1997).

Nevertheless, it is important to establish if the pattern presented here applies to other lessons on Livemocha. In order to do this, I selected other five lessons out of the 12 lessons that students completed during the development of this project. In turn, I followed the same analytic procedure used to examine how the components of ICC unfold in the lessons. Table 19 presents the general results of the analysis including lesson W9 discussed above.

Table 19

Presence of intercultural aspects on five Livemocha lessons

Lesson	Topics	ICC component. present	Sections of the lessons with more frequent cultural elements	Dominant modes used to convey cultural content
Lesson: W9 Holiday celebration with friends	Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannukah, Chinese New Year	Attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating	Introduction, vocabulary, read- speak, listen-write	Visual-Linguistic

Lesson: V10 It could mean?	Superbowl	Attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating	Introduction, vocabulary, read-write	Visual-Linguistic
Lesson: X2 I am excited about studying abroad in Spain this summer	Study abroad Travel procedures and needs	Attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating	Introduction, vocabulary, usage, read-speak, listen-speak	Visual-Linguistic
Lesson: V9 Is he the one who was in Titanic?	Movie the Titanic	Knowledge, interpreting and relating	Introduction, vocabulary, usage, read-write	Visual-Linguistic
Lesson: W2 How could she tell my secret?	Friendship and betrayal	Attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating	Introduction, practice, read-write, read-speak, listen-write, listen-speak	Visual-Linguistic

The table above shows the sections with more intercultural elements, the ICC components and the dominant modes used to convey cultural meaning. Generally, the sections with most intercultural content were the introduction video, the vocabulary flashcards and the production exercises. Although there was also cultural content in the sections of usage and practice, the type of cultural knowledge was procedural and situated learners in the use of communicative skills with samples of cultural situations. The modes that transmitted these cultural elements were mostly visual (pictures, and videos) and linguistic (expressions in the oral documents, videos, examples, descriptions and exercises).

Regarding the topics of the lessons analyzed, these topics imply the association of language learning with cultural identity, practices and behavior. If we group them we find that all the lessons had a topic related to a cultural aspect of the C2. For example, the topics of the

lessons were: Holiday celebrations (lesson W9) the Superbowl (lesson V10), the movie The Titanic (lesson V9), study abroad procedures (lesson X2) and gossips and betrayal (lesson W2). These topics had the potential to promote attitudes of curiosity and openness towards the C2. By showing what the others do and how the others perceive similar practices such as watching movies (The Titanic) and attending to sports events (The Superbowl), Livemocha presented a positive and familiar image of the C2. The selection of topics in Livemocha is an indicator of how the cultural dimension was present in the semiotic design of this SNSLL.

The inclusion of the cited topics implies that Livemocha acknowledges the importance of cultural knowledge in language learning. Also, Livemocha motivated its users to be curious and open by including some cultural topics representing facts of the C2 and motivating learners to know some cultural behaviors concerning similar situations (e.g. Lesson X2: betrayal and gossip). Besides promoting the development of positive attitudes towards the cultural practices of other communities, the topics allowed learners to identify some cultural symbols of other peoples, their practices and attitudes towards their own cultures. In these topics Livemocha showed what other people do, how they perform some activities such as festivals, celebrations, academic practices and, in some cases, what motivated those activities (Lesson W9). These types of topics allowed learners to discover similar events in the C2 and other perspectives regarding cultural practices. For example on lessons W9, V9 and V10 Livemocha presented similar events to other cultures and showed the way other peoples discussed and lived these activities such as describing a movie, a football team or a holiday celebration. All these topics encompassed declarative knowledge. However, procedural knowledge was also present in these lessons.

Regarding procedural cultural knowledge, Livemocha presented the topics in a video clip. Usually, in these video clips, some actors talked about the topic of the lesson and their

conversation was framed in a communicative situation. In this way, the topics were not introduced directly but covertly as a spontaneous relation with the communicative situation where the actors spoke. For example, on lesson V10 two people are talking about a football team, the Cowboys. Then, they discuss about the possibility of the Cowboys being part of the championship. In this conversation, the topic of the Superbowl emerged as consequence of the communicative situation and both speakers discuss some cultural elements related with this event.

The introduction of cultural topics through the presentation of a communicative situation also helped learners to acquire procedural knowledge of the C2. Each lesson had a communicative objective and usually in the introduction Livemocha presented this procedural knowledge. For example, on the five lessons analyzed procedural knowledge was introduced. This procedural knowledge was related with the cultural topic of the lesson. These functions were listing the requirements to start a travel to study abroad (lesson X2), expressing anger and disappointment (lesson W2), expressing certainty (lesson V10), describing scenes of a film (lesson V9) and narrating holiday celebrations (lesson W9).

The thread in these situations is that all of them are related with American cultural practices. Particularly the discussion about the Titanic, the Superbowl and the celebrations are closely linked to the American culture. The description of the Titanic as an American symbol; the importance of football, which is regarded by some as the national sport of the United States (Belkin, 2004; U.S. Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP), 2015); and the wide variety of cultural celebrations in one same city are phenomena described through the lens of American people.

These topics and the way Livemocha addressed them provided learners factual and deeper knowledge about American culture mostly, but in some other case such as in Lesson W9, some other cultural groups are involved. Deeper knowledge appeared in the production sections where users had to position themselves in the place of someone else. Furthermore, in the production sections users had to apply the previous knowledge acquired in the lesson to propose solutions, tell anecdotes or give advice. The evidence of this deeper cultural knowledge is the application of declarative knowledge in hypothetical situations where there were issues related with the main topic of the lesson. These activities constitute meaningful intercultural exercises because learners were required to compare and contrast the cultural rituals of their own culture and that of the C2. In turn, this task of comparison and contrast as proposed by interculturalists (Byram, 1997; Álvarez & Bonilla, 2009; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013c) is a requirement for the development of intercultural skills.

Particularly, in the sections of introduction, vocabulary and practice I found more factual information. In those sections the cultural information was transmitted overtly because it was more frequent than in the other sections, there was an evident relationship between the lexical items, the topic and the images (see analysis of lesson W9 above) and the cultural information appeared in the communicative situations of the introductory videos. Additionally, in the section of practice users had to review the factual knowledge introduced in the previous sections to develop the proposed exercises. However, in some lessons, the cultural facts appeared in all the sections, as we saw in lesson W9.

The findings above show that there was a distinction of the sections of Livemocha. In cultural terms, each section potentially promoted a component of Byram's ICC model. For instance, the introduction video presented a communicative situation where attitudes and factual

and procedural knowledge appeared. In the vocabulary section, lexical items regarding declarative knowledge were displayed and users acquired this vocabulary to develop further sections. In the section of usage Livemocha showed learners procedural knowledge related with the cultural topic presented and the communicative situation of the lesson. In the practice section, users applied their declarative and procedural knowledge of the C2 in exercises involving the communicative skills. Finally, in the section of production exercises (read-write, read-speak, listen-write, listen-speak) learners interpreted and related the declarative and procedural knowledge presented in the situations and proposed solutions, described events or gave advice. Therefore, most sections integrated explicitly the component of knowledge while the component of attitudes was promoted implicitly within the communicative situations of the lesson.

In semiotic terms, the sections of the lessons were grouped in regards to the salience of the mode used. Hence, we have two groups: more visual oriented and more linguistically oriented sections. The visually oriented sections relied mostly on visual elements such as pictures, video and color to construct meaning and the linguistic elements were secondary to the section. These sections were introduction and vocabulary. The linguistically oriented sections were usage, practice and production exercises. In these sections, the cultural knowledge was introduced by linguistic modes and the visual elements played a supportive role. Generally, on these sections cultural knowledge was taught as factual information and focused on helping learners to establish successful interactions.

The semiotic construction of Livemocha's sections shows that most cultural knowledge was transmitted through linguistic and visual modes. Therefore, culture was portrayed as a component of language learning. On Livemocha culture was transmitted in the same way of the linguistic functions (through presentation, practice and production). We saw on the analysis of

lesson W9 that the introduction, vocabulary, usage and practice sections followed the scheme of most communicative lessons and allowed the presence of covert cultural knowledge. This pattern was adopted in the other lessons studied.

The linguistic mode transmitted overtly cultural knowledge. Through cultural facts, vocabulary, grammatical rules and examples Livemocha supported the linguistic objectives of each lesson. In these elements, there was explicit declarative and procedural knowledge of the C2. On lesson W9 we studied how the introduction and vocabulary presented cultural information regarding African American and Jewish peoples. These linguistic elements were useful to introduce the topic of conditionals and comparatives. Nevertheless, the focus of these elements was linguistic and the cultural dimension of language appeared to support the communicative view of Livemocha. This was a common feature on Livemocha's lessons.

Among the two modes of communication discussed above, the visual mode was the strongest one in presenting cultural information. This mode transmitted cultural knowledge and attitudes through the images and videos. Particularly the compositional elements used in the visual components were gaze, gestures and the tone of voice used between people. Additionally, the situations presented the topics and people appearing on the lessons showed a covert disposition towards cultural aspects of the target language.

Nevertheless, the representation of other cultures based on images and a partial reference on videos could lead to the construction of stereotypes about the target culture. Since the learning focus on Livemocha was communicative, culture appeared as background for all the language tasks. For this reason, the treatment of cultural information was not deep. Thence, cultures and cultural products were represented in a homogeneous way as we studied it on lesson W9

regarding Americans' social classes. The cultural dimension on Livemocha was also presented in terms of facts. The vocabulary of lesson W9 (Table 18) is an example of the way Livemocha approached other cultures through facts and information. In addition to this criticism, Livemocha also falls short to provide deeper discussions of cultural or social issues. Although given that this is a website that intended to reach out as many users as possible worldwide, it would be understandable to think that they were careful in presenting or engaging users in discussions about sensitive topics.

Based on the previous analysis, the pictures and videos in introductions suggest that Livemocha did not represent other cultures in a negative way. On the contrary, other cultures are presented as valuable, interesting and full of similarities that have the potential to unite people from different parts of the world. Livemocha relied on semiotic resources potential to transmit cultural knowledge. Other authors have discussed this potential of semiotic resources in creating and mobilizing discourses (Kress, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).

The component of knowledge permeated almost all the lesson and appeared mainly in the sections of introduction, vocabulary, usage and practice. Since Livemocha had a communicative focus, the type of knowledge most promoted was procedural with some elements of declarative cultural facts. This can be seen in the information showed on the flashcards and lexical items introduced in lessons. Moreover, the entire lessons provided procedural knowledge of the C2. From the topic until the production exercises, all the lessons aimed at teaching users the social conventions of communication in a foreign language. This implies that procedural knowledge was the center of Livemocha lessons and was supported by semiotic resources. The role of semiotic resources as meaning making tools has also been studied in other works (Hawisher & Selfe, 1998; Jewitt, 2009; Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Finally, the skills of interpreting and relating were the main component in the production sections because users had to interpret the communicative situations presented and relate it with their own lives. Additionally, in the practice sections, the topics, the representation of other cultures and the invitation to propose solutions were covert manifestations of the intercultural dimension on Livemocha.

The absence of other ICC components such as the skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness can be explained due to the nature of the lessons. On these spaces users could not engage in intercultural communication with other users, the limitations of the chat tool also hindered the establishment of trust among users so they could construct the trust required to deal with sensitive cultural topics. The recognition of social issues, critical stances and other sensitive themes were not present on Livemocha's exercises. Thence, learners could not fully develop a critical stance about cultural documents or events. Therefore, the semiotic design of Livemocha promoted other ICC components such as attitudes, knowledge and the skills of interpreting and relating. These findings match with the results of the analysis of lesson W9 where the ICC components missing were the skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness.

To sum up, we can infer that Livemocha's semiotic design had a salient cultural presence. The cultural dimension presented in lesson W9 matched with the other four lessons analyzed. The topics of the lessons implied that Livemocha recognized the importance of cultural elements in language learning. Most of the cultural dimension on Livemocha was factual information regarding the C2. The distinction of Livemocha sections could be understood in terms of ICC components and modes. In terms of ICC components attitudes and knowledge were the two big elements that appeared in the sections. Concerning the modes of communication, most cultural

knowledge was transmitted through visual mode. The visual mode was more covert and this meant that for Livemocha the cultural dimension was a subsidiary component of language learning and cultural knowledge was transmitted mainly subconsciously. This subconscious construction of cultural knowledge leads to the construction of stereotypes and superficial understanding of the C2. We need to remember that semiotic resources are culturally constructed (Kress, 2010). Hence, the most salient ICC components found in Livemocha's semiotic design were attitudes, knowledge and the skills of interpreting and relating.

Presence of intercultural elements in the participants' reflections and interactions

In the previous section, I focused on Livemocha's semiotic design and the cultural meanings of its contents. In this section, I analyze what the different instruments of data collection show as indicators of intercultural competence in the participants' commentaries of this study. When identifying ICC, we need to bear in mind that intercultural competence is not something that we can accurately measure or assess (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013b; Byram, 1997).

The findings that I present and discuss here are part of a life-long process that students carry out in order to become intercultural speakers. The results I present are partial evidence of intercultural behaviors, attitudes, or thoughts that appeared in the participants' commentaries during the focus group sessions, the final survey and the learning logs. These statements indicate how students demonstrated intercultural attitudes and behaviors towards the target culture. In addition, the work of the students within the lessons and their chat interactions showed how these intercultural skills played an important role in the participants' actions on Livemocha and the relationship between language learning and culture. Figure 19 below exhibits the four dimensions of intercultural skills appearing on the participants' reflections and chat interactions.

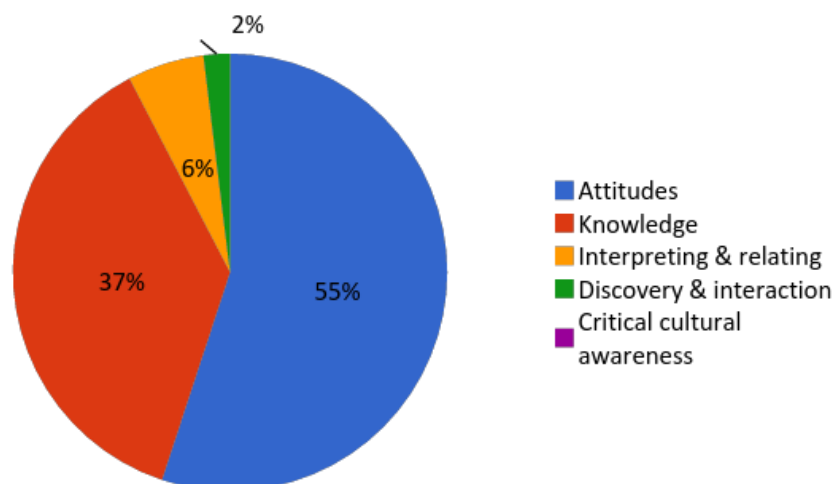


Figure 19. Dimensions of ICC identified in the students' reflections and interactions

Figure 19 shows that from the total of all the relevant data chosen and analyzed 55% of the students' commentaries indicated intercultural attitudes towards the target culture and people from other cultural background. The skill of knowledge was the second with more presence with a frequency of 37%. With 6% the skill of interpreting and relating events and documents from an intercultural stance appeared much less in the data. The skill of discovery and interaction had a subtle 2% of the total of data analyzed. It is noteworthy that in several cases one single excerpt provided evidence of more than one skill and this helped me to discover how the skills were interrelated with each other. For example, in one occasion AG commented:

Something that C said that we don't know why many Indian guys used to write you [Colombian people], I asked one of them, or two one day and they answered me that they found some similarities between Latin-American culture and theirs. [...] and that's because when they spoke to Europeans or Americans they always had an uncomfortable reaction towards them [Indian guys], a kind of certain distance, while Latin people were more open. AG. (Focus group, 2016).

In this excerpt AG gives us an indicator of how attitudes, knowledge and skills of discovery and interaction were at play during some of the students' online interactions. First, AG was interested in discovering why some Indian interlocutors preferred to talk with Latin-American people and by doing so, she manifested attitudes of curiosity and openness. Second, after AG's talk with her Indian interlocutors she could have an idea about the socialization processes of them and the way to get close to someone of a different culture. In the same way, AG could manifest indicators of skills of interpretation and relating and discovery and interaction. She was able to interpret her interlocutors' attitudes and feelings, relate them with her social online behavior and discover how some Indian people liked to interact with Latin people. This type of commentaries was common in the data and allowed me to identify some manifestations of ICC within the participants' voices.

Although I found manifestations of some ICC skills, the resulting data did not show evidence of critical cultural awareness. This leads us to question the affordances of Livemocha for promoting ICC development. These aspects will be discussed later. In the next paragraphs, I illustrate, explain and discuss the evidence of the ICC components present in the data beginning with the skill of attitudes.

Attitudes. The component of attitudes was the most frequent in the statistics of intercultural behavior. In Figure 19 we observe that 55% of the data gathered showed indicators of attitudes of openness and curiosity towards the C2. In what follows I explain the presence of attitudes and provide support using students' voices.

According to Albarracin, Zanna, Johnson, and Kumkale (2005), attitudes are a set of psychological human predispositions to express an evaluative judgment towards an entity. What Byram's model defines as attitudes is the position of openness, curiosity and interest in

discovering other views of the world, the capacity to decenter from ethnocentric perspectives and sharing experiences and knowledge regarding cultural and life experiences. In this case, the participants exhibited evidence of intercultural attitudes when they reflected about their experience on Livemocha, their commentaries, their interest on cultural information and their eagerness to look for opportunities of online interaction with people from other cultures.

Intercultural attitudes were also evidenced when the students reflected about their own cultural background and established comparisons between the cultural behavior of other members of Livemocha and themselves. In fact, this pattern was also observed when the participants reflected about the differences of communication at an intranational level. Taking into account that the component of attitudes was the most frequent in the students' voices (Figure 19), now, I explain the statistics of the descriptors of the skill of attitudes (Figure 20).

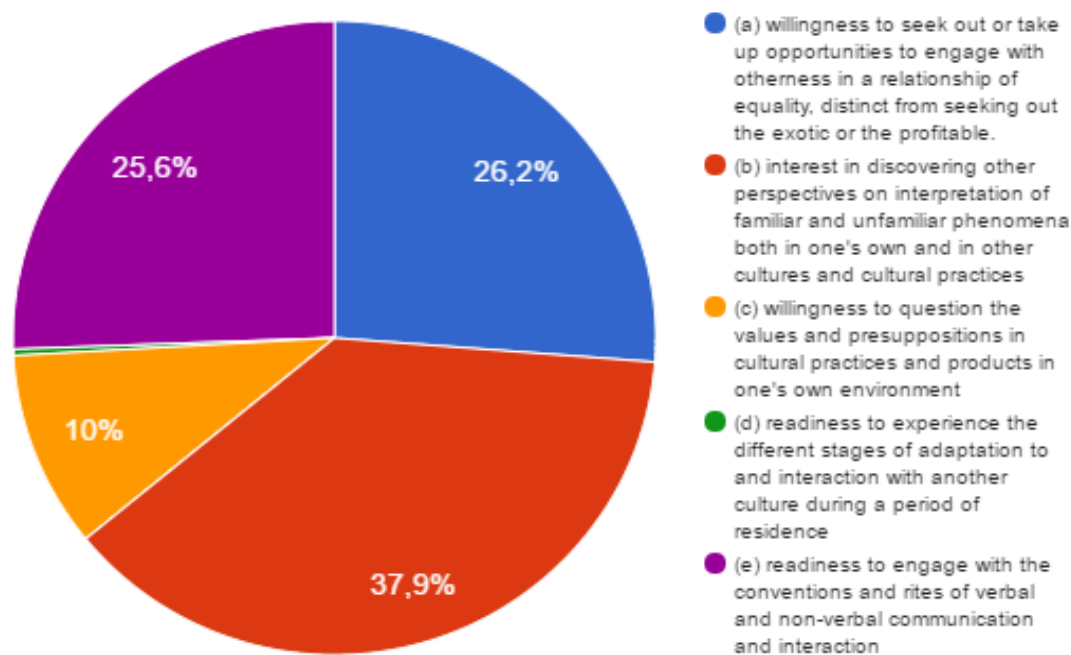


Figure 20. Results of ICC descriptors of attitudes

It is interesting to notice that among all descriptors comprising the component of Attitudes, the most frequent were the ones referring to (a) willingness to engage in intercultural interaction, (b) interest in discovering other perspectives regarding familiar and unfamiliar phenomena and (e) readiness to participating in communicative acts respecting the linguistic and social convention of interaction. These descriptors were promoted by the design of Livemocha, the class activities and the students' interest in interacting with others.

Livemocha promoted interaction and discovery of cultural aspects among its users in some spaces such as language partners, help others, chat and language lessons (for a deeper examination see section of multimodal analysis). In fact, in the survey¹ that focused on aspects of culture, 61% of the participants answered that they observed more cultural elements in the section of language partners (Figure 21). Additionally, 69% of the participants identified more cultural elements in the section of introduction within the language lessons than in the rest of the sections (Figure 22).

¹ The results of the survey include all members of the class including the ones who were not part of the sample of the case study.

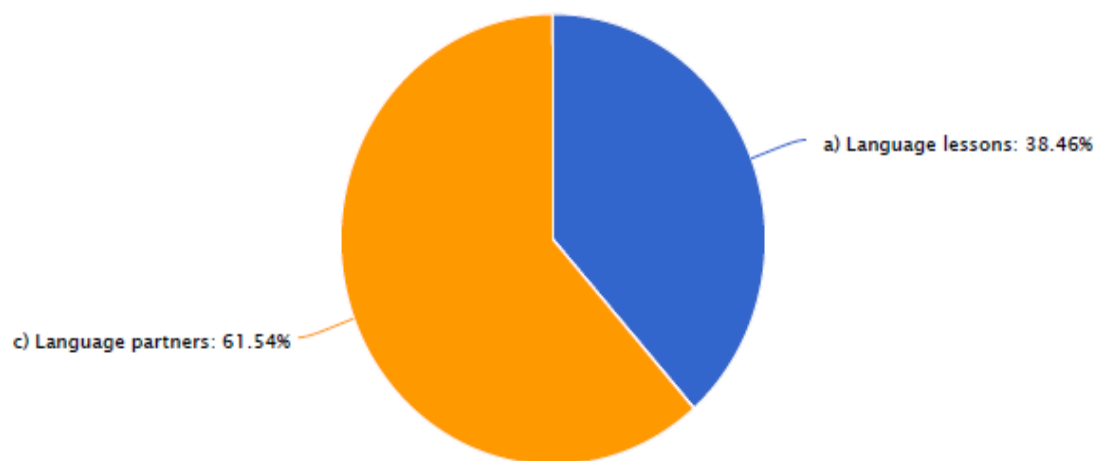


Figure 21. Presence of cultural elements in Livemocha sections

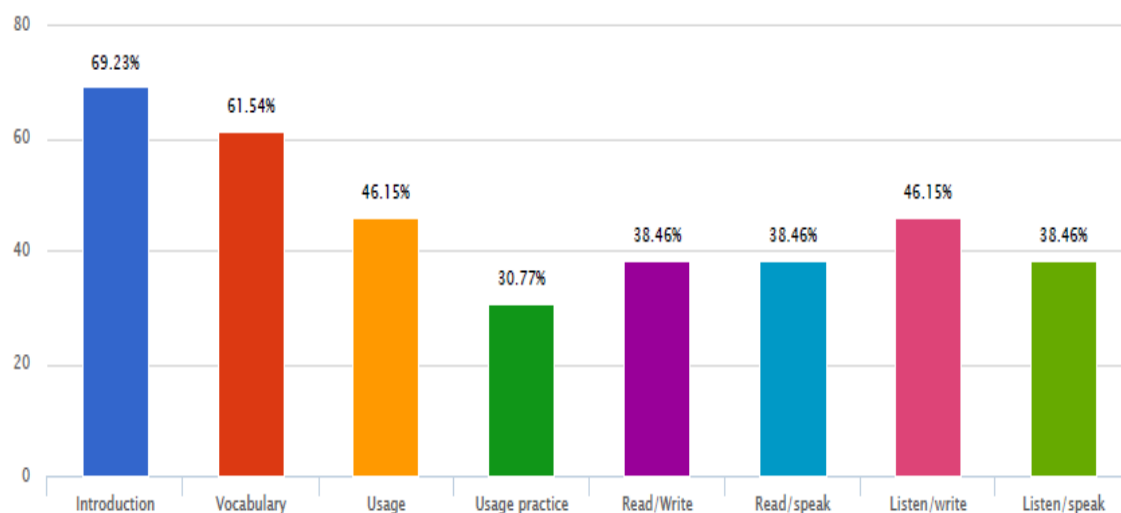


Figure 22. Presence of cultural elements in the language lessons

The focus of the class also promoted the development of descriptors a, b and e of the component of attitudes. The teacher encouraged students to interact and look for intercultural aspects with their interlocutors. He also proposed several activities aimed at observing cultural elements on the site. For example, in the next excerpt a student wrote about one of these class activities.

In the first hour of the class we had to chat with three people, one of the classroom and two external friends, we had to talk with them about christmas and three questions about it. The second hour we had to complete a unit about celebrations of different cultures. (EJ , Learning Log, December 16th 2015)

EJ explains in her learning log entry the activity that she developed during the class. In this situation, the teacher asked the students to look for other people to interact using Livemocha chat tool. Then, the students were encouraged to develop a language lesson about Christmas. In this example, we see how interaction and learning about other cultures was promoted in class through some activities. This means that although Livmeocha had the potential to encourage intercultural attitudes and interactions, it depends on the teacher to bridge Livemocha's activities with the development of intercultural competencies.

The students interest for interacting with people from other cultures was another reason why the descriptors a, b and e appeared with most frequency in the data. Usually, the students tried to communicate with other members of Livemocha and even though they could not achieve it all the times, they kept trying. The next excerpt shows how this happened.

When I was chatting, at the beginning it happened to me very much, that people did not answer. I thought: "why should I write to 300 people?" And then, they started to write (...) There were some (language partners) who recommended me some books, music bands that I had never listened before, but they were very good (JD, Focus group, 2016).

In this commentary, JD expresses the frustration that he felt at the beginning when trying to talk with other people. However, he recognizes that his perseverance was fruitful and that he could establish interaction with other users. Furthermore, his language partners recommended him books and bands. When JD refers to these bands as good, it means that he looked for them

and listened to their music, this shows how he expanded his cultural repertoire and interested for his interlocutors' perspectives. These actions are proof of positive intercultural attitudes.

Regarding descriptors c and d we find they were the descriptors with less presence in the data (See Figure 20). A possible reason for absence of some intercultural descriptors might be found in the nature of Livemocha's pedagogical design and the type of applications of the site. Some of the reasons why the descriptor c barely appeared were because the participants did not have enough time to develop enough trust with other members of Livemocha to talk about deep intercultural aspects. Furthermore, the linguistic level of the students was a barrier that did not allow them to try sensitive topics. Students seemed to be cautious when choosing the topics and their treatment. This fact also shows that the participants were interested in maintaining relationships with their interlocutors which is also part of ICC.

Furthermore, the descriptor related to experience the different stages of adaptation and interaction with a second culture in a period of residence does not apply because the participants were not preparing to live in another country; they were involved in a learning language online activity.

Other fragments of the data where I have identified indicators of intercultural attitudes come from the instruments and the fragments of the focus group. I translated students verbatim keeping their meanings. In some cases, I added contextual information to some excerpts by using square brackets. Language mistakes were not corrected in order to keep the originality of the excerpts. The observations in the field notes also give support to the claims of this subsection.

One of the questions included in the survey asked:

What is an intercultural speaker?

someone with cultural awareness, that respects and relates with the differences between his own culture and others. (MG, Survey, 2016)

In this excerpt, the participant MG answered in the survey what she thought that an intercultural speaker should demonstrate. Here, we can see how MG identifies cultural awareness and respect necessary for an intercultural speaker. Furthermore, she proposes that there must be a bridge between the cultures at play in intercultural interaction by relating and valuing the differences between individuals. This type of recognition goes in accordance with Byram's ICC model when he identifies in the skill of attitudes a descriptor which highlights the need of showing interest in discovering how to interpret and understand familiar and unfamiliar phenomena that take place in intercultural communication processes. Furthermore, Liddicoat assures that in intercultural communication speakers need to engage in processes mediated by respect, curiosity and acceptance of otherness (Liddicoat, 2002).

When MG talks about the cultural differences and the relationship with others, she demonstrates her awareness of interest and her positive attitude towards a different culture because she mentions these attitudes as necessary for an intercultural speaker and for an ultimate effective intercultural interaction. Similarly, Alvarez and Bonilla (2009) state that in engaging in communicative processes across cultures people need to decenter and accept the otherness of individuals so they achieve understanding and attitudes that ensure positive interactions. The next fragments obtained from the learning log illustrate how other participants demonstrated attitudes of curiosity and openness towards different cultures.

5. What themes did you talk about during your exchange?

We talked about the semester, about their lifes, I also asked one guy from Sweden about what he thought about Colombia because he had been here. (EJ, Learning log, December 2nd 2015)

6. *Were those themes interesting or relevant to you? why?*

I think I need more time to chat with them because I cant speak so much (NC, Learning log, December 9th 2015).

Those themes are so important for me because I think the best way to learn a new language is using it in real situations and being exposed and hooked on it during long periods of time. In addition, when we practice a specific topic they can help me to develop my skills and improve, and I can do the same for them (AG, Learning log, November 25th 2015).

In the three previous excerpts we see how these participants (EJ, NC and AG) performed intercultural behavior. When asked about the topics discussed on the chat tool, EJ wrote that she talked about academic life, personal background and she recognized a particular situation regarding her talk with a Swedish man with whom she discussed about the image he had about Colombians. These types of topics indicate how EJ is interested in knowing the cultural reality of others and the way she focused on the personal background of her interlocutor is an evidence of her eagerness to establish intercultural contact.

In addition, when she asked her interlocutor about the way he saw Colombia, she showed how interested she was in knowing the interpretation of the Swedish man regarding his experience in Colombia. In this respect, Byram (1997) names this type of behavior as a fundamental part of the skill of attitudes and locates it in one of his ICC descriptors as follows: “(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices” (p. 50). This interest is

evident when EJ tries to know what the other man thought about Colombia and since she mentions that he had been in Colombia before, we can know that in the conversation they shared information about travel and experiences abroad.

Another interesting indicator of intercultural behavior can be observed in the other two answers of students NC and AG. For instance, NC shared that she needed more time to establish effective communication with other people using the chat tool. This example shows how eager she was to look for opportunities to engage in intercultural. Furthermore, Byram states that part of being an intercultural speaker involves the eagerness and interest in investing time by taking opportunities to immerse in intercultural communication.

In this same vein, AG wrote that what made interesting her interactions with other members of Livemocha was the opportunity to learn a second language by using it in real-time situations. Her recognition of the social nature of language learning and the willingness to learn by helping others is a clear indicator of an attitude that aligns with ICC.

Moreover, her interest in learning a language through the discussion of specific topics online and opening herself to support others' learning process is recognized by Byram (1997) in one of his curricular objectives as: “(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable” (p. 50). In fact, what we see here is that AG far from being motivated by profiting or seeking the exotic of other users of Livemocha, her interest was to use the platform of Livemocha as a resource to improve her skills through online support to others. The next sample also shows this relation of attitudes and learning languages through intercultural contact.

Teacher: *What aspects did you consider so that [interaction] happened?*

AG: Hey JD, it's not only about how you ... start a conversation about a specific topic, but how to end it so you can, in other moment, talk to that person, because sometimes you ended like: "ah, no bye, I gotta go", I mean if someone says me that in that way, I just like: "hey, not terrible, I'm not gonna talk to that person". But, if you... you have to be.. like trying to end [the chat interaction] in a formal way, like: "hey, see you later" or "I'm busy right now", I don't know, blah, blah,... Things like those (AG, Focus group, 2016).

Here we see the importance that AG assigns to the ritual of social interaction and how she shows eagerness to continue talking to other members of Livemocha by establishing a closing formula that goes beyond the simple farewell. Instead she says that it is very important to close a conversation by being very polite and to avoid abrupt interruption of the communication. She adds that when somebody interrupts in that abrupt way a conversation with her, she refuses to talk again to that person. Therefore, what AG looks for is a constant and friendly interaction with other members of Livemocha and one of the tools that she used for this objective was to closing her conversations showing interest in talking again with that person. In relation to Byram's theory, we can see how the skill of openness and eagerness to actively engage in intercultural communication knowing the rites underlying the C2 is part of what AG considered relevant to communicate with others using Livemocha.

In part, what AG wants to avoid is intercultural dysfunction by showing herself as someone polite and eager to continue talking with other users of Livemocha. An example of online difficulties caused by misinterpretation of phenomena and cultural dysfunction can be traced down to Ware and Kramsch's (2005) work. In their study, these researchers explained how two users of an online language learning platform engaged in two courses had problems due to their lack of appropriate management of cultural differences in terms of the attitudes

demonstrated in their interactions and the type of responses provided by each of them. These students, a girl learning English in Germany, and a young man learning German in an American University had an incident regarding a social conflict in Germany and the understanding of some historical events of that country. The misunderstanding was caused by a message written by Rob (the American student) who asked about the existence of a cultural conflict between Western German people and their Eastern fellows. Then, in the following interactions with Marie, who was trying to explain about her reality in Germany, the interaction turned sarcastic, awkward and conflicting.

What Ware and Kramsch explained was that this intercultural misunderstanding was not caused due to lack of L2 proficiency or appropriate management of the pragmatic elements. What originated this misunderstanding was the lack of self-awareness to ask about different positions in a foreign country (on the side of Rob) and the way Marie explained Rob about the history and national memory of her country.

Being aware of this type of possible online cultural “dangers” was what seemed to motivate AG to close her interactions in a very kind way in order to keep in contact with other people using the chat tool of Livemocha. As we can see, she says “, *it’s not only about how you ... start a conversation about a specific topic, but how to end it so you can, in other moment, talk to that person*” (AG, Focus group, 2016). This reflection demonstrates how interested she is in taking all the possible opportunities to engage in intercultural communication and to keep “open doors” to learn more from the others in a relationship of equality and respect. Furthermore, she demonstrates how much she respects the other by closing a conversation in an appropriate way.

More examples of intercultural attitudes can be found in the chat conversations that learners maintained with other people on Livemocha. In the following lines, we see how two participants demonstrate their attitudes of openness and interest towards the others and their cultures. Let us see how AC interacts with N who is a Livemocha user from another culture.

Chat #5

1 N: Hello!

2 How are you?

3 A: very good and you?

4 N: Very good to hear!

5 Very good too, thank you!

6 A: so, where are you

7 from :D

8 N: United States

9 Where are you from?

10 A: ok, I'm colombian

11 N: very nice!

12 A: yes, :D, so do you

13 know spanish?

14 N: Very, very Little.

15 Not enough to say, "I know Spanish" haha

16 Do you know English?

17 A: ok, not problem, :D,

18 and yes I know english, I'm studying english and french

19 What do you like to do?

20 N: English and French,

21 wonderful!

22 What about you?

23 A: I like read

24 And also a lot of things

25 Even, I'm Reading a book right now, maybe you red it

26 N: Maybe!

27 A: animal farm is called By george orwell, I almost finished it

28 Is so interesting story

29 N: I have not read it, but I know is a very famous book by James Orwell, who

30 also wrote another famous

31 book called "1984"

32 A: yes of course, you should read ir speaks about a revolution in a farm

33 And is funny because animals cna speak and act as

34 human beings but is not a fable

35 N: yes!

36 A: if you wants you can

37 left me your Skype id and maybe practice more english because I'm still I'm

38 learning english, you know, ori f you want to practice spanish

39 N: it is "...."

40 A: now I have to go, so

41 good bye and was nice talk to you :D

(AC, Chat#5, 2015).

We can see how in this chat conversation AC answers N's greeting and asks for her interlocutor's mood. Then, she continues by inquiring about N's nationality and she makes a move to turn the conversation towards the realm of languages. When N answers that he speaks a little bit of Spanish they turn to AC's academic life and she asks about N's favorite activities. Then, AC introduces the core topic of this conversation: the book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. AC calls upon N's previous knowledge and by saying in line 25: *"I'm Reading a book right now, maybe you red it"* (AC, Chat#5, 2015), she tries to show a positive attitude by assuming that her interlocutor already read the book, to make him feel comfortable in the conversation (although the topic emerges from an academic activity). She invites him to engage actively in the conversation about the book *Animal Farm*. After this invitation, N answers that he maybe has read the book and AC proceeds to present the book and to mention that it is an interesting work.

N admits not having read Orwell's book, but in order to save face, he demonstrates some knowledge about the author by telling that he knows one of his literary pieces: *"N: I have not read it, but I know is a very famous book by James Orwell, who also wrote another famous book called "1984."* (Lines 29-31). What seems interesting is that although N does not know about the particular book mentioned, he demonstrates eagerness to continue the conversation. After that, AC accepts N's statement and invites him to read *Animal Farm* by advising him to read the book and by telling him the general plot of the story. N responds accepting what AC says and finally, AC invites N to keep in touch with her by using Skype.

The particularity of this interaction is the way AC moved the conversation and how she demonstrated all the time eagerness to involve her interlocutor in the chat interaction.

Commentaries and appraisals in lines 10, 11, 17, 32 and 41, such as: “*ok, not problem, :D, yes of course, you should read it, was nice talk to you :D*” were some demonstrations of AC’s interest in making her chat partner comfortable and in maintaining fluent communication with him. All this goes in accordance with Byram’s (1997) ICC theory in the component of attitudes. One of the descriptors states: “(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable” (p. 50). Beyond a regular chat conversation turning around trivialities and generalities, in this example we could see how engaged the student was and how interested she was in taking more opportunities to exchange intercultural communication with her interlocutor. Throughout this conversation AC also showed how ready she was to engage in verbal communication taking into account the conventions and rites that play a major role in online interaction. She showed this intercultural behavior by avoiding undermining N’s lack of knowledge about the book and by inviting him to talk.

Another example of intercultural attitudes can be seen in the next conversation when a student presents herself as an intercultural mediator and offers her help to her chat partner.

Chat #11

1 A: Hello Mark, I am A and I am from Colombia. I am learning English, if you

2 want

3 I can help you to improve the Spanish and you can help to improve my English,

4 no?

5 M: Hola A... saludos... y claro que nos podemos ayudar. Yo estoy en la

6 ciudad

7 de Berkeley. California USA

8 A: Wow, that's great, I'm in Cali Colombia, have you hear something about

9 Cali?

10 M: yes, I have... but I have never been to Colombia. Hope to visit some day...

11 A: yes, it's so cool, and what about you, are you a student? If you wants you

12 can

13 send me your messages in Spanish.

(AG, Chat #11, 2015).

In this conversation, student AG starts the interaction by greeting and introducing herself. It is interesting to note that she starts by offering her help and requesting support for her learning process. Then M accepts her proposal and by speaking in Spanish he shows eagerness to help her to improve her English skills and establish intercultural contact. Consequently, AG guides the interaction by asking M about his travel experience. To this, he answers that he had never been in Cali, but that he would like to visit the city. Finally, AG closes asking more details about M's life, however the conversation stopped and M did not answer back that day.

Although this sample is quite short, we can see on it from the very first line how AG tried to hook her interlocutor and to offer her help. She was not looking for the profitable or exotic. As Byram (1997) states, learners must be able to: "seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable". (p. 57). This is very important because it demonstrates AG's motivation to establish intercultural interaction.

We can also see here that when she establishes contact with M, she encourages him by praising his answers. Thence, on lines 8 and 9 she says: "*Wow, that's great, yes, it's so cool*"

(AG, Chat#11, 2015). Using this kind of expressions was a pattern in some cases that appeared during the chat interactions. By doing this, AG showed indicators of ICC through her willingness to maintain contact with other Livemocha members and readiness to establish online verbal contact with somebody from another culture. Moreover, her introduction demonstrates that her interest is to learn from others and to support her language partners' learning online process:

"Hello Mark, I am A and I am from Colombia. I am learning English, if you want I can help you to improve the Spanish and you can help to improve my English, no?." (AG, Chat#11, lines 1-4, 2015). From an intercultural perspective, these actions (motivating others to learn one's language, supporting their language learning process and treating them with respect) are necessary to engage in effective communicative interaction (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013b).

Additionally, in the two examples presented above we identify some indicators of the descriptor e: "readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction" (Byram, 1997, p. 57). The interest and the way the two participants managed the chat interaction suggest that they could start conversations and maintain them being aware of their otherness. In addition, AG and AC could close their interactions with a possibility to get further contact. Doing this requires learners to be ready to engage successfully in communication with others.

Furthermore, in the field notes I could find indicators of attitudes of curiosity and openness in the way students tried to engage in online exchange with others and the interest they had in discussing about the lives of the others. This behavior gave insights about the students' disposition to learn from the other. For example, in the next excerpt taken from the observation we can observe how these attitudes emerged during the class work.

On the other side, there was JD for whom N was recommending him books. JD opened Google and was searching for the book. I also observed that JD checked out N's profile page on Livemocha and was searching for information that he found in there. For example, he searched for "show Choir" and he asked me about the word> Pentatonic. It seemed Nicholas was a musician. (Course professor, entry January 27th, 2016).

In the previous journal entry we can observe how JD experienced attitudes of openness and curiosity. First, JD accepted N's recommendation about a book and he went beyond by looking the book on internet. By looking N's recommended book, JD opened himself to receive his interlocutor's advice and observed a different perspective about a familiar phenomenon. Second, JD was curious. He did not conform to talk and accept N's recommendation; he also visited N's profile and searched some information of his interlocutor to know more about his life. His curiosity led him to ask the teacher about a word that he did not know and they concluded that N might be a musician. These encounters enhanced the students' possibilities to understand other perspectives of the world and to know more about other cultures.

Now that we have studied how the skill of attitudes emerged from the data, we must wonder about the development and presence of the other ICC skills. In the next section, I study the skill of knowledge in the participants' voices.

Knowledge. In this research, the component of knowledge was one of the most frequent skills in the data with 37% of presence in all the students' voices (Figure 19). In fact, when the participants talked about cultural topics in the focus group, they identified behaviors and social practices of other peoples. Mainly, the students analyzed their experience on Livemocha and talked about the way they integrated cultural knowledge (national memory and processes of communication in the C2) in their learning process.

In Byram's (1997) model, the component of knowledge refers to the factual knowledge about the national memory of the target culture, the cultural icons, expressions and products derived from the cosmovision, idiosyncrasy and beliefs of others. In this study the participants showed knowledge in their online interaction with other members of Livemocha on the chat tool, in the understanding and application of factual knowledge in the exercises on the language lessons and their reflections during the focus group about interactions on the website, the learning logs, and the second survey.

Acquiring knowledge about the cultural expressions, the habits, customs, the processes of interaction and the general vision of the world that the target culture has trains learners to know how to interact in specific communicative circumstances; it allows learners to identify possible points of dysfunction or empathy; it guides them to understand nonverbal language, to see beyond the common practices of others and to identify what makes other people around the world different (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2008). For these reasons, intercultural knowledge enhances the ways learners engage in contact with others. As a matter of fact, at one point of the interaction studied in Ware and Kramsch's (2005) work, the treatment of the element of factual knowledge about the history of contemporary Germany was a factor that unleashed intercultural misunderstanding.

The way participants acquired cultural knowledge in this study is analyzed below. Based on the evidence appeared in the data, the most frequent descriptors of ICC were the ones related to the national memory of the others' country and the processes of social interaction. The information on Figure 23 shows that the descriptors with highest presence were: *(e) the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country* and *(k) the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country* (Byram, 1997, p. 51).

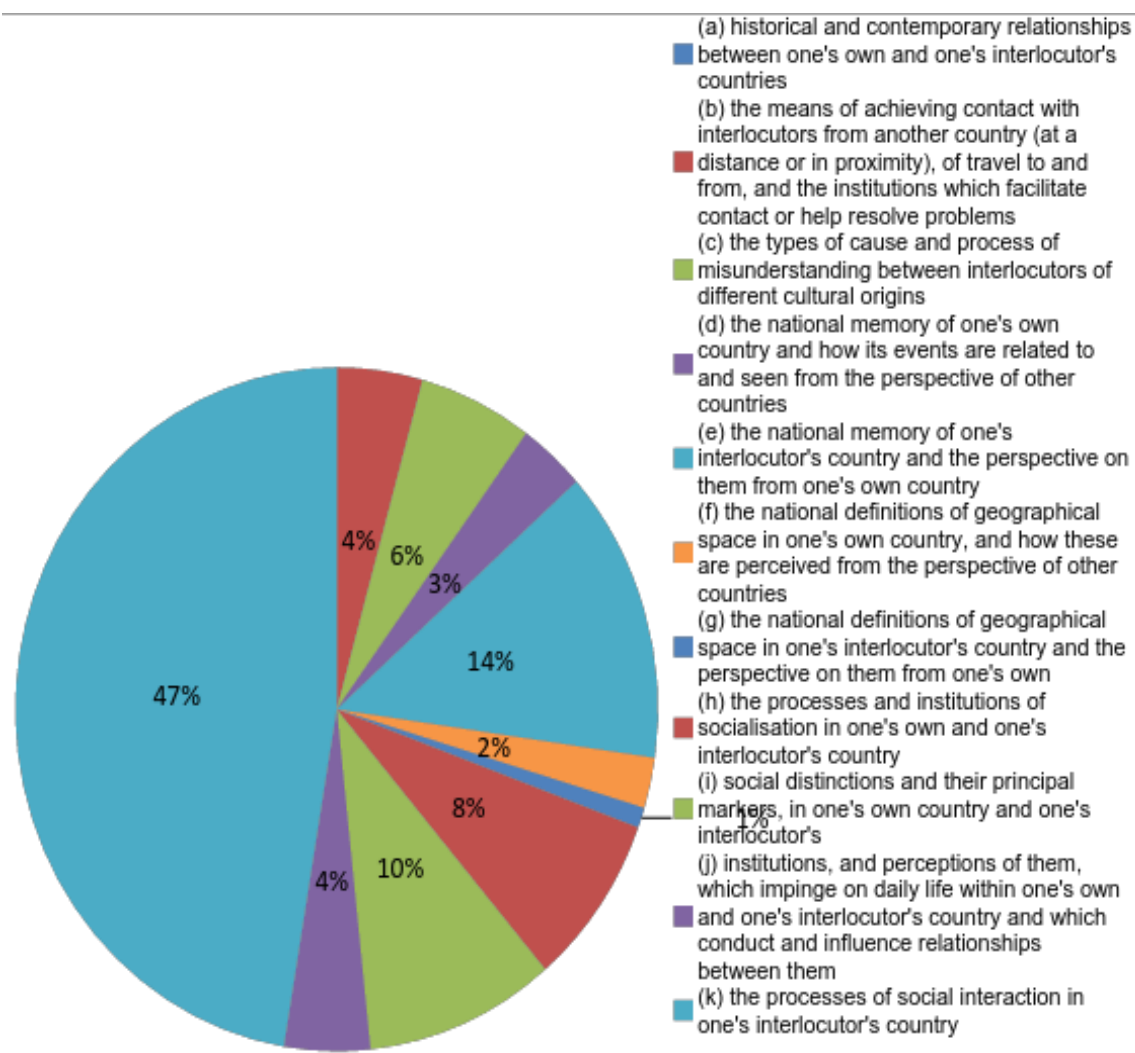


Figure 23. Frequency of descriptors of Knowledge component in the data

The students' curiosity, interest and contact with other people on Livemocha promoted the development of intercultural knowledge, and particularly of the descriptors e and k. A glance on the topics discussed on the chat tool (Figure 24), their commentaries and reflections are proof of this fact. In the fragments below, I explain how the component of intercultural knowledge can be evidenced in the participants' experience.

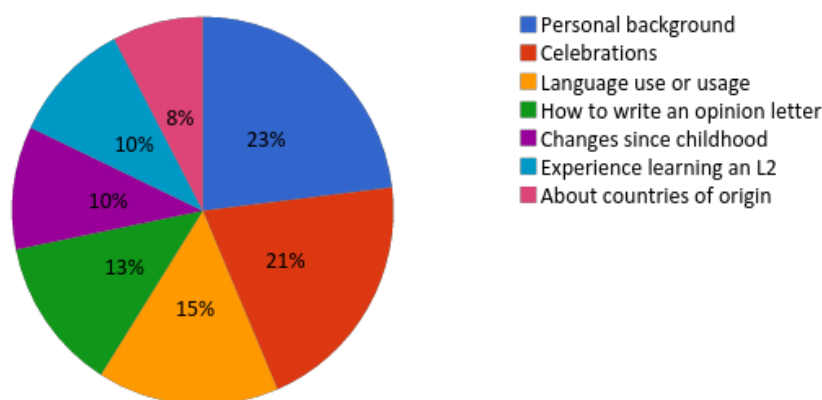


Figure 24. Main topics discussed on chat obtained from learning logs

The learning logs provide a view of how cultural knowledge developed as well. On Figure 24 we can observe the most frequent topics discussed on the chat. These topics were related to cultural elements such as celebrations, countries of origin, their interlocutors' personal life and processes of social interaction in the others' cultures (writing a letter, language use). These are all elements that correspond to knowledge about the target culture.

If we group the topics in the two categories of knowledge proposed by Byram, we find that the topics of personal background, celebrations, changes from childhood, experience learning an L2 and countries of origin are part of declarative knowledge. These topics provide learners factual knowledge about the C2 reflected in the interlocutors' experiences of life. In total, the topics related to declarative knowledge add 72%. Nevertheless, we also see that the

students were interested in the social practices of other cultures. Topics such as language use and how to write an opinion letter, help learners to know how to interact following the social procedures of the C2. The discussion of these topics had a significant impact on the participants' perception of the other cultures. In the next paragraphs, I explain some reflections of the students in the learning logs and excerpts of the students' chat discussions.

What have you learned about your own culture and other cultures from your interactions with others and your experience on Livemocha?

I have learned how people from other countries act in different situations, what they think my culture and country and viceversa. I have learned about religion, political issues and education.
(AG, Survey, 2016).

In the examples above, we see how AG answers that she learned about the cultural behavior of people (*“how people from other countries act in different situations,”* their actions and reactions in different situations), their opinion about her culture, and cultural facts (she mentions religion, politics and education). The interesting feature of this answer is that she clarifies that this process of acquiring cultural knowledge went beyond her myness and that she was able to learn how the cultural dimension operated in her own culture (when she says: *“and viceversa”*).

Therefore, AG understood that cultural learning goes beyond facts and data. She also analyzed how similar were her and her interlocutor's cultures. After this process of reflection about cultural knowledge, she was able to understand the bridge between cultures and to accept the way others see her national culture. As Liddicoat (2002) and Alvarez and Bonilla (2009) say, when learners are able to decenter and accept others' views about themselves, they reach a level

of acceptance of the otherness that makes possible a better understanding among cultures. This was what happened in the previous example.

In the next excerpt, taken from the learning log, we can observe another example of how cultural knowledge developed in some of the students' reflections after having worked on some Livemocha language lessons.

What cultural aspects could you identify during the exchange?

Also, something that i found very interesting in a conversation with a chinese guy is that government doesn't let people use facebook and twiter. My friend said is because government hide somethings and the expression freedom is not very good. (AG, Learning log, 2015)

In this case, AG discusses about a social issue that happens in China. Although AG did not go deeper in this issue, she acknowledges that after having talked to her Chinese interlocutor she gained cultural knowledge about the reality in China today and she referred to this "discovery" as something "*very interesting*" (AG, Learning log, 2015). Something that could have demonstrated a more critical approach would have been a discussion with a more profound lens how the prohibition of using some social networks such as Facebook and Twitter has shaped the Chinese society and how the other user faces this political measure. Nonetheless, AG evidenced her intercultural knowledge by identifying that one aspect of culture is the management of media in a country (*that government doesn't let people use facebook and twiter*). Furthermore, AG expresses that her interlocutor analyzes his reality by saying that the Government has secrets for its people and that freedom of expression is not a right for everybody in China.

In Byram's terms what we can observe in this fragment is knowledge about a process of socialization in the interlocutor's country (people interact without using Facebook or Twitter)

within the institution of social media. The process that she discovered in this case was online communication in China. In fact, this type of knowledge appears in one of Byram's (1997) curricular objectives: "(h) the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and one's interlocutor's country" (Byram, 1997, p. 51).

We also see that AG reported the perception that her interlocutor had towards one of his national institutions (The Government) and she explained that this perception caused him distrust due to the lack of freedom to communicate in the same way as other Western nations (*My friend said is because government hide somethings and the expression freedom is not very good.*).

Byram (1997) defines this behavior as knowledge about: "(j) institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them" (Byram, 1997, p.51).

By analyzing how an individual evaluates his communicational system within his country, AG was able to identify a social issue and understand the condition of the other cultural group. This fact shows that during chat interactions, learners were exposed to cultural elements. This type of behavior allows learners to comprehend deeper processes of interaction and gives them the tools to engage in intercultural exchanges (Rico, 2012; Sercu, et al, 2005). The evidence of how students could incorporate intercultural knowledge from the interaction with Livemocha and its applications is also witnessed in some reflections during the focus group sessions.

Teacher: *Do you believe that there is a focus on Livemocha, in terms of language skills development? If so, which one is the focus? I mean, What does Livemocha want that you... that somebody develops the most? Is there any emphasis, or something similar? Or, is it balanced?*

JD: *I think that moreover culture because you saw the gestures they [the actors in the introductory videos] had when they spoke in the video and in the expressions... the idioms, some. Then, it appeared: “This usually is used by native people in oral speech, but for the written, (...)”. So, one said: “Ah, good that’s culture”, because (...) you’re not gonna write... “This is for you” [using the Spanish word vos instead of tu], in a present; no! One writes: “For you, [Using the Spanish word usted] from me”, (...). So, you always noticed and consciously or unconsciously, because you always had present the way as it was said, or because you were just like: “ah, well, I can use this in this situation” (JD, Focus group, 2015).*

In this fragment, we can see that J identified that one of the focuses on Livemocha was cultural knowledge. According to him, Livemocha was dedicated to teach languages using cultural knowledge. J based his opinion on the way the language lessons were presented and the type of introductory videos (*because you saw the gestures they [the actors in the introductory videos] had when they spoke in the video and in the expressions*). Another aspect that J identified as a source of cultural knowledge was the grammatical explanations and the language use tips offered in the lessons. The potential of these tips of communication as part of the cultural content on Livemocha constituted elements that taught students about the interaction practices in the target culture. The integration of this type of knowledge is a pattern in the design of SNSLLs (Alvarez, 2014a; Chotel, 2012).

In fact, when learners are exposed to this type of pragmatic knowledge, they gain elements to establish effective communication with people from other cultures. Let us remember that one of the evidences that shows that a learner is competent in a second language is his/her mastering of the pragmatic elements of a language and its functions (Halliday, 1978). Therefore, acquiring cultural knowledge about the national memory, customs, habits and cosmovision of the

target culture gives the learners tools that they need in order to achieve successful interactions. In Byram's model this is evidenced in the descriptor K of the skill of attitudes: *(k) the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country* (Byram, 1997; p. 51).

By identifying some patterns of oral and written communication J demonstrates that he is aware of some cultural differences in communicative acts. When he explains the example of the use of the Spanish pronouns *tu* and *vos*. J identifies that these types of pragmatic uses in real-time communication are part of the cultural knowledge offered on Livemocha. Moreover, he says that the usage of both pronouns depends on the communicative situation and the interlocutor. From an intercultural perspective, Byram establishes that knowing the processes of social interaction in one's own and in the interlocutor's cultures are necessary to evidence ICC (Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001).

The evidence of ICC in the students was not only reported in their reflections. A glimpse to the field notes demonstrates that in class discussions, the participants talked about other cultures, particularly the way as Americans perceive the superbowl and their Christmas celebrations. In these conversations, they mentioned some details of declarative knowledge of the C2. In addition, in their chat interactions, the students also manifested their cultural knowledge about the others' national memory and symbols. The next chat conversation is an example of the appearance of knowledge about a cultural element of the target language.

Chat # 38

1 MG: Hello N!

2 Are you available to chat?

3 N: Hello, M!

4 How are you?

5 Yes, I am available to chat :)

6 MG: Im really good, thank you. How about you?

7 N: Really good to hear!

8 I am really good, thank you!

9 MG: So... tell me something about you. What do you do in Livemocha?

10 N: Help others

11 What do you do?

12 MG: I'm a student! I'm doing a degree on foreign languages and this is

13 sort of a class

14 So.... you are form USA?

15 N: Oh! How wonderful!

16 Yes, I am American

17 What are you?

18 MG: What do you mean? where am I from?

19 N: Yes, sorry, where are you from?

20 MG: I'm from Colombia

21 And which part of USA are you from?

22 N: Oh! Very nice!

23 Michigan, in the area America calls the, "Upper Peninsula"

24 What part of Colombia are you from?

25 MG: Antioquia. have you heard about Medellin. It's a beautiful place

26 N: I have not, but even the name sounds beautiful

27 MG: You need to visit Medellin someday. It's amazing and people are

28 really nice

29 N: Yes, I must!

30 MG: I know it's really weird, but do you mind if I ask you about a book

31 that I'm

32 reading right now? I need an opinion

33 N: Oh yes, go ahead!

34 MG: Thank you!

35 N: No problem!

36 MG: It's Animal Farm

37 I'm planning to write an essay about that book

38 Have you read it?

39 N: Awesome!

40 I have not read it, but I know it's a very famous book by James Orwell,

41 who

42 also wrote another famous book called "1984"

43 N: George Orwell, I am very sorry

44 MG: Exactly!

45 the book tries to satire some aspects of the Russian revolution

46 N: Oh! How wonderful!

47 M: and I want to make a comparison between the time of that revolution

48 and the

49 current situation with the government in Colombia

50 You think is a good idea?

51 N: It is a wonderful idea!

52 MG: Thank you!

(MG, Chat#38, 2016)

In this chat conversation we see that M starts the interaction (Lines 1- 8) by using formulas of politeness (saying hello and asking if her interlocutor was able to talk, asking about his mood). In the next stage, M invites N to talk about himself and asks him about his work on Livemocha. N answers that he helps others on Livemocha and the conversation turns upon M's academic studies and N's nationality (Lines 9-16). Now, in the next stage of the conversation (Lines 17-20) appears a linguistic misunderstanding. N asks in a wrong way about M's nationality as can be observed in the fragment below:

17 N *What are you?*

18 MG: *What do you mean? where am I from?*

19 N: *Yes, sorry, where are you from?*

20 MG: *I'm from Colombia*

(MG, Chat#38, 2016)

The interesting behavior that we see here is that M realizes about N's mistake, (even though he is a native speaker) by writing a question in a wrong way. When she notices the misunderstanding, she asks again for confirmation and proposes the correct formula for asking about her nationality in line 18 (*What do you mean? where am I from?*). When M asks for the correction of the question, she uses her knowledge about the processes of social interaction in her interlocutor's country to clarify the message. M's action gave a positive result that allowed the continuation of the conversation because in line 19 N apologizes for the way he asked and

corrects his question. N's action encouraged M to talk about her country and to share interesting facts about the national definitions of their geographic spaces (Lines 21-28).

Some of the cultural knowledge that both interlocutors gained was related with the geographic facts about each other's country. For example, N shared that he lived in Michigan and that people in the United States call this part the "Upper Peninsula". On her part, M told her interlocutor that she was from Antioquia, particularly from the city of Medellin. She also adds that Medellin was a beautiful city and invited N to visit it.

All this information constitutes examples of information that might be considered, according to Byram's model to information related to the geographical space of the interlocutors' countries. In addition, this information and the way M and N shared it shows that both interlocutors had a positive perspective towards their own and the other's country. As a matter of fact, Byram states that this type of knowledge is one of the descriptors of ICC: "(g) the national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own" (Byram, 197, p, 51).

The conversation did not stop there. M encourages N to keep talking and now (Lines 29-51) she focuses the conversation on the book *Animal Farm*. She first asks permission to change the topic although she admitted that this change was a little weird (Lines 29-32). It is noteworthy to mention that in this session, the students had to talk about the book they were reading in class. That book was *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. For this reason, M decided to talk about the book.

In lines 31-48, N accepts to talk about the topic chosen by M and she explains her intention to write an essay about Orwell's book. In this stage of the conversation M demonstrates

her knowledge about the book relating it to the reality of the Colombian situation. One of the descriptors featured in this conversation is the knowledge of the national memory of the interlocutor's country. In the skill of knowledge Byram includes the knowledge about the cultural products and national symbols of the other's country. In this sense, M displayed her factual knowledge about Orwell's work and the social relationship that this book has with the Russian Revolution and the political reality of Colombia. This part of knowledge appears to be one of Byram's curricular objectives:

(e) the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country (Byram, 1997; p.51).

In fact, M goes beyond of simply having the factual knowledge about Orwell's work, she was able to relate it and analyze it with her country's reality and the current situation of Colombia: *"the book tries to satire some aspects of the Russian revolution and I want to make a comparison between the time of that revolution and the current situation with the government in Colombia."* (M, Chat # 38, 2016).

One of the particularities of this exchange is that N did not read the book, but he knew about the author and in order to save face, he displayed his knowledge about Orwell and his book 1984 in the lines 40-43. In fact, N wrote first James Orwell instead of George Orwell. Then he corrected himself (Lines 44-46). Consequently, this conversation shows how some users of Livemocha surpassed some of their mistakes either linguistic (when N asked wrongly for M's nationality) or cultural (when N mistakenly wrote Jamer Orwell instead of George Orwell). This also shows how some users have the cultural knowledge to interact with people of other cultures

and to achieve a successful interaction by apologizing for their communicative mistakes and correcting some wrong information given by them.

Finally, this conversation ends when M asks N his opinion about her idea for the essay that she was going to write. N praises her idea and then she closes the chat by thanking N. Actually, Belz (2007) argues: “In Byram’s model, the learner not only ‘gathers facts’ about the foreign culture, but is able to put this information into dialogue with information about his or her own country in similar topical domains” (p. 133). As we could identify in M’s dialogue, she was able to use the factual information that she had in a real-time communicational exchange and to utilize it as a medium to carry out the work assigned in class.

Summarizing this fragment, we could examine that M demonstrated basically two types of intercultural knowledge: knowledge about the social interaction in her interlocutor’s culture, geographical information about her country and factual data about one of the cultural symbols of her interlocutor’s country. All this knowledge appears in some of the descriptors proposed by Byram and enhances the articulation of knowledge with the skill of interpretation and relation that will be discussed below.

Other research has shown that having factual knowledge about the interlocutor’s country is a requisite to establish successful interactions. For instance, Ware and Kramsch’s (2005) work is a sample of how this type of knowledge might enhance or hinder online interactions. In this respect, the study carried out by Bauer et al. (2006) showed that cultural issues must be integrated in the EFL classroom in order to better understand the reality of the target culture. In the same sense, Belz (2007) highlights the need to integrate all the intercultural dimensions of Byram’s model to the process of language learning. Bearing in mind this need, having

understood the presence of intercultural knowledge in this study, we will observe in the next sub section the results regarding the skill of interpreting and relating.

Skills of interpreting and relating. Among all the data of this study, the skill of interpreting and relating had a representation of 6% (Figure 19). However, it is interesting to observe the manifestations of this skill in the participants' voices. Let us start by remembering what Byram says about this skill.

In his ICC model, Byram (1997) establishes that the skill of interpreting and relating (*Savoir comprendre*) embraces the abilities that an intercultural speaker has in order to “unveil” the ethnocentric meanings in a document or an event and to explain it to someone from a different culture. This skill implies the “conscious navigation” in a sea of varied cultural knowledge (events and documents) in order to find secure ports and trade with all the possible products available. In Byram's words: “The ability to interpret a document from one country for someone from another, or to identify relationships between documents from different countries, is therefore dependent on knowledge of one's own and the other environment” (Byram, 1997, p. 37).

The skill of interpreting and relating also permits the learners to combine their previous knowledge to analyze the material they engage with and put it to work in their everyday intercultural communication, to dialogue with different cultures and to know how to deal with cultural dysfunction and incoherence. The importance of this skill for an intercultural speaker resides in the potential to negotiate with different views of the world and to combine this factual information in real-time communication. Usually this type of knowledge leads learners to go beyond linguistic, pragmatic or cultural communicative issues through the accurate analysis of

situations and the possibility to find intermediate solutions to these difficulties in intercultural communication (Byram, 2003).

Although this skill had a scarce presence in the total data (only 6%) I will discuss here the evidence of this skill in the students' voices. Regarding the frequency of the descriptors of this skill, Figure 25 below shows us that the two descriptors that appeared the most were:

(b) identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present, and

(c) mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena (Byram, 1997, p. 52).

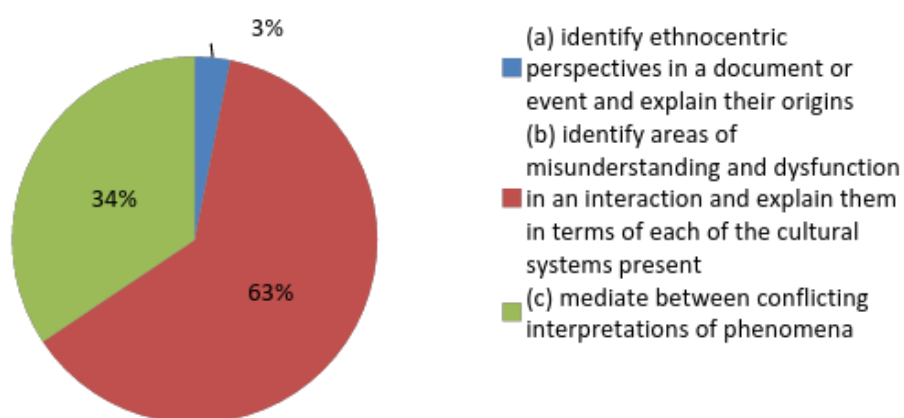


Figure 25. Frequency of Skills of Interpreting and Relating

The instruments where these descriptors appeared were in the focus group and the chat conversations. The development of these descriptors was due to the usage of the chat where learners could identify areas of misunderstanding. In the context of this study, the skill of interpreting and relating offered learners tools to use their knowledge in finding the causes of misunderstandings, explain them and developing alternatives to solve them under the limitations of real-time communication. When speakers reach this point, they can be aware of ethnocentric

views of language, know how to overpass these perspectives and fix communicative misunderstanding, or if being able to solve them, at least speakers can explain them using a clear position. In the next fragments, we will see how the participants of this study demonstrated evidence of this skill in their reflections in the focus group and in one chat conversation.

Teacher: *How did you deal with the person who asked you to show your body?*

AG: *No, I told him that I thought it was a disrespectful behavior [to ask someone to show his/her body within an online application] and that in my country, I didn't know if in his culture that was normal, because one doesn't know, right? but that here [in Colombia] that wasn't very good and I just stopped talking to him* (AG, Focus group, 2016).

In this fragment, we observe AG's reaction facing a dysfunctional communicative and intercultural situation. The problem emerged when a man asked her to show him her body. In front of this request, AG's feels outraged and rejects this request. We can observe here the way she reflects about the event and her reaction. In this respect, AG says that she explained the man that she did not just refuse to show her body, she also clarified him that asking that type of actions was a disrespectful behavior, that in her country that was not allowed (*"I told him that I thought it was a disrespectful behavior and that in my country, that wasn't very good and I just stopped talking to him."*).

The intercultural behavior that we observed here was the identification of areas of cultural dysfunction which produced problems in the interaction and the explanation of them from one of the cultural systems at play: "identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present" (Byram, 1997, p.52). Byram describes this kind of events as areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction, since

they hinder successful intercultural communication. As we analyzed above, AG identified the area of cultural dysfunction, online improper sexual behavior, and she also explained her cultural point of view towards this behavior.

Although Byram (1997) proposes that intercultural speakers must explain these areas of intercultural miscommunication in both cultural systems, here we see how AG explained the event in terms of her own culture. Even though, she does not elaborate a complete explanation of the event in her interlocutor's cultural terms, she acknowledges the difference and even the possibility that in her interlocutor's culture this might not be an improper behavior: "*I didn't know if in his culture that was normal, because one doesn't know, right?*" (AG, Focus group, 2016). In this situation, AG just stopped talking with her interlocutor, which does not allow further communication. Nonetheless, let us see how other participants analyzed their interactions at home from the chat tool and identified some misunderstanding concerning the level of politeness and the actions to take in those situations.

Chat # 10

1 JD: Hi AG!

2 AG: Hey! Here I go

3 does your mom say?

4 please, make me a cup of tea?

5 do you think it is a request or not?

6 JD: is more like a order jajajajja

7 AG: *an

8 ok

- 9 I think almost the same because whit your mom you have to do it.
- 10 it doesn't matter if you want or not
- 11 it is like you do not have other option
- 12 and the politeness depend in the tone and entonation she does it
- 13 well
- 14 JD: yes, if you don't do what she said you is like failed your life
- 15 AG: now what do you do when someone makes noise when you are reading?
- 16 sorry for the excessive use of WHEN in that question
- 17 in my case I could be quiet? And sometimes I start to read aloud in order the
- 18 other person makes silence
- 19 silence
- 20 I think the last that I wrote is not very polite but it is effective
- (AG, Chat#10, 2016).

In this chat conversation AG and JD talk on the chat about the interactional patterns present in their culture. In this case, the chat was intraclass and the participants discussed a topic proposed by their teacher. The task consisted of using the chat tool to discuss with a classmate about the content of the Livemocha lesson studied during that session. In the chat above we observe two main topics: the way mothers ask for help and an alternative to asking for silence when reading in a public place.

Regarding the ways mothers ask for help, AG and JD identified that their mothers used the word please to attenuate the ordering tone, but both participants acknowledged that this word did not imply an option, that their mothers used this word indistinctively in the case of optional

help or an order. Both speakers agreed on the fact that they had to do what their mothers told them even if they did not want to regardless of the use of the word please (Lines 3-9). In fact, AG says that the politeness level may depend on the tone mothers use (Line 12). There is a pragmatic use of the word “please,” not as a voluntary option to do something (bring a cup of tea in this case) but to give an order. The essence here is the understanding of an order said in the tone of an optional favor, and as JD said on line 14 if they do not understand that order, they would surely be in trouble.

The second topic here is related with another situation that might cause misunderstanding or communication breakdown. AG asks JD in line 15: *“now what do you do when someone makes noise when you are reading?”* (AG, chat #10, 2016). In this situation, she admits in lines 17-20 that when this happens she reads aloud in order to call the others’ attention and let them know that they must be quiet so she can read calmly. This action, as AG says is not very polite, but it has the potential to obtain silence from the others.

In this conversation, we could prove that AG and JD identified two possible areas of misunderstanding in interactions: the use of the words “please” to order and the reactions when people make noise when others read. The participants also explained in functional terms the first area of misunderstanding and demonstrated how the usage of the word “please” may change the interpretation of the order: “(c) mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena” (Byram, 1997, p. 57). In fact, this conversation is a manifestation of the way AG and JD mediate between conflicting interpretations of a phenomenon. In this case, both students know that using a polite way to ask a favor implies an implicit order, therefore, they are aware of the possible interpretation of this utterance and they know how to mediate in a similar situation with their mothers.

Other research has also demonstrated that the identification of possible areas of misunderstanding and difference play an important role in intercultural communication (Ware & Kramsch, 2005; Belz, 2007; Wilden, 2006). The skill of interpretation and relation supports learners' abilities to discover new cultural knowledge and to interact with other people. For this reason the next sub section is dedicated to study the development of the skill of discovery and interaction.

Skills of discovery and interaction. In the data, the skill of discovery and interaction had a frequency of 2% (Figure 19). The percentage indicates the scarce presence of this skill. However, the insights of the students regarding this skill are worthy to discuss. Therefore, here I analyze the examples where this ability was discovered and discuss its importance for the study.

According to Byram (1997) the skills of discovery and interaction (*Savoir apprendre/faire*) are related to the learner's ability to operate his/her attitudes and knowledge in discovering different cultural perspectives and using the previous knowledge in real-time communication. In this study, the skills of discovery and interaction were very important given their high degree of usefulness in intercultural communication mediated by the chat tool. Since communication happened on an online platform, the mediation required a degree of combined attitudes of respect, knowledge of other cultures and skills of interpretation, discovery and interaction in order to avoid misunderstandings and dysfunction during online communication. Livemocha allowed this type of interaction and the participants of this study demonstrated evidence of this skill.

The presence of the skills of discovery and interaction is portrayed in Figure 26. The figure shows that among the descriptors, the skill of interaction did not appear² and only the skill of discovery was present. In fact, within the skill of discovery the descriptor with more frequency was: *(c) identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances* (Byram, 1997, p. 52), appearing six times. The figures also show that descriptor b had a similar frequency appearing four times (Figure 26).

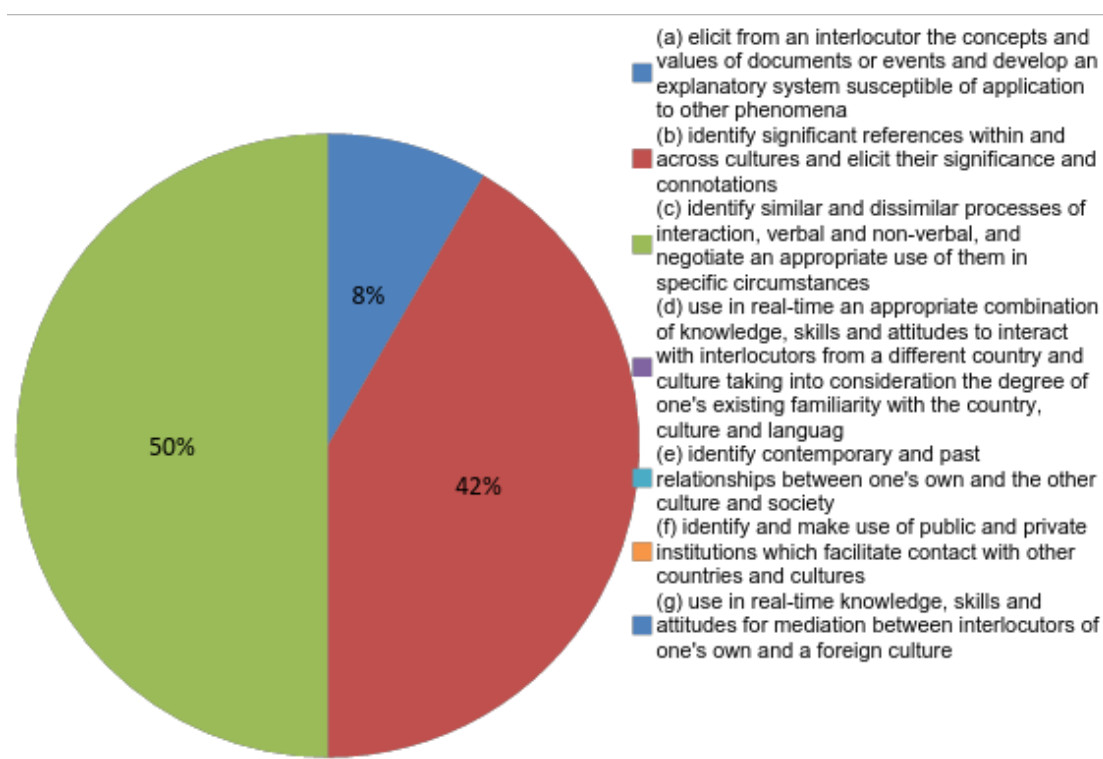


Figure 26. Frequency of descriptors in the Skill of Discovery and Interaction

² According to Byram (1997), the descriptors a, b and c corresponded to the skill of discovery.

The remaining descriptors (d, e, f and g) constituted the skill of interaction.

The skills of discovery and interaction imply the analysis and contrast of the communicative practices among cultures, to identify meaningful differences across cultural systems and the acknowledgement of concepts and values within intercultural communication. These actions can be developed through reflection and without direct contact with other people. Therefore, both, the reflections about the particularities among cultures and the chat provided the conditions that promoted the development of skills of discovery among the participants of this study. The students' voices in the fragments below show us how the students manifested the skill of discovery.

Teacher: What do you think about this statement? Intercultural contacts only happen when you interact with people from other nationalities.

AG: Teacher, something similar happened to me, but because once... with various specific words... once somebody told me: hey are you going to give me the "liga." And I just stayed like staring at him [and thinking]: "is he asking me something sexual?" So, of course, the person saw me with the face (that I thought that he was flirting with me), and he told me: "not, the money." I did not know that "liga" meant that. (AG, Focus Group, 2016).

In the reflection above, AG identifies a particularity in the discourse of someone who belonged to a different cultural background. Although she referred to someone from the same country, AG's interlocutor was someone from a different city and in the context of this study, I acknowledge the existence of intracultural relations within people from the same country. In this respect, Agar (1994) and his concept of languaculture play an important role. Agar (1994) points out that language is the symbolic bridge among cultures and occupies the spaces that constitute the connections among people. From this point of view, Agar (1994) describes a connection between the meaning and functions of language (semantic and pragmatic dimensions of

language). In the previous case, we observe that AG connected the word *liga* with something sexual. When her interlocutor explained the meaning of that word in this particular communicative context, she could understand another meaning of that word with a different function.

Additionally, Risager (2007) proposes the poetic and identity dimension in language learning. According to her, the identity dimension promotes the role of learners in the development of their linguaculture. Therefore, learners build their own linguaculture based on their social interactions and their personal meaning making construction. With AG's example, we see the construction of linguacultural elements. What happened was that she constructed her linguaculture based on her experience with her friend who taught her the usage of the word *liga*.

AG's observation constitutes evidence of how she identified a dissimilar process of interaction among people from the same country with different cultural differences represented in their speech patterns. In other words, the participants identified that cultural variations and linguistic variability can coexist in the same country. This fact goes beyond Byram's conception of cultural boundaries. In his definition of the skills of discovery and interaction he only recognizes cultural communication among people from different countries. This scheme might be discussed from the above evidence and the reality of subcultures that exist in the same national boundaries (Alvarez & Bonilla, 2009).

Going back to AG's reflection, she showed one of Byram's descriptors in her identification of communicative cultural differences with her interlocutor.

(b) identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations (Byram, 1997, p. 53).

What AG identified was a different way to refer to money. Although at the beginning she thought that her interlocutor was proposing her something sexually inappropriate because he used the word “liga,” she could negotiate the meaning of this word by using nonverbal language (*“So, of course, the person saw me with the face (that I thought that he was flirting with me), and he told me: “not, the money.”* AG, Focus Group, 2016). Besides her discovery of a novel way to refer to money we saw how AG elicited the connotation in this situation and adapted to the pragmatic and symbolic dimensions of her interlocutor, which lead her to include this reference as a new linguistic and functional resource to her linguaculture (*“I did not know that “liga” meant that [money]”* AG, Focus Group, 2016).

Additionally, the skill of discovery and interaction can be evidenced in the chat conversations held by the students. The next fragment, taken from a conversation between two participants of this study, suggests the presence of this skill in a real-time communicative situation.

Chat # 22

1 JD: hello?

2 M: Hey!!

3 JD: lets go to the point!

4 how do you celebrate christmas?

5 XD

6 M: jaajajajajaja

7 that's Akward!!

8 JD: yes but is something that we have to do jajaja

9 M: this year, I would spend the 24th with K, but my family would enjoy the

10 day together, have some diner and open gifts

11 JD: ohhh ok, that sounds great!

12 so you will have a great day!

13 M: jajajajaja I hope so

14 An what about you

15 ?

16 JD: well, to be honest I think I will not celebrate it, I think I'll just go to sleep!

17 is chirstmas different from any other time of the year?? Do you think so?

18 M: Not really, but I think people tends to think differently

19 Like They were a better person

20 JD: yes I think the same way, for me there are many moments to share with

21 family not only christmas

22 ohhhh do you have like a check list to achieve next year?

(JD & M, Chat #22, 2015).

What we can observe in this chat conversation is an example of how both speakers develop an explanation about a cultural event in their own country. The chat interaction here is developed in three main stages. The greeting, the discussion about how M celebrates Christmas and their discussion about how Christmas seems to change people. In lines 1-8 JD opens the conversation and establishes the topic to discuss (Christmas celebration). In fact, he established this topic because in the context of the class the teacher asked them to find someone online and talk to him/her about Christmas celebrations. Since, there were no Livemocha users available to chat with them, JD decided to develop this class activity with one of his classmates using the chat tool. For this reason, he contacts M and asks her straight away about her celebration of

Christmas. She reacts in line 6-7 surprised, but she accepts to interact with him (M: jaajajajajaja that's Akward!!). JD explains his reason to talk about this topic in line 8: "JD: yes but is something that we have to do jajaja".

In lines 9-13 M talks about what she will do on Christmas (spending December 24th with a friend) and says that her family will celebrate staying together, eating dinner and opening presents. JD assumes that M will have a great time with her family and writes that he feels glad about it. Then, on line 14 M asks JD about his Christmas celebration. It is in this stage of the conversation that the skill of discovery appears. When JD talks about his Christmas plans (Lines 16-17), he says that he will not do anything, and reflects about the supposed importance of Christmas for people: "*JD: well, to be honest I think I will not celebrate it, I think I'll just go to sleep! is chirstmas different from any other time of the year?? Do you think so?*" (JD, Chat :22, 2015). In this answer and his further question, JD controverts the meaning of Christmas and invites M to reflect about the symbolism of this date. In fact, his plans for that day show that for him, Christmas is not an important date. He also adds that Christmas is not so relevant and that it is not the only day to spend with family.

To answer JD's question, M elicited the concept of Christmas and the values behind his words and took a sympathetic attitude. In lines 18 and 19, she accepts what JD said and she, having recognized JD's attitude towards Christmas explains the effect of this celebration on people. In fact, she aligns to JD's message: "*Not really, but I think people tends to think differently Like They were a better person.*" (M, Chat, 22, 2015). M accepts first that Christmas is not a different day of the year and she adds that despite the nature of Christmas as any regular day of the year, people tend to be different and to assume that just for the time of the year they become better human beings.

It was precisely in these lines where M demonstrated evidence of the skill of discovery. In this respect, Byram (1997) establishes as one the ICC descriptors of the skill of discovery and interaction:

(a) elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena. (Byram, 1997. p. 53)

As discussed before, M discovered JD's concept and value of Christmas. When JD says that he is not going to celebrate Christmas by doing what M will do, she admits that Christmas, despite her previous comment about what she would do in that time of the year, is not a very different epoch of the year and that in fact, it transforms people's attitudes. Additionally, M explains that on Christmas *"people tend to think differently"* (M, Chat #22, 2015). Therefore, we could observe how M besides identifying JD's conception and values about Christmas developed a system explaining why people think that this is a special time. This explanatory system goes in accordance with JD's opinion who says that Christmas is not the only time to share in family (Lines 20-21). Other research has also shown that interpreting values and concepts from interlocutors is a required skill in intercultural contact (Ware & Kramsch, 2005; Belz & Kinginger, 2003; Thorne, 2003; Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

The chat promoted interactions with other people. Since the development of the skills of discovery and interaction operate on real-time communicative acts, the chat becomes an ideal space to help learners to enhance their intercultural skills through the interaction with people from other cultures. Although Byram assures that the skill of discovery does not require real-time interaction, he explains the benefits of actual communication in intercultural processes:

One mode of discovery is obviously through social interaction, even though this adds constraints of time and mutual perceptions and attitudes mentioned earlier. The skill of interaction is above all the ability to manage these constraints in particular circumstances with specific interlocutors (Byram, 1997, p.38).

In this quote Byram demonstrates that social interaction enhances the skill of discovery. Therefore, discovery leads learners to manage the difficulties of time, perceptions and attitudes which operate in singular communicative situations among particular speakers. Going beyond this fact, the chat tool was a space where Livemocha users could manage, within a virtual space, these types of communicative constraints. Managing communicative constraints could lead learners to (as we studied above) identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction and to identify meaningful cultural references in their interactions with others. In fact, one of the participants admitted having identified an interesting cultural fact due to her interactions in the chat.

Teacher: *In cultural terms, how useful was the chat? What did it allow you to understand about the cultural dimension of a language, of language learning?*

C: *One day we [C and her interlocutor] get to talk about the topic of clothing, and I hadn't realized... that all Indian men and Indian women dressed too like that... [Like Muslim people] (...) So, one day we were talking about it and he sent me a photo... ah!.. and he told me: "how do you wear?" [C answered her interlocutor] "A jean and a t-shirt, just normal." And I told him: "Why? how do you wear there?" So, he started to send me photos showing how women wear, and I was like, well, it seemed even nice, and I said: "hey, it's very nice." And I [asked him] "Do you also use robe?" And he told me: "No, I sometimes wear ..." I mean, it's like very cool to know how they wear there (...) and it's very cool, you learn a lot (C, Focus group, 2016).*

Here, C says that in her interactions via chat, she could know the meaning of clothes for Indians and that robes are also worn by men. She recognizes that previously, she did not know this fact, and she also discovered, with amazement a significant reference across cultures (clothing) (*“I mean, it’s like very cool to know how they wear there (...) and it’s very cool, you learn a lot”*). She also compared her wearing style with her interlocutor's and analyzed the social meaning of using robes and other clothes.

Besides the potential of chat to promote skills of discovery and interaction, this tool was a space for intercultural reflections. By discussing about cultural topics, users could identify and discuss ethnocentric perspectives. In fact, analyzing the topics discussed on their chats (Figure 24), the learning logs demonstrated that the topics discussed were cultural themes such as language learning, personal background, cultural facts and cultural behavior (general themes). Furthermore, one of the most discussed topics was celebrations which relate to cultural behavior.

In addition, the analysis also showed that the most discussed topic was personal background, which concerns the others’ information about nationality, likes, dislikes, and cultural similarities and differences. This shows that the participants used the chat to establish cultural exchanges and to identify cultural behaviors in the others’ backgrounds.

The evidence above explains why the chat was an online space where users could reflect about cultural aspects and where the participants of this study established interactions talking mostly about how people from other cultures behave and how similar or different their interlocutors were. As a consequence, we can say that the chat tool on Livemocha stimulated the skills of discovery and interaction because it allowed communication among the users and

promoted the exchange of intercultural reflections. However, the fact that the skill of discovery and interaction had had a presence so scarce calls attention.

Although, there was evidence of the skills of discovery and interaction in the information gathered, the skill of critical cultural awareness did not appear in the students' voices. Therefore, we need to analyze this phenomenon from the observation of Livemocha's space and the limitations of this research. Basically, three reasons can explain these findings in the students' voices: time of tasks, chat limitations and the communicative focus of Livemocha.

First, the time to establish online communication with a deep degree of intercultural analysis where the skill of interaction could be evidenced was not enough. This can be explained through the class dynamics and the time management of the students. The time used in class was divided in two stages: a) development of a Livemocha language lesson and b) chat interaction. Usually, the students invested more time completing the activities on Livemocha and looked for other users to interact. This was demonstrated in the field notes where students focused on the lessons.

Nonetheless, trying to establish communication on Livemocha took time and regularly the time for chat only was enough to talk about trivial topics. For this reason, the possibility to go beyond superficial topics regarding the personal background could not be overpassed. The interactions analyzed demonstrated that no chat conversation lasted more than fifteen minutes and the longest conversation did not last more than 60 lines. The limited time provoked this deficiency and made it difficult to evidence talks with a deep level of intercultural engagement. Under these conditions the development of critical skills to analyze cultural behavior was not the

ideal one. Another element that made difficult the development of skills of discovery and interaction were the chat problems on Livemocha.

Additional to the lack of time to establish online communication, the Livemocha chat presented several flaws in its functioning. These difficulties were the limited number of characters per message, the restriction to use only written chat without audio and video, the restriction to use hyperlinks and emoticons, the impossibility to know what users were available to chat, the limitation of chatting only out of the language lessons (because the users could not chat while developing the lessons) and the excessive time that Livemocha platform took to send the messages. The participants of this study mentioned all these issues in the learning logs and in the focus group.

Maybe the chat is not like facebook or whatsapp that we can see the messages without get out from the chat. In livemocha we have to get out of the chat to be able to see the others messages of the classmates (M, Learning log, 2015).

Here, M acknowledges that Livemocha's chat does not have the same effectiveness as other SNSs' chat. He also highlights the fact that on Livemocha's chat users can not have synchronic conversations with other members. As a consequence, the interface did not allow the dynamism and multiconversational affordance that young people would like to see in this type of virtual spaces (Liu et al, 2013; Brick, 2011a; Zourou, 2012). This static property of Livemocha also restricted the amount and quality of chat interactions and limited the development of intercultural skills. Another flaw identified by other user appears in the next fragment.

JD: I liked it, well, it was notorious the platform's problem that one doesn't know how long they [other Livemocha users] are online and it [Livemocha] is very slow so one can

receive the message. You can be online and one has to wait even until two minutes so it updates. (JD, Focus Group, 2016).

In this reflection, JD talks about his experience on Livemocha and also, he assessed it as a positive space for linguistic and cultural interaction. He remarked too that the chat did not have the possibility to see who was online and it was too slow. Added to M's opinion, it appears evident that these difficulties hinder the establishment of successful online interactions and diminished the time available to establish conversations about cultural issues.

Thirdly, the nature and focus of Livemocha's activities did not promote the development of critical cultural awareness. Most Livemocha activities aimed at developing communicative skills. These communicative grammatical activities were supported by cultural knowledge about facts, products and behaviors of the target culture. The production activities were centered on practicing the interactional knowledge of the target culture, interpreting cultural knowledge and relating it to the user's own cultural frameworks. Nevertheless, the activities on the language lessons did not imply taking a defined critical cultural stance. They did not require analysis of cultural issues or communicative situations where the users had to elaborate an explanatory system of interactional phenomena.

Consequently, the skill of critical cultural awareness did not have a space to be developed, practiced or assessed and the users limited to perform communicatively appropriate activities with a certain degree of intercultural attitudes and knowledge that allowed them to interpret and relate the information using their skill of discovery. However, these communicative tasks did not promote the process of assessing new knowledge from a defined political and cultural stance and a critical perspective. The samples analyzed demonstrated that despite the null presence of critical cultural awareness and the scant appearance of skills of discovery and

interaction and interpreting and relating, the skills of attitudes and knowledge were widely addressed and promoted in the spaces of Livemocha. The deep analysis on Livemocha's semiotic design permitted us to understand the presence of the intercultural dimension on this SNSLL.

Nonetheless, the previous findings raise discussion concerning the patterns of semiotic design of Livemocha and the intercultural and interactive issues of this and similar SNSLLs. These arguments can be supported by the results of similar research about other SNSLL and multimodal analyses to some web 2.0 sites like this one (Alvarez, 2014a; Michelson & Alvarez, 2016).

Conclusion

Communication with people from other cultural groups does not imply the development of ICC; however the use of SNSLLs has the potential to promote intercultural behaviors and attitudes. The affordances of SNSLLs can be better understood by analyzing their semiotic design. The intersemiotic relationships among the multimodal elements, sections and lessons can unveil the role of the cultural dimension on SNSLLs or any other virtual environment employed for pedagogical purposes. The reactions of users to the semiotic designs (contents and structure) of SNSLLs have the potential to inform if these sites promote the development of intercultural skills. With these precepts in mind, this study aimed at examining how the intercultural dimension materialized on Livemocha. In order to conduct such an exploration, two types of descriptions and analyzes were conducted. In the first place, I analyzed the content of five Livemocha's language lessons drawing on analytical strategies of multimodal social semiotics. Secondly, I analyzed the students' voices regarding their experience on Livemocha and the presence of the intercultural dimension in it. Likewise, I also inquired about how the participants developed components of ICC.

The second objective focused on the semiotic design of Livemocha and its relationship with the intercultural dimension of language learning. By looking at the website and analyzing it, I could discover that what the students' perceived matched with what Livemocha displayed. In terms of the multimodal semiotic dimension of Livemocha, this research demonstrated that Livemocha was a multimodal space based on linguistic and visual modes of communication. The semiotic composition of this SNSLL demonstrated that the elements on the language lessons were distributed in four main semiotic clusters dedicated to different functions: to display the basic information of the user and the lesson, to guide the users in the learning unit, to show the

learning material and to promote interaction within the lesson. The basic units of the lessons were icons, pictures, written text, oral documents and interactive tools.

The first analysis showed that Livemocha's semiotic design evidenced that the three intercultural components with most preference were attitudes, knowledge and skills of interpreting and relating. All these skills were mainly developed in the sections of introduction, vocabulary and production exercises. Nevertheless, the skills of attitudes and knowledge (declarative and procedural) predominated in the design of the units due to the culturalist view of Livemocha. The culturalist approach is characterized by engaging with culture as simple facts and information without looking for connections with the self and the other (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013a). In this respect, issues of teaching language from a Western perspective, the role of English as a global force in the design of Livemocha and the lack of spaces to develop critical skills emerged as clear limitations for developing ICC.

Concerning the second analysis which corresponds to the second objective of this study, the results showed that in general terms, the students described their experience on Livemocha as interesting and enriching. They said it was interesting because of the new cultural knowledge that they could develop in the lessons and enriching because of the intercultural exchanges they had with other users. However, they reported some limitations of the site to establish successful interactions due to the chat flaws, the risk of cyber flirting and the difficulties to contact other users. In regards to the presence of the intercultural dimension on Livemocha, the students said that they did observe cultural content. They acknowledged cultural content in the sections of introduction, vocabulary and in the chat tool.

Regarding the development of ICC, the participants' voices showed evidence that they are developing some ICC components. The components that appeared in the students' voices

were attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating and discovery and interaction. Mainly, the two components with more frequency in the data were attitudes and knowledge. The remaining two skills had a scarce presence. In the experience, the participants could develop these ICC components through chat interactions, analyzing the introductory videos and solving the production exercises. However, the component of critical cultural awareness did not appear in the students' voices. This might have happened due to the participants' level of English, their scant knowledge of certain topics, the lack of critical view of language learning on Livemocha and the limitations in the chat interactions.

These results show a connection between what the students said in the instruments and the multimodal analysis of Livemocha. In both analyzes I found evidence of the ICC components of attitudes, knowledge and skills of interpreting and relating. It is interesting that in the participants' voices the most salient component was attitudes and in the design of Livemocha the most remarkable component was knowledge. However, there is a direct connection in terms of attitudes and knowledge, both components were the most frequent in the two analyzes. This correspondence shows that Livemocha's semiotic design displayed culture as facts, openness and curiosity. Furthermore, the skills of relating and interpreting was part of Livemocha's lessons and in the instruments, these skills emerged from the chat interactions. This means that although students developed activities related with skills of interpretation and relating, the participants did not explicitly see this connection in the lesson, but in the chat interface.

It is also relevant to mention that this study proved some affordances of SNSLLs to promote intercultural citizenship. Since SNSLLs constitute online sites that encourage intercultural communication regardless of the boundaries of politics, nations, languages and religion, they allow learners to understand themselves as world citizens. On SNSLLs users are

motivated to engage in interactions with others, to help others and to be part of online social communities. Consequently, a message of intercultural and international cooperation is implicitly being transmitted. Both, the participants' voices and the semiotic design on Livemocha demonstrated that there was an intention on this SNSLL in displaying a positive image of other cultures. Therefore, values of freedom (of communication) and democracy (of participation) had a place on this type of websites.

Another aspect to pinpoint is that the skills of discovery and interaction were evidenced only in the students' voices, particularly the skill of discovery. Although these skills had a scant presence, they emerged from the chat interactions. These findings point at an interesting aspect because its absence in the semiotic design of Livemocha shows that the development of these skills have to do with the subjective construction that usually happen when students engage in interaction with the website contents and other users. Likewise, the absence of the component of critical cultural awareness demonstrates that despite the potentialities of Livemocha to promote ICC, the site still lacked activities and contents that openly engage students in critical discussions.

Furthermore, in this research I could observe a connection between the development of ICC and the adoption of a multimodal semiotic view of communication. Since multimodal semiotic documents are socially shaped and emerge from communicative processes, intercultural speakers need to be aware of the affordances that multimodal semiotics offers to unveil the meanings behind words, signs, images and discourses. Given the presence of multimodal texts in our globalized civilization, we, as teachers and learners, cannot neglect the role of multimodal semiotics as part of the cultural system of a target language and how this perspective can nourish interactive and educative processes, mainly in higher education contexts. Particularly, the

connection of ICC and a multimodal semiotic view of communication in this study offered a more complete view of how cultural products can enhance the development of intercultural skills. Moreover, multimodal social semiotics allowed a deeper analysis of how Livemocha's cultural contents could promote attitudes of openness and curiosity towards other cultures. Therefore, the use of SNSLLs in higher education can be enhanced through the adoption of an intercultural view of language teaching and a multimodal semiotic perspective of communication. This combination could lead to the understanding and interpretation of cultural processes in language learning and give us alternatives to become global citizens aware of their role as cultural mediators in a multicultural world.

Pedagogical implications

The results of this study have implications for the use of a multimodal conceptual and methodological framework in relation to language teaching. This study has showed how the multimodal analysis of a webpage could be interrelated with qualitative data emerging from the participants' voices. Since previous works focused either on analyzing the semiotic design of SNSLLs (Alvarez, 2014a; 2016b, c) or the experience of the participants in intercultural online experiences (Ware & Kramsch, 2005), no work had studied the development of ICC on SNSLLs drawing on a multimodal approach and comparing the results with the experience of users. Therefore, this research exemplified the combination of traditional qualitative analysis with a multimodal analysis in order to explore the intercultural dimension on a SNSLL. At the theoretical level, this research filled the gap of intercultural studies dedicated to comprehend the affordances of SNSLLs in higher education level.

Regarding the methodological level, this study tested that multimodal data can be analyzed following the method proposed by Alvarez (2016d). So far, no other research has followed this method and examined its usefulness in understanding and relating the different semiotic resources and modes of communication. This method proved its usefulness and potential to examine multimodal texts in regards to the intercultural view of language teaching and learning. Other studies could draw on Alvarez's method to carry out multimodal semiotic analysis and better understand the dynamics of multimodal texts in second/foreign language education.

In what concerns language teaching using SNSLLs, I propose five recommendations for language teachers and institutions: being aware of the multimodal view of communication, using or promoting spaces for intercultural and pluralistic communication, going beyond linguistic

imperialism and a Westernized view of language teaching, including the critical dimension of language learning in a more active way, and thriving for a more humanistic view of language teaching.

First, we need to understand that multimodal social semiotics can be used in language learning. For example, this work confirmed how Livemocha presented some multimodal patterns in its semiotic design; it included cultural elements and highly interactive affordances. Alvarez's studies (Alvarez, 2014a, 2015b, 2016b) have demonstrated that from the advent of Web 2.0 technologies the monomodal nature of language learning sites has evolved and incorporated a varied set of elements relying on diverse modes of communication. The inclusion of these modes support the semiotic design of SNLLs by expanding the affordances of traditional written and oral modes of communication to welcome more sophisticated units such as pictures, icons, command buttons and videos. By adding these elements to the general composition of SNSLLs users are able to become active learners, to control their learning process and to interact with others from any place of the world (Alvarez, 2014a). By acquiring a more active role in their education, users could develop intercultural awareness and, as observed in this study, cultivate attitudes of openness, curiosity and acceptance towards others. This reflection gives us a hint of how ICC and multimodal semiotics might play a major role in language teaching practices.

A second implication has to do with multimodal nature of Livemocha that to some extent offers the potential for the inclusion of intercultural contents or opportunities of engagement with them. For example, the fact that pictures are used contribute openly or covertly to spread cultural views, stereotypes or ideals. The chat lends itself to providing a context for intercultural exchange. In other words, it is about the potential. It is the potential of SNSLLs to include intercultural elements and establish intercultural interactions what might promote the

development of intercultural skills. This potential could be used to promote spaces for intercultural and pluralistic communication.

Although the development of intercultural competences did not seem to be the central focus of Livemocha, its semiotic design clearly displayed elements that nourished the way learners relearn and comprehend the target language and its culture. Therefore, since SNSLLs evidence the relationship between learning a language and its culture, it is important that in creating similar virtual environments, material designers consider the role of multimodal texts in conveying cultural knowledge and attitudes. Usually, as this study demonstrated it, the presence of the cultural dimension appears in pictures, written and oral texts and spaces like the chat. Consequently, the experience of this research taught us that the relationship between multimodal social semiotics and cultural contents was pivotal to develop ICC and by doing so, they played an important role in the learning process of the participants and the ultimate outcome of this study.

Following this idea, teachers, institutions and SNSLLs should include the critical dimension of language learning. The skill of thinking critically must be a need for teachers who work XXI century skills. The critical dimension of language learning must include social issues, problems and situations that do not usually appear on learning materials but that are present in the learners' everyday life. Particularly, Livemocha did not address sensitive topics such as religion, politics, racism or inequality. As a consequence, an important dimension of intercultural learning is ignored.

Byram (2006) proposes that intercultural speakers must be able to adopt a critical position to evaluate cultural events and documents. By doing this, learners would have the chance to understand the reality and to follow principles of democracy and freedom. By adopting

such a purview, teachers can generate spaces of change, transformation and reflection that might lead to a progressive improvement of the situations and a more complete understanding of the target culture.

The findings of this study showed also that Livemocha emphasized towards the American and, in minor degree, the British cultures and linguistic varieties. These hegemonic varieties were present during all the contents here analyzed. This is a sign of the uprising of English as dominant lingua franca and its culture as a hegemonic force that has caused its imposition and the favoring of one or two English language varieties, mostly American and British varieties (Garcia, 2009). The mission of local teachers is to go beyond these varieties and create alternatives to use language to understand other conditions of life. Therefore, I would propose to accept other varieties of the target language and to value their cultural diversity as unique and worthy of respect.

Finally, I propose to thrive for a more human view of language teaching. In this perspective I would propose the treatment of feelings, attitudes, perceptions and life experiences on SNSLLs. I suggest online spaces to deal with difficulties, forums to manage anxiety and other emotional situations that affect language learning. By applying these four simple ideas, I just try to recommend some alternatives that might help learners and teachers to deal with growing difficulties regarding our task as educators in the digital era.

This discussion leads us to acknowledge the potential of online tools and resources such as SNSLLs in language teaching. This potential can be enhanced by teachers who (seen here as the human component of digital online tools) can use SNSLLs to develop linguistic or intercultural competences by complementing and the available resources on these sites (videos, music, texts, chat) to plan their classes following an intercultural view of language teaching.

Limitations of this study

Among the difficulties I had to deal with during the development of this research, I explain the three most relevant: the general strike, data quality obtained from the students and Livemocha's limitations.

General strike: At the beginning of the semester, there was a general strike in the university where the research was being conducted. For seven weeks, from September to November, the classes were cancelled and the collection of data had to be suspended during these weeks. However, after these seven weeks, the semester resumed and the general timetable had to be adjusted. Therefore, the classes of that semester lasted until February and the next semester started in March and ended in July. Although the project could complete the data collection process in regards to the proposed length, the quality of the data collected was in part affected by the fact that the class extended over the period of Christmas recess. Some students were not as motivated during this period because traditionally, it was the time where they travelled to their hometowns and spend the Christmas time with their families.

Data quality: Another difficulty that I had to face was the quality of data obtained from the students. Usually, the reflections about culture and learning given in the learning logs after every lesson on Livemocha did not report enough information about the students' intercultural process. This caused difficulties when analyzing the participants' experiences on Livemocha.

Livemocha's limitations: In terms of interaction and functionality, this study evidenced problems related with connectivity, cyber harassment and learning material. Concerning connectivity, the site did not allow users to establish chat contact while developing their language lessons. As some participants discussed it, the limitation of closing the lesson to talk by chat limited the activity on the site. In addition, due to the several problems of the chat tool, the

amount of time destined to enhance the affordances of Livemocha was reduced. Some participants complained about this fact and pointed at it as a major difficulty on the site. Furthermore, the site deleted from the users' friends list some of their language partners without any request or notification. This made difficult to maintain continuous interactions with other users. In the same way, the platform changed the users' profile names by simplifying them with their last names. For example, if one user was Alejandro Fernandez, the site changed his name to Alejandro F. This was a mayor difficulty in one of the sessions with Livemocha when the students had to look for their classmates in order to discuss a class activity and complete it.

Another limitation stated by the students was cyber harassment. Some female students reported offensive propositions and cyber flirting by other users during chat conversations. This is an online behavior that has been reported in other studies such as Brick (2011) and Alvarez (2014a) that deters learners from engaging in online exchanges. In this research, the problem itself was not the inappropriate behavior of other users, the difficulty resided in the absence of online tools to censure the offenders. In fact, this difficulty has been reported in other studies (Whitty & Gavin, 2001; Vie 2007; Ibrahim, 2008). As a consequence, chat interactions were limited because many students were afraid of cyber flirting.

Further research

The various phenomena and approaches studied here require more research and analysis. Particularly, the intercultural view of language teaching, the usage of SNSLLs in higher education contexts and the study of multimodal social semiotics in communication require more attention. I propose two areas that could prove nourishing for the academic community.

First, at the theoretical level, the relationship among intercultural citizenship, SNSLLs and a multimodal view of communication must be further explored. Since SNSLLs are environments that provide spaces for intercultural communication, they could help us understand the diverse variables that are at play during online interactions and the effects that might enhance or hinder the development of intercultural competences. Other studies could focus on a critical analysis of the contents of SNSLLs. This type of analysis would prove rich because it could reveal the underlying messages behind the semiotic design and resources used by these learning sites. A critical view of SNSLLs will also enhance the possibilities of understanding the ideologies behind the cover and overt cultural meanings conveyed in the semiotic designs of these virtual environments. Other topics included within a critical perspective involve the creation, display, performance and transformation of identities, SNSLLs as imagined communities, the management of multimodal communication and the role of pedagogical material on SNSLLs.

A second domain that requires further work concerns methodology. Although this was a synchronic case study research, it would be positive to develop another study of this type but engaging more participants and extending the time of data collection. This will allow a deeper analysis and the possible observation of intercultural development. Future studies could set up assignments that engage students in online conversations that delve into social issues to foster a

deeper understanding of the other cultures. By promoting these types of discussions, it would be possible to observe the students' interactions and reactions and focus instruction on intercultural aspects.

Finally, the study of the multimodal dimension of communication needs to be explored further. More research concerning the students' multimodal communication, their reading of multimodal texts and their awareness of multimodal hidden messages could help the field of multimodal studies grow. This is a novel field of research that surely will be better understood by analyzing the nature of some SNSLLs and their relationship with language learning. Therefore, further research should focus on the effects of SNSLLs in the development of ICC in other contexts of formal language learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Consent form

LAS REDES SOCIALES PARA EL APRENDIZAJE DE LENGUAS (RESAL): UN ESTUDIO DE CASO MÚLTIPLE EN LICENCIATURAS DE IDIOMAS COLOMBIANAS

Estimado estudiante:

Durante el presente semestre, se llevará a cabo un proyecto de investigación en la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la UPTC el cual lleva por título: “**Las Redes Sociales para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESAL): Un Estudio de Caso Múltiple en Licenciaturas de Idiomas Colombianas**”. El proyecto busca observar cómo se podría articular el aprendizaje del inglés de una clase presencial con aquel que –potencialmente- puede ofrecer una red social Lingq Academy.

En caso de aceptar la invitación para participar en el proyecto, se le solicitará inscribirse en dicha red social, desarrollar unas unidades de estudio, llenar una encuesta al principio del proceso y otras encuestas de seguimiento. También se le pedirá grabar las sesiones de uso de la red, y participar en una entrevista al final.

Los hallazgos de la investigación se recopilarán en un informe final que se presentará al Departamento de Investigaciones de la Universidad. De igual manera, se socializarán dichos resultados en conferencias especializadas y en varias publicaciones que saldrán posteriormente.

Su participación es voluntaria y no representa ningún beneficio económico. Las actividades que se llevarán a cabo en la red social harán parte de sus obligaciones para esta clase (English II) y por lo tanto serán evaluadas incluso si usted decide **no** participar en la investigación. Esto quiere decir que si decide no participar en la investigación, las actividades que usted realice en la red social no serán utilizados como datos para la misma. A todos los participantes se les garantizará:

1. El uso de nombres ficticios para mantener su identidad en el anonimato.
2. Estricta confidencialidad con la información recolectada.
3. El acceso y la verificación de la información recolectada.
4. El uso de la información recolectada será usada únicamente con propósitos académicos.

Agradecemos su gentil atención y su autorización para colaborar en el desarrollo de este proyecto. En caso afirmativo, favor completar la información que se encuentra a continuación.

Grupo de Investigación “**RETELE**”

NOMBRE DE RESPONSABLE. (José Aldemar Álvarez)

Nombre del estudiante

Nombre que sugiere se emplee en el reporte final _____

Fecha: _____

Teléfono: _____

Correo electrónico: _____

Appendix B. Learning log format

Learning Log 1

Please complete this learning journal after each session on Livemocha.

Class: _____

Date: _____

Time spent on the website: _____

1. What activities did you do on Livemocha today?
2. What do you think you learned new (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) today?
3. Did you communicate with any member of the community during this session?

Yes_____ NO_____

4. What means of communication did you use ?

Written Chat_____ Video Chat_____ Email_____

Other? Which ones?_____

5. What themes did you talk about during your exchange?
6. Were those themes interesting or relevant to you? why?
7. What cultural aspects could you identify during the exchange?
8. What languages did you use during the exchange?

Spanish_____ English_____ French _____

Other? Which ones?_____

9. Who did you interact with? (write 1,2,3 etc. according to the number of people you interacted with today)

Woman_____ Man_____

10. Mark the nationalities of the members of the community you interacted with:

Colombian____ American____ Canadian____ British____ French____

German____ Australian____ Italian____ Algeria____ Indian____

Others? Which ones? _____

11. What difficulties did you find during this session:

1. Using the computer and tools needed to access the website_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

2. Understanding the navigation and organization of the website_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

3. Understanding contents in the lessons_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

4. Communicating and interacting with members of the community_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

5. Other. Which one?

Thank you for your collaboration!!

Appendix C. Initial survey format

Encuesta inicial proyecto: **Las Redes Sociales para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESAL): Un Estudio de Caso Múltiple en Licenciaturas de Idiomas Colombianas**

Objetivo: Indagar sobre las experiencias previas de los estudiantes en programas de formación en relación con el uso de redes sociales para el aprendizaje de lenguas.

Universidad

Programa

Nombre:

Edad:

Género:

Nivel de lengua que está cursando:

1. Frente al manejo de la tecnología, su nivel de competencia es:

___ Básico

___ Intermedio

___ Avanzado

___ Experto

2. ¿Desde cuándo ha tenido acceso a las siguientes tecnologías digitales?

- Computador ___ desde que nació ___ hace más de 10 años
___ los últimos 5 años ___ nunca ha tenido acceso
- Smartphone ___ desde que nació ___ hace más de 10 años
___ los últimos 5 años ___ nunca ha tenido acceso
- Internet ___ desde que nació ___ hace más de 10 años

_____ los últimos 5 años ___ nunca ha tenido acceso

- Tablet desde que nació _____hace más de 10 años

_____ los últimos 5 años ___ nunca ha tenido acceso

3. ¿Cual(es) de la(s) siguiente(s) expresion(es) sería(n) la(s) mejor(es) para caracterizar su relación con las herramientas tecnológicas (internet, tablet, computador, smartphone, etc.)?

Marque máximo dos.

_____Me gusta utilizarlas porque me acercan a la gente y a la información.

_____Las herramientas tecnológicas son útiles pero me siento algo perdido cuando las utilizo.

_____Soy bueno(a) utilizándolas, pero no son indispensables

_____Las herramientas tecnológicas son complicadas, no las entiendo y puedo vivir sin ellas.

_____Creo que las herramientas tecnológicas me ayudan con las tareas académicas

4. ¿Ha utilizado páginas web para el aprendizaje de lenguas? Mencione algunas.

5. ¿En qué aspectos del aprendizaje de una lengua se ha enfocado cuando utiliza páginas web para estudiar inglés? Marque las opciones que correspondan.

- a. _____ Reforzar vocabulario
- b. _____ Interactuar con otros
- c. _____ Aprender sobre la cultura propia
- d. _____ Aprender sobre la cultura foránea
- e. _____ Practicar gramática
- f. _____ Mejorar la pronunciación
- g. _____ Practicar la lectura
- h. _____ Practicar la escritura
- i. _____ Practicar la escucha

j. _____ Practicar la producción oral

k. _____ Otro ¿Cuál? _____

6. ¿Ha utilizado o utiliza estas redes sociales para propósitos de socialización? Señale las opciones que correspondan.

_____ Facebook _____ Ning _____ Twitter _____ Youtube
 _____ Instagram _____ LinkedIn _____ Google+ _____ Flickr
 _____ Pinterest _____ Tumblr _____ Badoo _____ Myspace
 _____ Hi5 _____ FourSquare

Otra ¿Cuál?: _____

7. ¿Ha utilizado o utiliza redes sociales con el propósito de aprender lenguas? Señale las opciones que correspondan.

_____ Facebook _____ Ning _____ Twitter _____ Youtube
 _____ Instagram _____ LinkedIn _____ Google+ _____ Flickr
 _____ Pinterest _____ Tumblr _____ Badoo _____ Myspace
 _____ Hi5 _____ Four Square _____ Livemocha _____ Itaki _____ Duolingo
 _____ Babbel _____ Busuu

Otra ¿Cuál?: _____

8. ¿Ha utilizado o utiliza redes sociales con el propósito de enseñar lenguas? Señale las opciones que correspondan.

_____ Facebook _____ Ning _____ Twitter _____ Youtube
 _____ Instagram _____ LinkedIn _____ Google+ _____ Flickr
 _____ Pinterest _____ Tumblr _____ Badoo _____ Myspace

☐ Hi5 ☐ FourSquare ☐ Livemocha ☐ Itaki ☐ Duolingo
☐ Babbel ☐ Busuu ☐ We Heart it

Otra ¿Cuál?: _____

9. Si ha utilizado redes sociales para el aprendizaje de lenguas, ¿con qué propósitos lo ha hecho?

Señale las opciones que correspondan.

- l. ☐ Reforzar vocabulario
- m. ☐ Interactuar con otros
- n. ☐ Aprender sobre la cultura propia
- o. ☐ Aprender sobre la cultura foránea
- p. ☐ Practicar gramática
- q. ☐ Mejorar la pronunciación
- r. ☐ Practicar la lectura
- s. ☐ Practicar la escritura
- t. ☐ Practicar la escucha
- u. ☐ Practicar la producción oral
- v. ☐ Otro ¿Cuál? _____

10. ¿Cuáles herramientas ofrecidas por las redes sociales para el aprendizaje de lenguas le gustan más?

- a. ☐ Chat
- b. ☐ Videochat
- c. ☐ Foro
- d. ☐ Otro ¿Cuál? _____

11. ¿Encuentra alguna diferencia entre aprender lenguas a través de redes sociales y otros recursos, por ejemplo, libros de textos? Menciona algunas.
12. ¿Qué opinión tiene sobre la utilización de redes sociales en el aprendizaje de Lenguas?
13. ¿Qué expectativas y/o temores le genera el integrar una red social a uno de sus cursos de lengua?

Expectativas:

Temores:

Appendix D. Final survey format

Universidad del Valle

Escuela de Ciencias del lenguaje

Facultad de Humanidades

Maestría en estudios interlingüísticos e interculturales

Survey about the cultural dimension on Livemocha

This survey intends to find out information concerning your intercultural competence development from your experience with the site Livemocha and exchanges with some of its members.

Section 1: Personal information.

Complete the information below.

Date: _____

1) Sex: Male _____ Female _____

2) Name: _____

3) Age: _____

4) Semester registered _____

Section 2: Culture

1. Choose one definition of culture that you agree with.

All the material products, behaviors, beliefs, communities and individuals that

- constitute and differentiate a group of people in a certain geographical and historical context.

An ever changing reality defined by historical historical, social, political, and

- economic conditions that is influenced by external factors and is constructed by the people who live it.

- Behaviors and ways of life of the people of any given community that identifies it from the others.

- An entity that does not change with time and is constituted of behaviors, facts and products.

- Everything that can be seen, “touched” and learned from a human group.

- The understanding and reflection about the norms of a society, its rules of conduct, values and orientations.

- The great accomplishments of the target community: arts, music, drama, as well as scientific discoveries.

- All that people use to communicate among members of the community.

2. What determines that someone belongs to a cultural group? (Number the next items from 1 to 7 in order of importance)

[illegible]

Political affiliation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Beliefs and values ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Ethnic group and race ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Religion ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. What is intercultural contact?

Pulse para añadir texto a la respuesta

4. If you have established intercultural contact, how have you done it? (Choose more than one option if needed).

- ☐ By traveling
- ☐ By talking to other people through online applications
- ☐ By listening to radio or cultural shows
- ☐ By watching movies or documentaries
- ☐ By reading
- ☐ By surfing on the web.
- ☐ By online courses.
- ☐ By attending to cultural events in your home city.
- ☐ By asking other people who have traveled to other countries.

☐

Other

5. What are the most important things to learn from different cultures? (Number the next items from 1 to 12 in order of importance)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Behavior, customs, habits	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Literature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
History	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Popular culture: clothing, music, art, media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Beliefs and moral values	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Economic aspects	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Geography of the country	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Religion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Political system or political situation of the country	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health system	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Educational system	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. What is an intercultural speaker?

Pulse para añadir texto a la respuesta

Section 3: Livemocha.

1. What Livemocha's sections allowed you to engage more with cultural aspects? (Choose one option)

- ☐ a) Language lessons
- ☐ b) Help others
- ☐ c) Language partners

2. In the lessons, what activities allowed you to observe or engage more with cultural aspects? (Choose more than one option if needed).

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Vocabulary
- ☐ Usage
- ☐ Usage practice
- ☐ Read/Write
- ☐ Read/speak
- ☐ Listen/write
- ☐ Listen/speak

3. Did you interact with members of different nationalities and classmates on Livemocha?

- ☐ Only classmates
- ☐ People from other nationalities
- ☐ Both

4. If you did, what are the nationalities of people you interacted with?

5. Did you establish regular contact with members of other nationalities on Livemocha? If affirmative, how often did you communicate with them? (Choose one option)

- ☐ Everyday
- ☐ Weekly (out of class)
- ☐ Weekly (only in class)
- ☐ Every other week
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ I did not have regular contact with Livemocha members
- ☐ Other

6. What topics did you talk about with other Livemocha members? (Choose all the options you need).

- ☐ Everyday life
- ☐ Leisure activities
- ☐ Anecdotes
- ☐ Preferences and hobbies
- ☐ Family and sentimental relationships

☐ Job

☐ Academic life

☐

Other

7. What have you learned about your own culture and other cultures from your interactions with others and your experience on Livemocha?

Appendix E. Focus group protocol

Grupo Focal proyecto de investigación: Las Redes Sociales para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESAL): Un estudio de Caso Múltiple en Tres Licenciaturas de Idiomas Colombianas.

Introducción

Buenos días a todos, gracias por acompañarme en este grupo focal. El objetivo de esta sesión es indagar sobre sus percepciones y experiencias sobre el uso de la red social Livemocha. Durante este semestre, como saben, hemos estado realizando unas sesiones de trabajo en Livemocha, en donde cada semana hemos trabajado en una unidad, utilizando la función de chat o haciendo otras tareas que yo he preparado y que la Livemocha no necesariamente propone. Esto dentro del marco del proyecto de investigación que estamos realizando con otras universidades. El objetivo del proyecto es mirar las maneras en que se pueden integrar este tipo de redes en las clases de lengua extranjera. La información producto de este grupo focal será utilizada para responder a varios interrogantes que nos hemos planteado al interior del estudio. Siéntanse libres de expresar honestamente sus opiniones, sentimientos o reservas respecto a este tipo de redes y su integración en las clases de lengua de licenciaturas.

Para realizar esta sesión es importante tener en cuenta las siguientes recomendaciones: primero que solo una persona hable al tiempo y que todos participen durante la sesión. También, tengan en cuenta que vamos a estar grabando esta sesión.

Me gustaría empezar por pedirles que cada uno se presente diciendo su nombre.

Preguntas introductorias

Livemocha es considerada como una red social con propósitos educativos. ¿Quiénes de ustedes han utilizado otro tipo de red social con o sin propósitos educativos? Y, ¿cuáles?

Preguntas centrales

Pregunta base:

¿Cuáles son las percepciones de los estudiantes respecto al uso de redes sociales para aprender lenguas como Busuu o Livemocha con respecto a su proceso de formación docente?

¿Ustedes qué piensan de que se utilicen este tipo de tecnologías en las clases de lengua extranjera pero en particular en clases de lengua de licenciaturas?

¿Cómo se sintieron utilizando Livemocha durante la clase este semestre?

¿En qué medida Livemocha contribuye al objetivo de formación en lengua extranjera y para la enseñanza de lengua extranjera que ustedes están recibiendo?

¿Cómo se caracterizan las habilidades del lenguaje que los estudiantes de licenciatura desarrollan mediante el uso de las RESAL Busuu?

¿Cómo la utilización de la página ha tenido algún impacto en el desarrollo de sus habilidades del lenguaje? Aquí quiero mencionar que no solamente me refiero a habilidades de la lengua como habla, escritura etc. sino de manera más amplia a habilidades del lenguaje que permiten formas de comunicación.

¿Qué tanto puede alguien aprender sobre cultura usando Livemocha?

¿Cuáles son los patrones de uso que adoptan los estudiantes de licenciatura en lengua extranjera en la RESAL Busuu y su relación con el desarrollo de habilidades del lenguaje?

En qué aspectos de los ejercicios que ofrece Livemocha en sus unidades de trabajo se enfocaron más ustedes cuando yo les asignaba el trabajo en alguna de ellas? ¿Por qué?

En varios casos noté que ustedes me preguntaban sobre el vocabulario de las unidades de Livemocha, o tomaban notas en su cuaderno, entre otras. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cosas que

ustedes hacían durante la sesión de trabajo en Livemocha para apoyar o complementar la comprensión de los contenidos?

¿Alguno de ustedes hizo uso de la página por fuera de la clase? ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia? ¿En qué contenidos y actividades se focalizaron más?

¿Hay alguna diferencia entre usar Busuu como parte constitutiva de la clase y como iniciativa propia?

¿Cómo la utilizaron ahora que no tenían una estructura específica indicada por el profesor?

¿Cree usted que puede enriquecer el conocimiento cultural de otros usuarios de Livemocha? De ser así, ¿qué tanto?

¿Cuál es el rol del diseño semiótico multimodal de RESAL en el desarrollo las habilidades del lenguaje en el contexto de un programa de formación de docentes en lengua extranjera?

Hablemos un poco sobre el diseño de la página web desde lo instruccional o pedagógico.

¿Qué recuerdan sobre la manera en que está organizada la página web?

¿Qué opinión tienen de las secciones en que están estructuradas las unidades de trabajo en Livemocha?

¿Ustedes creen que hay algún énfasis en Livemocha en términos de desarrollo de habilidades del lenguaje o de la lengua? ¿Cuál sería?

¿Cómo creen que Livemocha o los diseñadores de Livemocha ven a sus usuarios?

- ¿Cómo se ve esto reflejado en la manera en que está diseñada la página?

¿Qué opinión tienen ustedes sobre el diseño de la página web en términos de un material de aprendizaje?

- ¿Qué aspectos harían que a una persona le guste la página dentro de su presentación o navegabilidad?

- ¿Qué tan importante es que se combinen video, audio, imágenes, colores, y otros elementos de diseño?
- Si uno mira algunos materiales didácticos de varios años atrás se observa que había menos elementos de audio, imágenes, colores tec. que se combinaban para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas, ustedes creen que se necesita otro tipo de habilidades para manipular este tipo de textos?

¿Cuáles son las representaciones sobre el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas que subyace a la RESAL Busuu?

¿Cómo creen ustedes que la página o sus diseñadores piensan que un usuario debe aprender la lengua?

La página tiene un sistema en donde los mismo miembros de la comunidad revisan los escritos y grabaciones de otros usuarios. ¿Cómo les fue con este recurso de la página teniendo en cuenta que ustedes no solo son aprendices de la lengua sino además futuros docentes de lenguas?

Tradicionalmente se ha pensado que aprender una lengua solo puede suceder en el espacio de un salón de clase con un profesor, ustedes creen que las redes sociales como Livemocha está cambiando ese paradigma? ¿Cómo?

De acuerdo a su experiencia, ¿La cultura es un eje fundamental del método de aprendizaje de Livemocha? ¿Hasta qué punto?

¿Cuál es impacto del uso de la RESAL Busuu en los procesos de desarrollo de la comunicación intercultural en estudiantes de licenciatura en lengua extranjera?

¿Qué relación hay entre la dimensión cultural y los contenidos de la página web?

- ¿Cómo piensan que Livemocha puede ayudar a sus usuarios a conectar culturalmente y adquirir habilidades que faciliten entendimiento y comunicación

cultural??

Si mañana se encontraran con una persona de otro país o viajaran al exterior, ¿creen que el uso de la página web les podría ayudar en algo para las interacciones con otros?

¿En qué secciones de la página web creen que las cuestiones de la cultura se abordan?

¿Qué elementos consideran importantes al hablarle a alguien perteneciente a un contexto cultural diferente en Livemocha?

¿Cuál fue el aspecto cultural más relevante que usted aprendió en Livemocha?

- ¿En qué medida el chat facilita el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural?

¿Cómo establecían ustedes un contacto inicial con miembros de Livemocha pertenecientes a otras culturas?

En el trabajo que hicieron en las diversas sesiones de trabajo en clase, ¿hubo algún momento en el que notaron que el conocimiento o la conciencia sobre algún aspecto inter-cultural era necesario?

- Hubo alguna interacción en el chat en el que notaron que hubo falta de comprensión o malentendidos debido al desconocimiento o mala interpretación de algún aspecto relacionado con lo cultural?

¿Inciden o no las ideologías lingüísticas de natividad presentes en la RESAL

en la forma como los participantes se ven a sí mismos como usuarios del Inglés? ¿Si existe una incidencia, cómo se da?

Uno de los criterios para darle un rol a los usuarios en la comunidad de Livemocha es la lengua nativa. Recuerden que se busca que los miembros de la comunidad se comuniquen con nativos de la lengua que están aprendiendo, ¿qué opinan ustedes de este criterio?

- Ustedes creen que el contacto con un nativo es necesaria para desarrollar

competencia en la lengua extranjera?

- Otra de las tareas de Livemocha es la de ayudar a los miembros de la comunidad revisando audios o composiciones, cómo les pareció esta experiencia y en su mayoría a quienes le revisaron composiciones:

¿Cómo se pueden articular este tipo de redes sociales con las clases presenciales en un programa de formación de docentes de lengua?

Si usted es el profesor titular de un curso de inglés. Una de las herramientas de apoyo es Busuu.

¿Lo usaría? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo?

¿Hasta qué punto fue el lenguaje una barrera o una herramienta para establecer contacto intercultural? ¿Cómo ocurrió?

¿Qué opina usted de esta frase?

Los contactos interculturales solo ocurren cuando se interactúa con personas de otras nacionalidades.

Summary question.

Bueno, durante esta charla hemos discutido varios aspectos sobre el use de las redes sociales, en particular Livemocha en las clases de estudiantes que se están formando para ser docentes de lengua, ustedes han expresado que esta experiencia ha sido....

¿Este resumen que acabo de hacer es apropiado y recoge puntos importantes de la discusión de hoy?

Final question. Gracias todos estos elementos más la información recogida durante el semestre nos va a ayudar a determinar de qué manera se pueden integrar estas páginas en nuestras clases de lenguas. ¿Creen que hemos olvidado algo que podría aportar para ayudar al propósito del proyecto?

¿Hay alguna sugerencia que quieran hacernos?

¡¡Les agradecemos mucho!!

Appendix F. ICC matrix.

[illegible]