

THE MEXICAN IDENTITY OF THE READING TEXTS INCLUDED IN OFFICIAL TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract:-

Official free textbooks for basic education have been consolidated as the main instruments for teach in Mexican classrooms and fort he institutionalization of the school praxis. Since they are designed following the approach of the educational reform current at the time, teaching practices are usually focused on these materials that, to a certain extent, determine the dynamics, activities and information that students receive. Children attend school to build knowledge and achieve an integral development. The function of formal education is not limited to the dissemination and transmission of data and facts, but also it contributes to the construction of an image of the subject, of his peers, of his space and of his role in society. Hence, the official educational editions have become an opportunity for the characterization of the Mexican people. This article attempts, precisely, to observe the construction of an image of national identity through the study of textbooks for schoolchildren. This analysis focuses on the volumes titled Spanish. Reading texts for the six grades of elementary education, distributed on the 2017-2018 school year

Keywords: - *Textbook, image, basic education, national identity, Mexican identity*

INTRODUCTION

Humans, almost instinctively, seek other people, relate to them, establishes links; man is a gregarious being without a doubt. From the most remote times, people's organization have been characterized by the integration of increasingly complex groups: family, tribes, clans, villages, nations. The complexity of social organization has progressively created such heterogeneous groups, that their relationship as a unit sometimes appears as an artificial construct. Because of this, the contrasts and variations within the same nation lead to question which elements determine that some people are part of a nation Villoro (2012) and Gellner, (1991) agree that the nationality of a person depends, above all, on two aspects: a shared culture and the acknowledgement of belonging. These authors conceive nationalism as a general imposition of a culture in a society, whose population had been ruled mostly by various primary cultures. The integration of a nation will not be, then, a natural process in the evolution of a community; for the contrary, it will be observed as a phenomenon of coercion, through which a dominant idiosyncrasy will be assumed by the inhabitants of a geographical space. This essay analyzes the institutional action for the conformation of a Mexican nationality, through the conformation of a shared culture and the construction of an identity that allows all Mexicans to recognize themselves as such. Specifically, this study focuses on the educational institution, especially on the free materials that the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretariat of Public Education –SEP) distributes for basic education. Textbooks, because of their contents and didactic intention, constitute an instrument of special importance for the creation of a Mexican image that fits in the institutional project of the nation.

4. THEORETICAL APPROACH –METHODOLOGICAL

Bakhtin (1986) explains that linguistic communication is executed in the form of individualized concrete utterances. The specific types of utterances for a particular linguistic situation, similar between them and different from the others, constitute the speech genres. Each area of human activity, in which language is used, develops its own speech genre; whereby there is an extreme heterogeneity of genres, both oral and written. This research studies textbooks as a speech genre, characterized by its officiality and its didactic purpose, as well as its informative and formative nature. The concept of speech genre allows a linguistic approach for the analysis, through which the text is analyzed as a speech act that is part of a communicative chain. To observe the utterance within a communicative chain implies to examine it in its real function, it means, in an enunciation situation where it participates in the dialogue with other past, present and future utterances. Due to this dialogue between utterances, the discursive genres acquire a historical character that establishes a link with the context (Bakhtin, 2008). By considering the text as part of a historical dialogue, social communication is envisioned in a more complex way, leaving behind the idea of transmission in favor of a conception that includes the dynamic nature of the subjects of enunciation. From this perspective, the image is observed as a means for the construction of ideas, points of view and identities, insofar as its action is not limited to convey information, but also creates a sense of reality thanks to the correlation and exchange between subjects and texts. The analysis of the schoolchildren's reading texts allow to observe the themes and figures of the Mexican identity in textbooks. Barthes (2010) defines the figure as a fragment of the discourse that has a concrete meaning; so, through the analysis of all figures, the full meaning of a text can be captured. Corona (2006) redefines this concept, understanding it as minimum significant particles, through which the themes that allow visualizing the meaning of the text are established. In this work, the concept of figure is used in a similar way to Corona, that is, as discursive elements that have a symbolic meaning through which indicators for the construction of a concept of Mexican identity can be found.

4. RESULTS

Mexican educational materials for basic education include the books distributed for free by the Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos (CONALITEG -National Commission of Free Textbooks), as well as the school manuals of private publishers. However, by government regulation, free textbooks have been decreed "official", while other editions have acquired the status of "support books". This fact allows to visualize a transcendental aspect to consider a volume as a textbook: the institutional approval. Both, in countries that have free editions and in those that do not, textbooks used for elementary school must comply with certain established format and content requirements. Therefore, its official nature lies in its approval by the competent authorities, that certify which materials are compatible with the current focus, discourse and educational policies. For this reason, Bertoni (cited in Carbone, 2001: 20) describes the textbook as "an instrument of systematic educational praxis and its discourse is, thus, part of the global educational discourse".

For this author, textbooks are fragments of the discursive-ideological development that people call education. The "monopoly of legitimated education" refers to the control that government retain over formal education (Gutiérrez Chong, 2012). The free distribution of these volumes is based on a nationalist intention that pursues two objectives (González Cosío, 2013): a) contribute to build a national unity by providing all Mexican children the same cultural standards; b) ensure that all socioeconomic strata have access to adequate study materials. In this way, the importance of the official textbooks will have a double impact in the construction of a national identity: on one hand, they help to homogenize the contents of basic education; on the other hand, they forge a commitment between the State and the new generation of citizens. The conformation of a national identity, understood as the acceptance of belonging to a group and its culture, is achieved through the knowledge of social nature that young people learn within the various institutions where they interact. Due to this, the textbooks titled Spanish. Reading texts includes a diverse thematic around the construction of the concept of Mexican being. Table 1 presents the topics located in the research corpus, that are related to the institution of a national identity. To assess the proportion of the reading texts that incorporate the national aspect, this table also indicates the number of the total that are included in each volume from the first to the sixth grade of elementary school

Grade	Total of reading texts	Reading texts about Mexican elements	Reading texts located in Mexico	Reading texts for the Mexican citizen
1°	25	2	7	7
2°	27	8	6	3
3°	31	6	7	14
4°	34	2	7	14
5°	36	7	8	6
6°	37	10	8	6

As can be seen, the topics about the Mexican identity in official textbooks have been divided into three major sections that are described subsequently: a) Reading texts about Mexican elements; b) Reading texts located in Mexico; c) Reading texts for the Mexican citizen

4.1. Reading texts about Mexican elements

This section includes the reading texts that address elements that strengthen the national identity, such as historical and cultural aspects. As for the history of Mexico, textbooks introduce stories about events and characters. Thereby, passages of three specific moments, that have transcended for the conformation of the Mexican nation, are presented: the Pre-Hispanic era, the Independence and the Revolution. Also, some recent events are mentioned, as long as they have had a great impact or have caused several damages; for example, the outbreak of influenza virus type A (subtype H1N1), the earthquake of 1985 in Mexico City, the floods in the Papaloapan Basin. A different handling of the information can be observed when reading texts deal with previous and recent events. Past incidents are explained directly, but the facts are told from a Manichean perspective; instead, recent history is immersed in another story, either as a context or as a pretext for introducing advices or guidance in case of an emergency. These different approaches to history reveal that textbooks are concerned to expose data of distant events in order to help structure a common past, which constitutes a necessary element for the construction of nationalism. Besides that, the inclusion of recent events shows that previous experiences should serve to learn and be prepared, at the same time that citizen union is exalted. Stories focused on heroic characters constitute a substantial percentage in the reading texts about historical aspects; practically half of the narrations emphasize on the praise of a character and his work. Among the protagonists of national history, there are independence insurgents, revolutionary caudillos, personalities of art and sport. As for the athletes, it must be noted that stories of several Olympic medalists, especially medalists who participated in the 1968 Olympics, were included. Textbooks of Spanish. Reading texts display a special interest in the construction of national heroes, as "role models" for children who attend basic education. For this reason, heroes' descriptions do not only explain their achievements, but also accentuate their ideals, their efforts, the adversities and the challenges they had to face to become the pride of their country. In addition to historical details, texts that focused on national aspects also describe Mexican customs and habits. Narratives about traditions are essential for the conformation of the nation project; in the case of textbooks, the Day of the Dead is presented as the most important Mexican custom, since it has the highest number of references. It is important to note that the textbooks reviewed for this study include very few traditional legends³, despite their symbolic and cultural value and their appeal for school children. Although, on the other hand, these educational materials incorporate stories with fantastic characters and situations with mythical overtones, but which are not part of the Mexican tradition

4.2. Reading texts located in Mexico

The textbooks of Spanish. Reading text have few lyrical works, most of the texts tell a story, whether in verse, theater or prose. In order to establish some empathy with the reader, many of the narrated actions take place in children's familiar environments. For this reason, almost all stories happen in a school, at home or on the street; on rare occasions, foreign countries or fictitious spaces are mentioned. Many narratives do not indicate if the action occurs in a specific country; so, it cannot be assumed immediately that the context of the story is, without question, Mexico. This section gathers the reading texts that do not develop their story around a Mexican cultural aspect, but it is explicit that the narration happens or refers to Mexico. Thus, places, animals, food, characters, names, popular literature referents are mentioned to place the story in the Mexican soil. The names of the cities, the description of a town or the reference to a particular site allow us to recognize the Mexican spaces. The same happens when indigenous names, famous people (like soccer players) or traditional food are mentioned. It is necessary to mention that these allusions to the Mexican context can be located both in narrations of realistic character, as well as in narrations with fantastic elements. Even in informative texts there are national references that indicate that the action is located in Mexico. Among the texts that present some Mexican town, the anecdotes of the interviewers of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI–National Institute of Statistic and Geography) are introduced. Except for the fifth-grade volume, all the other books include at least one anecdote from INEGI interviewers, where the humorous or problematic situations that they have to face are narrated. These stories are characterized for describing remote villages, rural landscapes and unconventional people. Another cultural element found in these editions is the popular literature: proverbs, tongue twisters, calaveras⁴, riddles, rhymes, recipes. On some occasions, these literary texts are used not only to depict an artistic style that is associated with popular culture; but also, they are used to portray traditional aspects of Mexico. Thus, there are riddles that describe the avocado or skulls to Diego Rivera.

4.3. Reading texts for the Mexican citizen

This section includes the narratives that aim to expose the necessary moral values for achieving a healthy and peaceful coexistence, as well as provide advice to prevent accidents or act in cases of emergency. Although most of the textbooks' stories have some didactic purpose, this section includes those narrations that, due to their thematic, address elements for the development of citizens who live in harmony and know how to face risk situations. These texts, dedicated to the promotion of a cordial coexistence, consider issues that have as background the configuration of moral and citizen values. According to the concerns of public education, they focus on problems such as bullying, gender issues, politics, respect for others and, above all, respect for the elderly. The narratives contain anecdotes of realistic and fantastic nature. Textbooks also present readings about environmental care, suggestions for risk situations and action protocols in case of an emergency situation, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, among others. These narrative texts are intended to teach how citizens can preserve their integrity in extreme conditions, either in their relationship with the environment that surrounds them, or in their coexistence with other people. Because of this, pages that talk about health and disease prevention are considered in this section

5. DISCUSSION

National stereotypes allow to identify the specific characteristics of Mexican people, so its members can discriminate themselves from strangers; this way, a depiction of their own selves and the others is established (Todorov, 2013). The configuration of a national identity presupposes the creation of a reference of the Mexican being through stereotyped and institutionalized figures that are constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed in time through different tools, such as textbooks. The analysis of textbooks titled Spanish. Text readings enable to identify the topics used for the conformation of an image of Mexico, the Mexican people and the Mexican citizens. This approach reveals certain figures that are presented to the students as a nationalist aspect of their formal education. These figures are exposed as mythical references that shape a national identity through a characterization of a "Mexican culture". The national characterization, then, implies the conjunction of aspects selected by a hegemonic power, from which the characteristics of the country and its citizens are described. From this standpoint, the identity can be understood as "the articulation of myths and symbols that unify us all [...] not to extract an average of our characteristics from it, but to link our existence to the coherence of a national project that defines us as opposed to others" (Casas, 2008: 155). For this, the topics about Mexican identity, that have been observed in official textbooks, build the figures that are represented below

5.1. The Mexican indigenous past

Villegas (1986: 390) observes that, from all different types of nationalisms that emerged from the Revolution, "the first, the most important and the most widespread of nationalisms is the ethnological. That is, the identification of national quintessence with the indigenous, and the indigenous with the popular and the revolutionary" (6). The nationalist inclination of textbooks treasures the link between the pre-Hispanic indigenous with the mestizo. The Mexica (also called Azteca) people have become the mythical antecedent of the nation. However, by recognizing them as the national ancestors, textbooks link them to the past; so, frequently, indigenous people are represented as remote figures in time, not as current inhabitants of Mexico. According to this approach, most of textbooks' stories with Indian protagonists have a fantastic context and are always located in the past, so the indigenous character can acquire a mythical and distant personality. Personages and events are mostly described in the midst of a legendary atmosphere, even if they are historical. For example, the first years of Nezahualcōyotl's life are exposed in the following way.

He received proper education according to his lineage, he learned everything that was considered necessary to be a ruler of his people: writing, customs, rituals, traditions and history of his Chichimecas, Toltecs, Mexicas and Acolhuas ancestors. [...] One of the most difficult events that changed his life occurred when Tezozomoc, lord of Azcapotzalco, killed his father before his eyes, while he was hiding so as not to be seen. This situation motivated Acolmiztli to change his name to Nezahualcōyotl, which means "hungry or fasting coyote", as a form of sacrifice and promise of justice (SEP, 2013f: 51)

Despite the ethnic diversity of the Mexican territory, the need to build a common past identifies the Mexican nation as a descendant of the Aztecs; even, two of the three national symbols -the shield and, therefore, the flag -refer to the myth about the foundation of Tenochtitlan, the Mexicas' capital city. This Azteca's hegemony is also reflected in the reading texts reviewed, whose indigenous references focus especially on the Mexica people and, in a second place, on the Maya people.

5.2. The Mexican hero

In addition to the founding myths and inherited customs, the historical past also includes events and heroes, whose representations constitute a national ideal for school children. The hero is an action character, who puts the needs of society before his own; this sacrifice to which he submits by his own will elevates him into a messianic figure. Due to this mythical spirit, heroes -like gods and other supernatural beings -are separated from the everyday world (Eliade, 1998), their weaknesses and defects are suppressed from the collective memory, so they can become a symbol of virtue. The historical hero loses his contradictory, complex and human features, in favor of a mythification based on static stereotypes and constructs, in order to achieve the dignity status of a national symbol. Because

of this, the official history has pruned the heroes' personalities to turn them into legendary figures who possess a set of qualities necessary to "get on the pedestal" (Carrera Damas, 2003). In this positive characterization are reflected the ethical values and ideals, which lead them to rebel against a world full of injustices, inequalities and dangers. Thus, "they take a trajectory that leads them straight to a certain death, and they acquire a physical feature that makes their figure unmistakable: a bald head, a frock coat, a bandana, a mustache and a wide hat, almost arm" (Ibargüengoitia, 2015: 34)⁹. In textbooks for basic education, national heroes are not only those who fought in the wars of the Independence and the Revolution, but also those who have raised the name of Mexico, whether in the field of art, science, technology or sports. Hence, the biographies of eminent artists, Olympic medalists and inventors are frequent in the volumes of all school grades. The construction of a myth always goes back to its origin; in the case of the hero, to his childhood (Rank, 2015). For this reason, it is common to observe that biographies of historical figures focus on the qualities and achievements obtained since their early years; because the flawless personality that characterizes the adult hero has its sustenance and genesis in his youth. Despite the story of a child is something that young students can relate and be interested in; textbooks' narratives include few anecdotes regarding the first years of a character's life. Instead, textbooks describe their first approaches or their most recognized accomplishments to the branch in which artists, athletes and inventors stood out. On February 17, 1917, in the state of Jalisco, Guillermo González Camarena was born. As a child, he demonstrated his inventive spirit and skills for electronics. When he was just two years old, his parents, Arturo González and Sara Camarena, took him to live in Mexico City. Soon, in his new home, he found a place to practice his favorite hobby. He made a laboratory in the basement, where he enjoyed experimenting and creating new things, including toys that moved with electricity. (SEP, 2013a: 58)¹⁰. Most biographies tell the story of postrevolutionary characters, that is, figures of the last century. With this, textbooks aim to bring students closer to the characters that are nearest to them in time; as well as assessing heroic aspects with which they can connect, such as technology, art or sports.

5.3. The national customs By sharing the same history and the same culture, a national unity and ties of belonging, that are manifested through similar conceptions of what "being Mexican" implies, is sustained. The action of the State for the construction of a concept of Mexican identity will be fundamental. Government not only allows the validation of customs and traditions that become symbols and images of the national background, but also allows its diffusion through its institutions, in such a way that are recognized and appropriated by all Mexicans. The configuration of national traditions can be observed in the reading texts, through the depiction and reconstruction of certain customs of Mexico and the Mexicans. The recognition and explanation of customs and traditions becomes necessary for primary school students, because they constitute a link between the mythical past and the current reality. Traditions facilitate the continuity of a national system and the practice of nationalist actions. The main customs of official textbooks, as it has been already pointed out, are those related to the Day of the Dead. Traditions may have a completely nationalist intention or be mixed with a more universal culture, like this calavera dedicated to Mozart. When Mozart was a little boy knew of his not long existence.

That is why he hooked the love with
 Music and its essence. Death
 Always kept joking with their
 Weapons of iniquity. She would be listening to him for
 All the eternity (SEP, 2013f: 75)

The strong presence of the festivity of November 2nd, compared to the rest of Mexican traditions, can be explained by the origin of national celebrations. Many festivities in Mexico are closely related to the Catholic religion, so the secular nature of public education conflicts with the use of these customs in textbooks. However, from a merely informative perspective, other subjects' textbooks mention these traditions as part of the cultural richness of this country.

5.4. The Mexican values

Althusser (2014) asserts that the School-Family pair constitutes the dominant ideological apparatus for secular national states. These two institutions have some similar aspects: both are places where there is an authority figure that takes care of children; both are teaching spaces where young people learn customs, values, roles and norms that will enable them to live and to coexist harmoniously in society. The difference between these institutions is their social impact; while families integrate kids into the same groups that the rest of the family belongs to, formal education has a nationalist function. The educational institution is a privileged space to promote a common culture, given its formative and informative action towards young people. One of the main functions of the school in this enculturation process is the construction and preservation of certain values that are considered essential for the Mexican citizen. In this way, besides the image of a glorious past and the struggle for independence and sovereignty, the Mexican culture adds conventional symbols and myths—such as freedom, national unity, solidarity, democracy—in order to inculcate an image of the national political system (Latapí, 1989). Through these elements, an "own" cultural legacy is instituted, as well as an awareness of the distinctive attributes of the Mexican nation, which are perpetuated and reconstructed following a program that validates the dispositions and the permanence of the State system. The features that are promoted for the image of the national culture are:

- Mexican pluriculturalism. Textbooks present different ways of celebrating national customs and traditions in different parts of the country. The characteristics of different villages are also portrayed to demonstrate the cultural diversity that exists in Mexico
- Tolerance and respect for others. In accordance with the educational approaches and concerns of the world society, textbooks incorporate stories that aimed at the promotion of equality between men and women, respect for alternative forms of life, recognition of family structures different than the nuclear family, respect to the particular characteristics (age, sex, race, beliefs) of each person. Thus, school education intends to inculcate the conception of a tolerant Mexican society that respects individuality
- The vigilant society. One of the constants in the volumes for the six school grades is the presence of topics about prevention and action. Either through stories or through informative texts, textbooks explain what to do in case of fire, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Likewise, it also encourages the prevention of accidents and the promotion of a healthy life
- The ecological Mexican. The narratives included in textbooks shown characters that attack the environment, but later they reconsider their posture and change their attitude. In addition, instructive texts about recycling and caring for nature and the environment are incorporated. These narrative and informative readings seek to pose situations for pondering about the impact of man on nature, in order to create an ecological conscience. Considering these elements, the portrayal of a Mexican citizen aware of himself and his environment is observed.

Textbooks not only contain knowledge of a theoretical nature, but also present values, customs, attitudes that are intended to be inculcated in students through school actions. These qualities and behaviors are not part of a Christian moral doctrine. In fact, these educative materials respect the constitutional statutes referring to the secularity of public education; for this reason, there is an absence of religious references. José Agustín (2014: 191) explains that: free textbooks tried to be up-to-date with the most contemporary knowledge and disciplines and also to be an accessible product, relatively objective in parts and idyllic in others, in order to foster in the students, the parity between the homeland and the government, as well as establish an uncritical subordination of children to the political-social system (Agustín, 2014: 191)

As the main instrument of official education, textbooks seek to train future Mexican citizens, hence the customs and behavioral norms that they present do not have a religious but a nationalistic support. Therefore, the knowledge that basic education intends to achieve with the official textbooks correspond both to its informative function, including thematic contents in accordance with the current curricula, as well as to its formative function, through values and customs of institutional and official character that guarantee the continuity of the State.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Formal education includes constant allusions to a nationalist discourse, whether through written texts, visuals, civic acts or recreational activities. In fact, the ideals and knowledge necessary for cultural integration are a recurrent theme in study plans, so it is not surprising that the contents focus on situations that refer to the construction of a homeland culture. Thus, education has become one of the means and ends for the conformation of a notion of the Mexican identity, endorsed by the institutions and consistent with the national culture. Textbooks do not only address the theoretical contents of the official curricula, but also, they expose a political and cultural position that the educational authorities approve when choosing a text over another, either by a contest or by commission. For this reason, these official materials have become a crucial part of a political and national project, whose discourse presents a didactic intention with two purposes: to construct socially and politically accepted ideas, or to change or refine them. Thereby, the characteristics of the Mexican identity proposed by basic education's textbooks reveal the concerns and conceptions of what is privileged as "Mexican" essence

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