



Multimodal Writing in The Spanish Classroom: A Pedagogical Tool to Empower and Heal from The Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the multimodal compositions of seven students in an intermediate Spanish class which took place during the Summer of 2021. The class met virtually by zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which limited face-to-face interactions. The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound effect on people's lives around the world, causing not only physical health issues but also mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression among others. Multimodal writing is a tool to empower students and help them heal from the trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, multimodality allows students to produce texts that reflect their experiences, identity, and voices through the various modes of communication available on the internet. Even though writing has become an important language skill due to technology and all the social platforms, some scholars don't give the same importance to writing than to other skills in language learning (Valdez et al., 1992). Multimodal texts combine two or more modes of communication, such as written language, spoken language, visual, audio among others (The New London Group, 1994). As Edwards-Groves (2011) strongly stated "A contemporary focus on writing highlights how technology use also enables new possibilities for creativity - new creativities - in multimodal text construction and meaning making (p. 51).

Keywords: writing, multimodal, healing, empower, identity.

INTRODUCTION

Writings is no longer just the ability to read and write paper-based texts (Li and Storch 2017). The computer and internet have redesigned the concept of writing, a skill that can no longer be considered less important than speaking or listening comprehension in a language class (Valdes et al. 1992). In addition, writing has always focused on accuracy, and it has been seen as an added skill to practice grammar and vocabulary. Nowadays, writing requires a wide range of modes afforded by technology, the internet, and the multiple social platforms our students interact with daily. In fact, multimodal writing has always existed, "Old Egyptian script was based on images, and so still are Chinese and other logographic languages" (Coulmas, 2003). Technology is part of students' lives, they are involved one way or another with iPhones, iPads, MacBook's, and iBlog's on the internet. The YouTube channel has become the main source of knowledge for multiple disciplines. Therefore, it makes sense to make the written text made up of multiple semiotic modes students can interact with to communicate their messages. Furthermore, multimodal writing is a way to meet linguistic and cultural differences in the classroom, as well as the wide range of personalities and learning styles that are comprised in any one group of students. (New London Group, 1996).

Students who enter the professional field.

'Need to be experienced and skilled not only in reading (consuming) texts employing multiple modalities, but also in composing in multiple modalities, if they hope to communicate successfully within the digital communication networks that characterize workplaces, schools, civic life, and span traditional cultural, national, and geopolitical borders' (Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007, p. 3). The students whose compositions I will analyze in this paper, have received Spanish as a foreign language class for more than three semesters.

This class took place during the summer of 2021, and we had our class sessions by zoom. Students were exhausted of the trauma from the pandemic, some had lost family members, friends, and they were anxious about the future. Additionally, some of them had some learning challenges that required the use of a wide range of pedagogical tools for learning to take place. This situation of the pandemic, and the composition of the class and individual needs, motivated me to use multimodality to empower and help students heal from all the traumatic events they endured during the pandemic. The use of multimodality allowed students to create identity friendly texts, where they were 100% in charge of their compositions, since the nontextual elements would become the map students followed to write their stories. They chose the grammar and the vocabulary based on the pictures that describe their lived experiences, the final product would portrait students' students' voices as reflected in the choices of modes afforded by the internet.

ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS

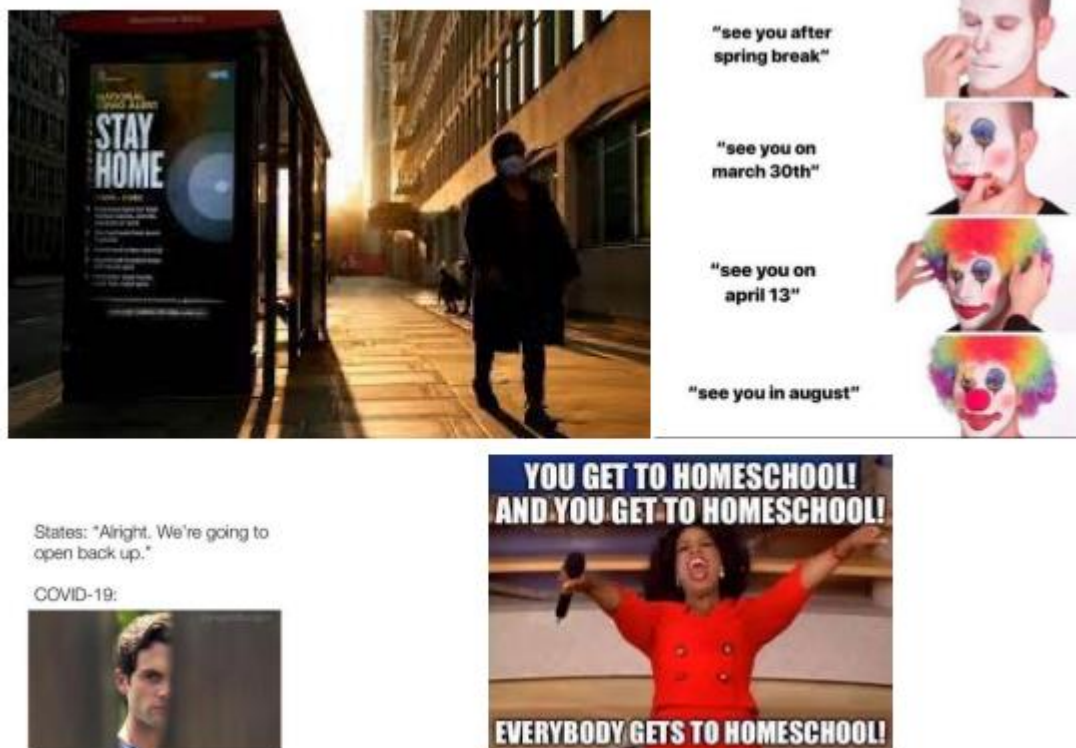
I will refer to students using alphabetical letters, from letter A to J.

Next, is the composition of student A, which I briefly interpret to English, since all of them are written in Spanish except for other modes such as photos, pictures, and video clips among other internet affordances that incorporate written and/or spoken English.

Student A

[El último año fue extraño por Covid 19. Las tiendas cerraron y la gente no pudo viajar. Tuvimos que usar nuestras computadoras para la escuela y hablamos por Zoom. He vivido en casa durante Covid, pero voy a volver a la escuela en el otoño. Fue difícil para mí aprender en línea, pero los profesores lo hicieron más fácil. Los profesores ofrecieron ayuda y fueron muy pacientes. Fue difícil estar lejos de mi familia y amigos durante mucho tiempo, pero era importante que todos estuvieran seguros. En enero, me puse en cuarentena en Lancaster porque mis abuelos tenían el virus. Estaba triste porque no quería dejar a mis abuelos. Ellos mejoraron y yo regresé a casa. Me alegré de que los científicos crearan la vacuna para todos.]

Student A expresses through the linguistic and pictures that contain the English language how weird the Covid-19 epidemic was. Student A says that it was extremely difficult to be away from family members and friend for such a long period of time, but it was necessary to keep each other safe. The student mentions that their grandparents got the virus, but survived, and it was a relief when the Covid-19 vaccine became available). The pictures he/she uses depict the loneliness, and the prolonged period of time without being able to see friends, or other family members.



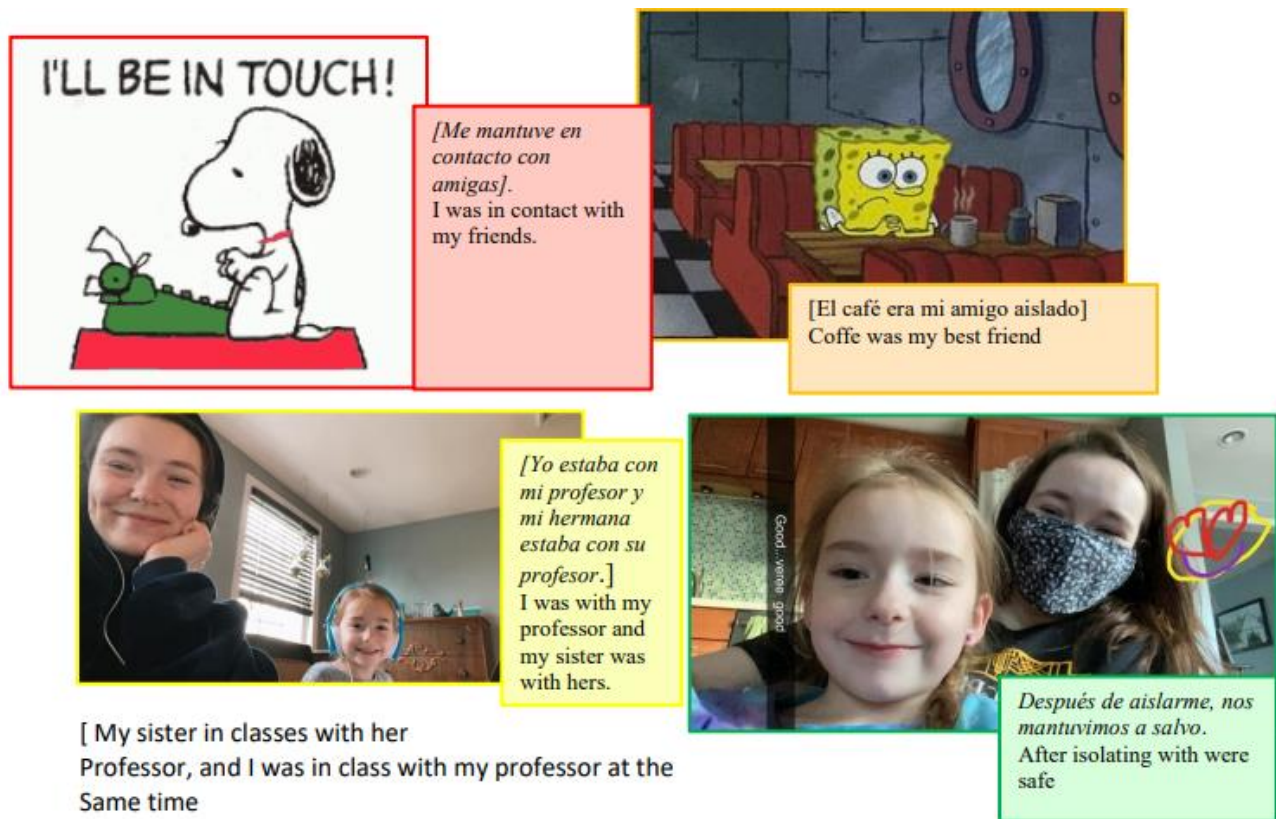
Student B

[Mi vida fue deprimente porque no pude ver a mis amigas o mi familia durante meses.

Extrañaba mi primo, nos llevamos bien. Solíamos salir de compras mucho y era muy divertido. Me mantuve en contacto con mi familia con mi teléfono. Me gusta hablar con ellos porque me hacen feliz. Fue un momento desafiante para nosotros.

Estaba aburrido en mi casa todo el día. Me sentí muy aislada y abrumada. Así que, mi mama y yo fuimos a caminar mucho. Entonces la escuela comenzó de nuevo. Tuve que acostumbrarme al "zoom". Era difícil de comprender. No, me gustaba la escuela en la computadora. No pude ver a mis amigos o profesores.





Student B describes how depressing it was not to be able to see family and friends for months. He/she misses his/her cousin, since he/she was a close friend. Student B felt overwhelmed, lonely, isolated, depressed, and having classes by zoom was difficult. This student makes a collage of adjectives that describe his state of mind and how he/she felt during all those months: classes by zoom, difficult, boring, depression, overwhelmed, and isolated. These are the student's adjectives that describe how he/she felt during the one year and a half that classes were held by zoom.

Student C

[My sister in classes with her Professor, and I was in class with my professor at the Same time

[Mi vida durante el COVID-19 ha sido una experiencia que nunca olvidaré. Me sentí abrumado y asustado. Me sentí más inquieto que cuando empezó. Me aseguré de mantenerme más en contacto con mis amigos y familiares. Fue agradable pasar tiempo con mi gran familia. Las cinco hermanas estaban en casa. Mi papá también trabajaba desde casa, lo cual fue divertido. Nos llevamos más bien que antes. No tenía vacaciones, pero veía películas de Disney con mi familia. Estuve aislado un poco y fue un desafío. La escuela fue difícil y pedí mucho ayuda a los profesores. Asistí a la escuela al mismo tiempo que dos de mis hermanas. Cuando la vacuna estuvo segura, tuve esperanza. Fue emocionante ver el progreso. Me pusieron la vacuna en el brazo, lo que me hizo creer que todo iba a estar bien. Pude volver a ver a mis amigos y familiares a salvo.]

This student says that the Covid-19 pandemic is something he/she will never forget. He/she felt scared, overwhelmed, and anxious. The student looks at both positive and negatives of the experience. He/She says that school was particularly y difficult and that he/she had to ask the professor for help in all her classes. It was fun to have school at the same time my parents and sisters had classes or had to work . It was very challenging for everyone and was excited when the vaccine was available for everyone. It was boring at times, but I watched Disney with my siblings, I was relieved when we got the vaccine, and I could see that things would be better afterwards. One of things he expresses through a picture is that coffee was his/her only friend, and that is sad!!

Student D

[La vida ha sido dura durante el Covid-19. La escuela en línea ha sido muy difícil. Es mucho más trabajo en línea que en persona. No, he visto mucho a mis amigos durante el Covid-19. Solo juego videojuegos con ellos. Jugamos muchos juegos para pasar el tiempo. No celebramos las fiestas de este año con mi familia. Ha sido un año muy aburrido. Finalmente, las cosas han comenzado a ser normales de nuevo. He empezado a salir de nuevo. Ha sido un año largo y estoy listo para graduarse. He visto un montón de Netflix. Estoy listo para salir de nuevo.]



Student E



En esta composición voy a escribir sobre el año pasado durante COVID-19. El año fue muy aislante.

Me quedé mucho en la casa con my familia. Mi familia y yo vimos mucho Netflix durante el año pasado; fue muy agradable.

Yo extrañé mis amigos y mi trabajo en la biblioteca de la escuela.

Todas mis clases fueron en línea. Me gustó tener clases en línea porque mucho tiempo para mi.

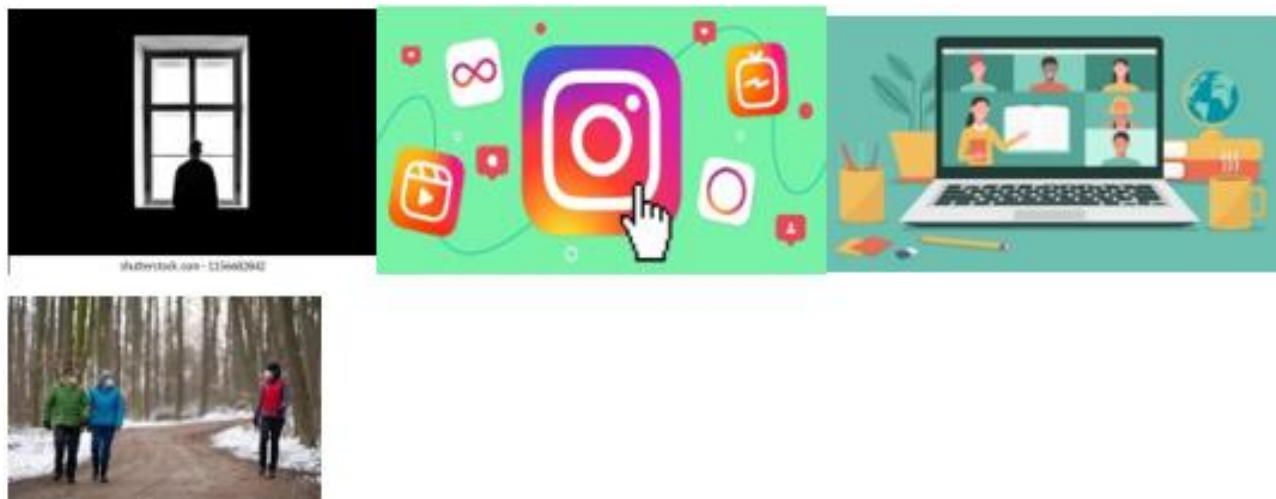
También yo trabajé mucho el año pasado porque tenía tiempo. Yo era mesera. También hice muchas actividades. Leí libros, aprendí a cocinar y hornear, caminé por la vecindad.

Sp Adobe Spark

Student D expresses how difficult it was to take classes online during Covid-19. He says he has not seen his friends for so long, and that learning online is much more difficult than in-person classes. He spends a lot of time playing videogames to pass the time, and his family has not celebrated any of the Holidays together, like they did before. I has been a boring year. Finally, things have started to go back to normal. I started to go out a little bit, but it has been a very long year and I am ready to graduate. I have seen Netflix a lot, but I am ready to go out like I used to.

Student E writes about her experience during 2020. Student E says she spend a lot of time watching Netflix with her family. I missed my friends and co-workers from the School Library. All my classes took place online, and I liked it because I could spend more time for myself. I worked very hard in my classes because I felt I had more time. I read books, learned how to cook, and bake and I walked through the neighborhood a lot.

Student F



[Me he hecho más aislada físicamente desde la primavera del 2020, pero todavía, me he mantenido en contacto con mi universidad, mi familia, y mis amigos. Por ejemplo, yo he hecho mi tarea y he tomado mis exámenes en línea. He usado Zoom para asistir mis clases y hablar con profesores y otras personas. El verano pasado, yo creé un cuento de Instagram, y he subido fotos interesantes y cómicas allí desde entonces. He subido dibujos lindos también. Aunque he estado aislada físicamente de otras personas con frecuencia, todavía he ido a pasear a veces, en mi barrio o en el parque]

Student D expresses how isolated she has felt during Spring of 2020. She says she has been in contact with his family, friends, and the university through zoom. She says she has taken classes, done homework, and talked to her professors by zoom. She says that even though she has felt physically isolated from other people, she still can walk through the park or neighborhood, always keeping a distance and wearing a face mask.

Student G

[Espero que el COVID-19 termine pronto. Me he aburrido mucho. No me gustaba estar en casa. Solía pasar tiempo con amigos. Durante COVID me quedé en mi dormitorio. Leí muchos libros y vi muchos programas de televisión. Mi programa favorito que vi fue "The West Wing" y "Schitt's Creek." Pude ir a ver amigos en Virginia. Me divertí mucho con ellos. Fue bueno viajar y no estar en casa. Espero que el mundo vuelva pronto a la normalidad. No me gusta no poder hacer y ver cosas nuevas. COVID estaba muy solo. ¡Estoy listo para estar con amigos e ir a playa!] Student G can't wait to see the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. I have been very bored. I don't like to be at home. I used to spend a lot of time with my friend, but during Covid, I have had to stay in my room. I have read many books and watched a lot of television. My favorite program was 'The West Wing and Schitt's Creek. Student G says she can't wait for the world to go back to normal. She does not like to be without being able to do and see new things. The pandemic time has been very lonely.

The pictures she uses, in addition to the linguistic mode, shows sleeping, reading, and television. Those were her main activities during the pandemic.



Student H

[En la primavera del 2020 cuando Covid 19 appeared, terminando mi tercer año de universidad, pero me tomé un tiempo para haciendo dos pasantías para la escuela. Para una pasantía, estaba trabajando con la ciudad de Philadelphia en la división de vivienda y desarrollo comunidad. Allí asistí en los esfuerzos de prevención de la falta de vivienda. En mi otra pasantía aprendí sobre la relación entre las refinerías y el benzene y cómo puede afectar a las personas que viven cerca de las refinerías. Durante este tiempo también adopté dos conejitos, mi conejito blanco se llama Grayson y mi conejito marrón de llama Coco. Finalmente, no pude ir a lugares a los que normalmente voy como el salón de uñas porque estaban cerrados.]



Student H shares that when the Covid-19 pandemic started, she was pursuing her third year at the university. However, she took the time to do two internships for school, one of them was with the Housing and Development of Philadelphia, and at the other internship, I learned about refineries and benzene and how it can affect people who live near those refineries. I could not go to places I frequently visited like the 'nail salon'.

However, I adopted two rabbits, my friends, Grayson, color white, and Coco, color marrón.

THE ORAL PRESENTATION

After writing the multimodal composition on their lived experiences, students shared their stories with the class. Students were truly motivated to share, and they had the undivided attention of the rest of class, which were listening and taking notes. After each student presented, there were questions asked from the classmates, and the responses were all about how they felt during the year and a half of the pandemic.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This was the first time I allowed students to use a wide variety of modes in their compositions. The Multimodality gave students a safe space to express and Multimodal writing allows individuals to express and channel their emotions related to what the whole world had been through with the pandemic, the loss of lives, the uncertainty, the unknown. Through the combination of their mother and target languages, and other modes, such as images and other multimedia elements, students were better equipped to communicate their emotions. Sharing their multimodal texts with the classroom gave them a sense of connection and community, since the whole class had been through the same restrictions, anxiety, loss due to the pandemic. The presentations provided a venue for students to connect with their classmates. They found support, empathy, and healing.

Other benefits of multimodal writing, include agency and empowerment. Students were in control of their narratives and their stories. Students were in control of the grammar and vocabulary they would use since each student's story was unique, and there was no right or wrong in what they wrote, it was a personalized text that triggered self-stem and agency. It was also a way for students to reflect not only on the negative aspects of the pandemic, but also the positives. Students learned the importance and value of family and staying together in challenging times.

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