

Chapter two: literature review

2.1 Discourse

The term discourse may be defined in different ways and its meaning will vary according to the context where it is used. Van Dijk (1997a) mentions that discourse is usually identified as a form of spoken language, what is said in public speeches for example, or it could also refer to the ideas of certain schools of thoughts, for instance the discourse of contemporary philosophies. However, Van Dijk (1989) comments that for discourse studies, the term discourse is understood as a particular form of language use, as well as a form of social interaction that can be defined as a communicative event in a social situation. Some examples the author gives are: interviews, conversations, meetings, letters, diaries, propaganda, discussions, laws, contracts, political discourses, songs, poetry, and news, just to mention a few (Van Dijk, 1981).

Van Dijk (1997a) comments that in discourse studies “analysts...want to include some other essential components such as who uses language, how, why and when” (p.2). Therefore, as the author mentions, what distinguishes discourse studies from grammar studies is that the analysis of discourse focuses on aspects that go beyond the syntax of language, although sometimes they might be included. Some of the properties discourse looks at in the analysis is the context where it is being used, the grammatical structures that are employed, as well as stylistic structures, the interactional characteristics, and the presentation performance (Van Dijk, 1981).

According to Van Dijk (1997a), discourse is part of complex social events because individuals use language to communicate their feelings, ideas, or beliefs to others; that is, to interact. The author explains that the three main dimensions of discourse refer to “1) language use; 2) the communication of beliefs (cognition); and 3) interaction in social situations” (p. 2). Van Dijk (2009) comments that discourse studies may incorporate

multidisciplinary orientations, for instance the socio-cognitive approach that includes mental representations, the processes language users go through when understanding and producing discourse in interaction, as well as the beliefs, values and ideologies that are part of that specific group. The author mentions that this approach also looks at how the socio-cognitive phenomena relate to the structures of discourse, and interaction in communicative events in a social structure.

As previously mentioned, discourse studies try to explain the relationships that exist among language use, beliefs, and social interactions. In the following subsections more detailed descriptions will be provided regarding the relation that exists between discourse and the dimensions of cognition and society. Additionally, a subsection that explains discourse and power will be included.

2.1.1 Discourse and cognition.

Discourse is related to cognition because as people comprehend a message whether spoken or written, the brain constructs different forms of cognitive representations that refer to codes, features, and meanings, to interpret the message that was received (Van Dijk, 1997b). Van Dijk mentions that the process the brain goes through to decipher messages is very complex, first because the meanings people formulate are closely related to personal experiences and knowledge which are different for each person; and secondly because the messages are regularly incomplete, unclear, redundant, and imprecise. The author comments that despite the noticeable faults in the communication system, message receivers tend to construct meaning with extraordinary accuracy.

Van Dijk (1997b) comments that some of the mental processes that are used to build cognitive representations are: “accessing words in the mental lexicon, activating concepts in long-term memory, searching for information, comparing structures that are available in working memory, and building structures by adding, deleting, rearranging, or connecting

information” (p.293). Van Dijk states that these cognitive representations might be executed mechanically, unconsciously, and could be measured in milliseconds. However, there are other processes that take a few seconds to be completed since they need to be processed consciously and more slowly. Van Dijk (1988) affirms that discourse can not be analyzed in detail without taking into account a cognitive framework. Leaving behind cognition would result, as he mentions, in a behaviorist excess.

Van Dijk (1989) explains the process that occurs when discourse is understood and produced. He mentions that to understand discourse, general information and data related to the context are analyzed and interpreted; then, the information obtained is stored in memory and then it is related to new or already existing models of situations. With all this elements, the receptor will be able to decipher the meaning of the message. Van Dijk mentions that for discourse production, fragments of situation models, as well as relevant information of communicative situations are formulated. Having this data is a fundamental aspect to construct and produce an effective message.

Furthermore, Van Dijk (1989) comments that to produce or understand discourse, socially shared knowledge and beliefs are essential to make the communication process successful and efficient. He also mentions that the meanings assigned to discourse depend on what is possible or what is supposed to be true in a particular culture. Additionally, Van Dijk (1997b) states that cognitive processes have social dimensions that can be acquired, employed, or changed through verbal or other forms of interaction. In the next subsection a more detailed description of the relation discourse-society will be provided.

2.1.2 Discourse and society.

Van Dijk (1997b) explains that language plays a very important role in society, since people are not only using language to achieve communication processes (speak, write, read or talk), but it also serves as a tool that makes them members of a society, cultural group,

community, etc. in order to demonstrate and form their identities. Discourse is a significant element that shows and constructs the characteristics of the sociocultural context and its analysis may show how language is used within a particular group, organization, culture or society (Van Dijk, 1997b). The author states that the purpose of analyzing discourse, besides understanding it as a form, meaning, and mental process, is to comprehend the intricate arrangements and categorizations of interaction in a specific context, society and culture.

Additionally, discourse plays a very important role in society since it is the medium used to convey ideologies in a persuasive manner (Van Dijk, 1997b). The ideologies within a group refer to who they are, who is part of their group, what do they do and why, what is good and bad for their members, and what is their social position; these concepts serve as markers of the communal interests and the individual practices, as well as the knowledge shared by the community (Van Dijk, 1997b). The author explains that discourse, ideologies and social groups represent a cycle, where discourse is first comprehended, then shared, then it will become abstract and finally, generalized.

Van Dijk (1989) comments that social groups have specific ways to interpret, understand, and categorize events. He also mentions that each culture shares common senses, procedures, strategies, structures and processes. The author states that all these elements are not only part of a social nature, but of social cognition. Moreover, power is an essential part of social cognition which allows the members of a society to use and form their representations of social groups, classes, institutions and the relationships between the dominant and the less powerful (Van Dijk, 1989). In the following subsection power and discourse will be discussed.

2.1.3 Discourse and power.

The power related to discourse refers particularly to social power, which is understood as the relation between groups. Power is a crucial element that needs to be taken into account when referring to discourse since dominant groups will certainly have more control

over the weaker ones (Van Dijk, 1997b). The author states that a powerful group needs, apart from discourse, specific sources that can be summed up into socio-economic, legal or political power, to dominate other groups. According to Van Dijk, there are several ways in which a dominant group may control other groups, these forms of power could be: forced, persuasive, alleged hegemony, controlling the context, the access people have to certain discourse, and the characteristics of the structures used.

Discourse is considered to be a tool that has the power to influence people without them being completely aware of its potential consequences. Therefore, the abuse of power represents an ethical problem because it may violate the human or social rights of a person or a group (Van Dijk, 1997b). The author mentions that there is an important responsibility related to discourse and those who control it, and that norms and values should be considered due to the inconspicuous control it exerts on the audiences. The analysis of certain types of discourse, for instance political discourses or propaganda, have revealed that discourse is not always used in a responsible way and have also questioned the norms that supposedly regulate or control it to protect the wellbeing of social groups. In the following subsection the analysis of discourse will be discussed.

2.1.4 Discourse analysis.

Van Dijk (1997a) explains that language has a communicative function; speakers use language to express what they think, feel, or want, and at the same time, what is being said will result in an interaction between the participants. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, the central dimensions of discourse analysis when using the socio-cognitive approach focus on language use, cognition, and social interactions. Van Dijk states that this is the reason why different disciplines can be related to the study of discourse. The author exemplifies this by pointing out that while linguistics can analyze how language is used in a particular discourse, psychology could look at discourse to understand how people communicate with others, and

social sciences to identify how people interact in particular circumstances. The author states that usually discourse analysis results in the construction of theories that clarify the existing relations between language use, thoughts or beliefs, and social relations.

Furthermore, Van Dijk (1997a) mentions that it is generally thought that discourse analysis can only be done with spoken language since there is an evident interaction between the speakers; nevertheless, written materials can also be analyzed because readers assimilate what they are reading in spite of what may seem a passive interaction between the reader and the text. What is more, he points out that the non-verbal aspects that occur in the communication process, such as laughs, gestures, and even silence, must also be considered for this type of analysis since they represent an essential part of the interaction.

As Van Dijk (1997a) comments, discourse analysis comprises a wide field of studies and analysts may focus on certain aspects, levels, dimensions of the materials, or on a general division of discourse. According to this author, the discourse analysis can be centered upon the following features:

- a) Discourse as a verbal structure, the analysis can be made on the non-verbal communication aspects, such as order and form, meaning, style, rhetoric, or schematic structures.
- b) The use of discourse and interaction in a society, the study may focus on speech acts, interaction, or the actual use of language.
- c) Cognition, where the objective is to define how people use and understand discourse, or the construction and use of models to produce discourse.
- d) In discourse and society, analysts can look at gender, ethnicity, or culture.

As mentioned in Chapter one, if the exposure to certain media contents is thought to have an influence on the violent behaviors among school children, analyzing the content that is being presented through these mediums might result in the explanation of certain attitudes,

behaviors, and even thoughts of the particular group due to the power media exerts over the masses. In this particular case, the analysis of media that is intended for children may help explain why problems such as bullying have risen in modern society. An analysis of media discourse might reveal the indirect teachings children are being exposed to by powerful mediums.

During the 1970s and the 1980s communication studies paid special attention to discourse and an interest on analyzing it emerged due to its utility (Van Dijk, 1997a). The author mentions that mass media messages became an important focal point due to the power media has over society. In the following section a detailed description of mass media and its role in society will be provided.

2.2 Mass media

Modern society is used to being exposed to a wide variety of messages from different sources that go from the internet, television, newspapers, advertisements or radio. According to Vasile (2010), all these resources are part of mass media, which is described as the name given to the circulation of information, entertainment, and ideas through the use of technological resources that include the examples given above. This author states that mass media are important modelling and influencing instruments for the audience's opinions about diverse topics. Torres and Mercado (2007) add that in the information age, mass media companies have become the most important instruments that reproduce and maintain culture and values in a society; they have three particular functions which relate to education, shaping of relations and promoting particular points of view (Vasile, 2010). Therefore, from what this author has mentioned, it can be said that the discourse used by media does have an impact on the audiences.

According to Gutierrez (2008) television has undoubtedly been the most popular mass medium of the 20th century. The main reasons for this declaration might be diverse, but some

include that using television is more comfortable since it does not necessarily require of a direct interaction with the spectator, it just needs to be turned on to get access to what is being presented (Clifford, Gunter and McAller, 1995). Also, the fact that it is available to diverse individuals with different characteristics such as age (Salinas, 1999, as cited in Canales 2003), gender, socioeconomic status, education levels, etc (Orozco, 1996).

In the next paragraphs, a brief description of the development of television in general will be presented, as well as the specific case of Mexico.

2.2.1 Television.

The word television has its origins in the Greek root *tele* which means far and the Latin root *video* which means watch (Canales, 2003). Television consists of presenting a series of static and separate images at a speed the human eye perceives as continuous movement (John, 1980, as cited in Canales 2003). Canales mentions that the creation of this medium was the result of several years of experimentation and that it was until November 1936 that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) inaugurated the first transmission of the British television service. During the first years of television broadcasting, the audience was limited because of the few sets that were produced and distributed (Aguaded, 1999, as cited in Canales 2003).

Throughout the years television expanded to different countries and in the 1960's some of the emissions had reached almost one hundred countries around the world (Canales, 2003). This author comments that it was during these years that the audience started to increase and countries such as Canada, Holland, England and the United States were among the ones with more spectators. Television has evolved and not only on the number of viewers; Burton (2000) explains that the changes television has had refer to technical changes, airtime transmissions, and the models of service, to mention some. According to Balle (1988, as cited in Canales 2003) some of the major changes television experienced were the extension of the transmission schedules, which in the 1950s was only during the evening and gradually

augmented until the broadcasting lasted 24 hours in the late 1980s (Burton, 2000), and the fact that people's likes influenced programming.

In the specific case of Mexico, the first transmission was done in 1946. The program was an artistic show that lasted two hours each Saturday and was only shown in Mexico City (Canales, 2003). In 1950 different channels started broadcasting in Mexico, the number of receptors increased and the signals started to get to other regions of the country. As time passed by, the number of corporations and channels increased. In 1950 the Consejo del Telesistema Mexicano S.A. was created, bringing together the channel 4, channel 2 and channel 5 to establish a solid company that could have better possibilities for spreading and providing a good service (Beltrán, 1989, as cited in Canales 2003). Later, TV channels that had different objectives such as education were developed. For example, channel 11, which is part of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, or the Telesecundarias, that used TV as a source for teaching in rural areas (Canales, 2003).

As previously commented by Gutierrez (2008), nowadays television is one of the most popular mass media. Condry (1989) mentioned that in that period the spectators who spend more time watching television were adults, about 4 hours per day, and teenagers, who were the ones who watched the least amount, did it for almost 24 hours in a week. The Nielsen Company reported that in the last three months of 2008, the average American was watching more than 151 hours per month; whilst the previous year, it had been reported a total of 145 hours per month (Gandossy, 2009).

In addition, Orozco (1996) mentions that contemporary society has incorporated television as an important part of their lives, activities, and homes and that the number of spectators has had a significant growth throughout the years in the entire world. In 1950 The Nielsen Company (1986, as cited in Condry 1989) calculated that approximately 4.6 million homes in the United States had a television, five years later the number increased to 32 million,

and in 1960 45.2 million homes had one. The company estimated that in 1985 99% of the American population owned a television set.

The popularity this medium has gained, the importance people have given to watching it, as well as the place it has taken in their lives, has led researchers to ask why audiences watch television, with what purposes and also, what might be the possible effects of this exposure. Before providing information regarding these topics, it is important to first understand what characteristics television has. Later, the reasons why television is watched will be provided, as well as the effects it may have on the spectators.

2.2.1.1 Characteristics of television.

Canales (2003) states that some of the reasons that make the small screen more attractive than radio, newspapers, or other media is the fact that it uses visual and auditory stimulations, which make it a very efficient and striking communicator. Condry (1989) mentions that these particular characteristics of television make the viewing a more attractive offer and the proof is that television has gained the attention of people of diverse ages, gender, religion, social class, and cultural background.

As previously mentioned, authors as Clifford et al. (1995) consider that watching television does not demand a direct interaction of the viewer; nonetheless, Orozco (1996) argues that television involves a complex process where an interaction between the spectator and what is presented on television occurs. This author emphasizes that a distinguishing characteristic of this medium is that there are multiple dimensions which refer to first, a symbolic exchange that has to do with the content presented by television and the negotiation of it with the audience which result in the construction of meanings. Secondly, the perceptive exchange that refers to the schemas, skills, and cognitive patterns that are involved in the content presented, as well as in the minds of the viewers. All these elements determine the perception of what is presented on television, as well as the obtained meaning. Thirdly, the

affective exchange that entails the emotions television causes on the audience with the characters or situations presented; and the last dimension refers to the activities, strategies, habits, and particularly, the uses that the spectators carry out while interacting with television. To exemplify this point, Orozco mentions that the viewer might only listen to the TV news, instead of watching and listening.

Orozco (1996) comments that the four dimensions are multiple exchanges that could be simultaneous and that are not always conscious and there are some that are more common with a specific audience. For example, soap operas, where the main point is to play with the viewers' emotions. Besides the feelings that watching a show may provoke in the viewers, or the visual and auditory effects it uses to attract the audience, there are other reasons that explain why television is watched that will be addressed in the following section.

2.2.1.2 Why is television watched?

Cabero (1989, as cited in Canales 2003) mentions that the reasons why people choose to watch television could well be from entertainment to relaxation. Additionally, Burton (2000) states that society uses television to fulfil the social needs people have as individuals or members of a social group. Cabero (1989, as cited in Canales 2003) comments that television is used as a source that satisfies the necessities of information, knowledge or entertainment, that allows people to become members of a specific community.

Burton (2000) explains that people use television to satisfy their desire to be informed. For example, by watching the news programs; to find out about local or foreign geographical and social environments. Also, they look to television to help fulfil their need to reinforce their identity since television is a source that helps individuals to check their sense of self with other characters or roles presented on TV shows. What is more, television is also used to interact socially by understanding the relationships of different characters in a soap opera for example. The diverse uses television has implies that what is shown on television, including the

discourse that is presented, does play an important role in the lives of individuals since they can learn or imitate the behaviors or actions of characters and transfer what they saw to their lives. Burton mentions that another use of television is for entertainment, to satisfy the need for diversion.

Additionally, Orozco (1996) points out that television is a medium that has a significant power of representation since it has electronic possibilities to appropriate and transmit its contents. He explains that these characteristics allow a reproduction of reality with precision and that it also stimulates specific reactions in the audience. Furthermore, Hall (1982, as cited in Orozco 1996) explains that even if the language used on television seems to be natural, it is the result of certain criteria and of a determined orientation which belong to television companies. In other words, the discourse used on television is a representation of what the television industry wants to project. Therefore, television has not only the power to represent social events, but also to make what they present look real (Hall, 1982 as cited in Orozco 1996). The power television has to present certain circumstances as real, as well as its possible credibility, are some of the features that have lead researchers to study the possible effects television could have on its viewers. This particular aspect will be presented in the following section. Afterwards, the controversial case of children and television will be discussed.

2.2.1.3 Effects of television.

Television has been considered a dangerous medium for the audiences that are exposed to it, not only because it has become part of everyday modern life in many parts of the world, but also because it is welcomed in most domiciles presenting “both a cultural phenomenon in itself, and a medium through which a range of cultural activities reach us...” (Burton, 2010, p. 1). According to Salinas (1999, as cited in Canales 2003), television can create different motivations for society, that can be interpreted as an enormous advantage for those who sell products or who try to implement political or social ideas, contributing largely to the

consumer society we live in today. As Salinas argued, the discourse used by the television industry may be used to manipulate the audiences, resulting in a benefit for corporations or politicians for instance.

According to Burton, the word *audience* entails passiveness or receptiveness, which could be seen as problematic from this perspective since the viewer is thought to accept everything that is being presented by television. Cabero (1989, as cited in Canales 2003) points out that as individuals watch the content presented by television, they will integrate what is being shown with their background knowledge which includes cultural aspects, attitudes, conducts, values, behaviours, etc. Buckingham (1994) argues that there are other variables that affect the possible effects of television, which are family and social class. Regardless of all the possible variables among the audiences, the discourse used in television has been considered as a homogeniser that in the past was an awakening tool and that in present has become more important in manipulating and controlling people's beliefs.

Nonetheless, there are diverse authors that do not consider the viewers as passive receptors. Burton (2000) exemplifies this idea by mentioning that it has been proven that people who watch television carry out other activities while it is switched on; moreover, he says that as viewers are in contact with this medium, there is a mental process that includes decoding television, reading the texts, and making sense of the codes presented. Moreover, Canales mentions that the effects of television will be different in each individual since the capacities for reflection and analysis will not be the same for everyone, they depend on psychological characteristics and social contexts. Furthermore, Orozco (1996) states that television, as a social institution, does not stand by itself; there are other institutions such as family, school, church, social movements, and political parties, that together construct the meanings given to the television content by its viewers. This information implies that not only

the discourse used by media constructs the views or beliefs of people, but also the discourse that is used in other social institutions, as the ones mentioned above.

Related to the controversy of whether viewers accept everything that is being transmitted on television or not, Buckingham (1994) states that the focus should not be put in “what the media do to people”, but on “what people do with the media” (p.15), since they are the ones who decide why they are watching television, whether it is to be informed, to escape, to spend time, to form their personal identity or to use it as a model to solve their problems and life. Whether these statements provide a justification of why media can work without any serious supervision, these declarations are not always acceptable, especially when the audience referred to are children.

In the following paragraphs, topics related to television and the young audiences will be approached. Themes such as the effects of television on children, violence in children’s TV shows, will be presented.

2.2.2 Children, television and its effects.

Some authors, as Erausquin, Matilla and Vazquez (1988) believe that children are like sponges that absorb everything that is presented on the small screen since they consider watching television as a passive activity. The problem they encounter with the young viewers is that they are not mature enough to distinguish what is reality and what is not. Nonetheless, Palmer (1994, as cited in Burton 2000) argues that like adults, children are active viewers as found in the research where there is a dynamic interaction between the child and what is seen; moreover the author states that television is “not a machine, but a medium of human communication” (p.232). Palmer agrees with the point Buckingham (1994) made about observing what the audience do with what they watch on TV, even if the viewers are children.

Regarding children and television, Dumitru (2010) points out two positions that exist. The first considers the young audience as susceptible, passive, and innocent that need to be protected from the dominant power of media since they are strongly influenced by it; on the other hand, the second sees children as empowered viewers. Dumitru claims that usually, the second standpoint is taken into account by commercial and marketing circles. However, no matter what perspective is taken when discussing the role children play when watching television because there are other features that need to be taken into account to examine this topic, for example the way children are being educated by their family and school.

Additionally, in relation to the concern related to the content presented to the youngsters and the type of receptors children are, the accessibility they have to this medium is considered to be an alarming aspect, not only because they have just to press one button to get access to television, but also because it can be watched at any time. What is more, besides the preoccupations about the receptiveness children have to television content and the access they have to this medium, Erausquin et al. (1988) mention that television might create the habit or preference in children of learning from a second source and not from individual experiences.

In reference to this statement García (2000) exemplifies it by pointing out that media have become significant sources for socialization, which is a process through which people, particularly the youngest, learn how to become functional members of a society, as to what they can expect from the world and the world from them (Roberts, 1973, as cited in García 2000). The socialization process in the early years during childhood starts in the family with the parents, brothers or sisters, and other children. Later, other places such as school or church for some, become part of the information sources for socialization. As the author mentioned, media is considered to have an important role in this process, particularly

television because it is from this medium that children acquire certain beliefs, values, and habits.

Also, García (2000) specifies that there are three different ways in which the small screen interferes in the socialization process. 1) it shows conducts that can be imitated; 2) it presents images that can incite to specific actions, and 3) it is the medium through which children can familiarize themselves with the values of a consumer and inactive society at a very early age, which according to Hapkiewicz (1979) starts between the ages of 1 to 1.6. To understand why television has become an important agent in the socialization process, it is necessary to know what the reasons for children to watch television are.

2.2.2.1 Why do children watch television?

In 1990, Gunter and McAleer (as cited in García 2000) carried out a study to find out the reasons why children watched TV. Some of the reasons they identified were: 1) to spend time; 2) to learn; 3) to feel accompanied and 4) to escape. In the following paragraphs an explanation of children's motivation to watch the small screen will be provided.

Children who said they watched television to spend time had reasons related to the type of programs they preferred. Gunter and McAleer (1990, as cited in García 2000) mentioned that children look for shows that entertain them; particularly, they look for emissions that are "exciting, fun and good" (p.65). Interestingly, the content found in the emissions that children watch are not always appropriate for their age or intended to this particular audience. Maccoby (1951, as cited in Dumitru, 2010) found out in a study that children's predilections were not always shows intended for this particular audience. The reasons why children do this, according to Maccoby, are that adult programs familiarize children with the adult world.

Regarding the learning, Gunter et al. (1990, as cited in García 2000) explain that one of the functions of television is to inform, although this does not mean that children decide to watch TV with this purpose. However, the authors mention that children consider television as a source for learning not only about what happens in their surroundings, but also about themselves. In a study with British children, Greenberg (as cited in García 2000) found that children used television as the first source to learn about themselves and as a second source to learn about other things. The knowledge they claim to obtain from this medium was: learn what is happening in the world, learn about things that were explained at school, observe how to react in specific circumstances, learn what could happen to them, and to see how other people solve the problems they also have (Greenber, as cited in García 2000).

Gunter et al. (as cited in García 2000) explained that most of the times children watch television alone. Usually when children feel lonely, they turn on the TV to be distracted with fantasies and to share with the characters different adventures that they would not be able to share with their friends (García, 2000). This has led some authors to describe the relation between children and TV as a “parasocial relationship” or “parasocial interaction”. This term means that children are acquainted with the characters that appear frequently on the screen and they develop certain closeness with them; then, children feel they know the character and that they could predict their actions.

Furthermore, television as a form of escape is a motivation for both children and adults. However, for children, television can help them go to a world of fantasies where they can forget the problems they face, or just the world where they live (García, 2000). According to this author, this particular reason might be often found in children who live in a difficult family environment or who have problems at school.

As it was already mentioned, television plays a crucial role in children’s daily activities and in their social adaptation process (García, 2000). Dorr (1980, as cited in García 2000)

points out that there is research that has proved that television represents an experience of social interaction for preschool children since they talk to the characters that appear on the screen. According to Dorr (1989, as cited in García 2000), this interaction with television might interfere with children getting involved in other social activities that are crucial for the learning of how to relate with other children. In 1982, Bybee, Robinson and Turrow (as cited in García 2000) carried out a study where they questioned 500 professors in the mass communication area about the effects of television on children. According to the professors, the principal effects are that the youngsters get more knowledge about different topics, their necessity for immediate gratification increases, social values and the learning of stereotypes are reinforced, and that there is a decrease on their reading capacities; moreover, they commented that children become more aggressive and curious and that their attention and creativity decreases.

Besides the socialization function television performs, the social circumstances also determine in some way the place it occupies in the modern household. Dumitru (2010) comments that the situation families live nowadays have had a notorious change; she mentions that parents these days have better educational levels and salaries, they have fewer children and at a later age, and that divorced and single-parent families are more usual. According to the author, these situations make some parents feel guilty and they tend to be more complaisant with what their children want, and that usually parents are tolerant with the content their children are exposed to by media.

Furthermore, television has primarily been considered as a vital source of guaranteed distraction at any time and also as a helpful tool for parents because it entertains and calms children down (Erasquin et al., 1988). According to García, television has proved the efficacy it has as today's babysitter because it can keep children quiet for long periods of time. The problem is that most parents are not aware of the effects media can have on their children, particularly violent media (Brodeur, 2007). This author states that if parents only knew how

harmful television can be, they would never leave their children with such a threatening caretaker. One of the most popular topics related to children and the danger television might display is the violence that is presented in some programs. Before discussing the specific case of children and television violence, it is essential to first describe the role of violence in television.

2.2.3 Violence in television.

The growth and development television has had over the years has attracted the attention of sociologists, psychologists and scientists from other disciplines as well, due to the effects it is thought to have on the audiences, specially the young ones (García, 2000). In 1961 a study carried out by Schram, Lyle and Parker (as cited in García 2000) showed in its results that there was a direct correlation between watching violent television and the aggressiveness of the spectators. In 1969 the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee about Television and Social Behavior was constituted in the United States (García, 2000). The basic conclusions provided by this Committee included: 1) the content in television is highly saturated with violence; 2) children, as well as adults, spend more time watching television, specifically shows with violent content; and 3) there is evidence that watching programs with violence increases the probabilities that the spectators will behave in a more aggressive manner.

Gerbner (2007) agrees with the allegation that crime and violence have a remarkable and persistent role in television, commenting that it is an essential part of the media industry, a global marketing institution. The author explains the particular case of American television companies who are particularly interested in selling their programs to other countries to expand their business internationally. If these companies want to increase their sales they need to include striking components that, apart from attracting the spectator, do not need to be translated and that can suit any culture. Furthermore, he mentions that violence is the

perfect element because it is “speak action” in any language, and “action” is demanded because “it travels well around the world”, as stated the producer of *Die Hard 2* (p.111, as cited in Brodeur 2007).

In addition to these points, Jacques Brodeur (2007) comments that violence is used in media to draw viewers’ attention, especially the youngest. The author explains that this type of content works well because human beings are curious. Furthermore, Gerbner (2007) explains that violent shows are not always very popular among the audience, but they are for the television companies that buy them since they have lower costs than quality productions. Therefore, due to the economical benefit violent shows represent for the television industry, the spectators are constantly exposed to this type of contents.

Moreover, Gerbner (2007) explains that the repercussions go beyond just promoting aggressive behaviors. The author argues that the television industry reduces the solutions that could be given to conflicts and it also oppresses independent television productions, which results in fewer alternatives, views, and approaches for the spectators. Interestingly, Gerbner reports that violence scenes occur approximately three to five times each hour in prime-time fiction, and surprisingly, between twenty and twenty five times each hour in cartoons. In the following sections a description of the violent content that is presented on the shows that are intended for children will be approached, followed by the legal aspects that protect the television audiences, specifically in Mexico.

2.2.3.1 Violence in children’s television programs.

According to Gerbner (2007), the issue of children and television, stands on the fact that children are being born in a society where values, beliefs, anecdotes about people and life are no longer transmitted or taught by institutions such as family, school, or church, but by corporations whose main objective is to make money. The author states that “Television, the

mainstream of the new cultural environment, has brought about a radical change in the way children grow up, learn, and live in our society” (p.107).

Furthermore, Brodeur (2007) comments that the governments have not established any regulation to protect children from the violence presented in entertainment; leaving the young generations exposed to what media decide will be displayed as values, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and ways to relate with others. Brodeur remarks that using violence as children entertainment for children under 13 years old represents a form of violation because it is between the age of 7 and 13 that children start making differences of what is real and what is fiction.

In addition, Brodeur (2007) argues that the violence presented on television affects children in different ways and it has nourished the augmentation of aggressions, injuries, and pain of some children around the world. This author asserts that violence was not invented by media; however, media has been using it to amuse the young spectators. Moreover, Potter and Warren (1998) state that humor has been used by media to cover and trivialize violent acts, resulting in imitable behaviors for the viewers.

2.2.3.2 Camouflaging violence with humor.

Potter and Warren (1998) say that authors such as Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli (1980) have repeatedly found that the rate of violence in cartoons is significantly higher than in other types of shows, which might indicate that children are exposed constantly to violent behaviors when watching programs that are supposed to be adequate for them. Also, violence is generally more common in comedies (Barcus, 1978; Cumberbatch, Lee, Hardy, & Jones 1978; Gerbner et al., 1980; Lichter & Lichter, 1983; Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1993; Williams, Zabrack, & Joy, 1982; as cited in Potter and Warren 1998). Potter and Warren were interested in understanding why was the audience not concerned about aggressive

representations in cartoons and comedies if violence had been detected as being notably higher than in other types of shows.

In their results, Potter and Warren (1998) showed that violence in comedies was not considerably less than in non-comedies. Their total sample contained only 22% of comedies, but 31.2% of all the violence found was in this type of shows; while the violence rate in other shows was of 31.4 acts per hour, in comedies the rate was of 50.4 acts per hour. Potter and Warren state that when analyzing violent content on television, it is important to take into account four contextual factors which are: consequences, reward or punishment, hero status, and remorse. These factors will be described in the following paragraphs.

Potter and Warren (1998) explain that depending on the context of the program, the audience will have a specific perception. For example, if violent behaviors are followed by serious consequences, the audience might be more inclined to disapproving what they just saw; but on the other hand, if there are no consequences at all, or minor, the viewers might consider the act as insignificant. Also, the authors comment that when violence is rewarded, or not penalized, it seems to indicate that the action was valid. In addition, they mention that when an aggressor shows remorse, the spectators will be lead to recognizing that action was severe, than if the perpetrator did not show any regret; and finally, Gunter (1985, as cited in Potter and Warren 1998) comments that if a violent act is committed by a character that has the role of a hero or villain, the story will persuade the perception the audience has about the aggression. Therefore, the discourse that is presented in television programs leads the attitudes, behaviors, or opinions the spectators will have. What is more, Potter and Warren state that humor can be used to hide other elements in a program,

if the humor is interrupted for a serious interlude where a violent act occurs, this interleaving of violence between humorous acts would likely capture the viewer's attention... If, however, the violence does not stand alone, but is instead linked with humor then viewers would be less likely to notice the violence. (p.43)

Potter and Warren (1998) carried out research where they included the 4 contextual factors that might be present in a violent act and the humor element. The authors identified that comedies were constantly related humor to violent behaviors. They found that 85.9% of the aggressions in their sample contained humor. Additionally, humor and violence were closely related with not so serious forms of violence; the authors found that humor was linked with 45.2% of hostile remarks and with only 3.3% of physical assaults. Furthermore, Potter and Warren explain that the violence is trivialized because negative consequences are rarely presented; only 12.3% of the violent aggressions were punished in comedies, and 21.8% in other programs. The authors comment that aggressors hardly ever show remorse, and that when heroes are the perpetrators, they are even rewarded.

As a conclusion to their research, Potter and Warren (1998) state that violence is considerably higher in comedies than in other type of programs; also, that the violence presented in these shows corresponds to assaults that might be perceived as minor, and that it is more likely to find verbal aggressions than physical. They conclude that media has been using humor to hide violence and this has resulted in the trivialization of violence, and not only this, but also the fact that the violent behaviors are not punished. "With comedy programs, adding the element of humor, a higher rate of hero perpetrator, and a lower rate of punishment, leads to greater chances of imitation" (p.55).

Likewise, Brodeur (2007) describes the violence media is using to present aggressive behaviors as *happy violence*, described by the author as violence that is "cool, swift, painless, and often spectacular, even thrilling, but usually sanitized. It always leads to a happy ending" (p.107). Happy violence, and the features presented by Potter and Warren (1998) are common characteristics of cartoons, which are programs intended for children.

2.2.3.3 Cartoons and violence.

According to Butler (2011), cartoons were first produced to be presented on the big screen and it was until the 1960s that they became part of the television programming; from that time on, according to Butler, “cartoons have been the main source of two major controversies: commercialization/merchandising and violence”.

Kirsh (2006) mentions that violence is a vital part of cartoons and explains that television networks present shows that contain violence from the very beginning to the end, for example Batman or Samurai X; and that there are others that mix comedic aspects with violent acts, for instance Scooby Doo and Woody Wood-pecker. Moreover, Potter and Warren (1998) comment that the violence presented in cartoons differs considerably from the violence presented in dramas. In cartoons, victims do not always show their suffering, and minor violent aggressions are more common; whereas in dramas, for example, realistic and major acts of violence are shown, and the suffering or pain victims experience is usually emphasized.

The consequences of children being in contact with violence have been associated with bullying practices and crime according to the time exposure to television (Brodeur, 2007). Frederick Zimmerman (as cited in Brodeur 2007), a professor in the University of Washington’s School of Public Health, reported that children who spent an average of 3.5 hours per day in front of television had a risk 25% higher of becoming bullies when they were between 6 and 11 years old. Additionally, Brodeur mentions that the consequences of this violence are already present in children’s environments. He states that science has proved that children will pay the price for this type of exposure and that repercussions will become more severe as long as high doses of physical and verbal violence continue to be presented to children.

Nonetheless, Brodeur (2007) claims that the most upsetting result of the exposure to media violence is desensitization, which he defines as the diminution of empathy. The author explains that when children are constantly exposed to violence, their capacity to help others or report maltreatments will diminish. For the author, desensitization represents a severe

problem for the coming generations as it “reduces – if not destroys– the value of life and the power of solidarity in our societies” (p.675). He comments that bullying is an example of this desensitization problem since it has been related to media violence and is present among the younger generations of society. In the following section, a detailed description of this issue will be provided and the particular case of Mexico will be discussed.

2.3 Bullying

According to the Cambridgeshire County Council (2008) bullying is defined as “a persistent, deliberate attempt to hurt or humiliate someone” (¶ 1). According to Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt (2001) to categorize an aggression as bullying, three elements must be present: 1) an intention to hurt or bother someone, 2) a behavior that occurs frequently, and 3) power discrepancy, the more powerful person or group harasses the weaker one. The authors state that bullying consist on assaults that may be expressed verbally (threatening, teasing, name-calling, taunting), physically (hitting, stealing), or psychologically (rumors, intentional exclusion). Unfortunately, bullying has become a regular practice among many school aged children, especially primary and secondary school children. Nansel et al. (2001) mention that the percentage of students that reported being bullied in an international survey go from 15% in some countries to as high as 70% in others.

Paloma Cobo (Martha Debayle, 2010), psychologist and co-author of the book *Bullying en México: Conductas violentas en niños y adolescentes*, states that the aggressive behaviors have always existed: the strong against the weak. However, the problem she encounters is that the young generations have fewer limitations, if any, since they are crueller and much more violent. Moreover, Cobo mentions that the fact that violent behaviours have always existed does not mean that they should be accepted or seen as normal.

Furthermore, Cobo (as cited in Martha Debayle 2010) explains that bullying can happen in any place where children are grouped together, for example: in a summer camp or in a sports

club. However, she states that school is the most common place for bullying to occur since it is where children spend most of their time.

The bullying issue has resulted in creating a dangerous environment for many students and some have even dropped out of school. Joel Burns (2010), a city councilman for the city of Fort Worth, Texas, tried to direct the attention of other council members to the bullying problem in a touching speech where he mentioned that the situation has become epidemic and that it must stop. In his discourse, Burns said that "... schools must be a safe place to learn and to grow; it is never acceptable for us to be the cause of any child to feel unloved or worthless" (3:28). Nansel et al. (2001) explain that a certain level of harassment and strife between children is acceptable; nevertheless, bullying represents a severe menace to youth. For this reason, it is a topic that is in the spotlight of teachers, parents, and institutions in different parts of the world since it affects the well-being and the good emotional development of young generations.

2.3.1 Consequences of bullying.

According to Banks (1997), bullying represents a problem for the educational sphere because there are children that cannot exercise their right to learn in a secure environment without being afraid of being bothered by other children. Experts from different disciplines have become aware of the crisis bullying is causing in today's society, especially because the experiences children are having very well could affect their psychological development and social adaptation (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009).

Nansel et al. (2001) carried out a study with children that were bullied, others that were bullies, and others that were not involved in these practices at all. The authors report that children who bullied and the ones being bullied were related to a lower psychosocial adjustment. Some of the dilemmas these children experienced were "social isolation, lack of success in school, and problem behaviors" (p.2099). Nansel et al. comment that many

investigations focus specifically on the consequences children experience on the period of time when they are being harassed, and that only few studies have been done on the long-term repercussions bullying may have. Nonetheless, the authors report that the research that has focused on this aspect has shown that bullying has negative effects in adulthood. Olewus (1994, as cited in Lucas et al. 2008) reported in his study that 60% of the students that accepted being bullies when they were between 6th and 9th grade, had been arrested at least one time by the age of 24. Additionally, Nansel et al. comment that bullying can associate aggressors to other types of issues related to alcohol and/or drug use. On the other hand, those who had been bullied presented higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem (Nansel et al.).

The consequences of bullying can be diverse; Rigby (2003, as cited in Gini & Pozzoli, 2009) recapitulated from the possible ones four categories which are: “1) Low psychological well-being, 2) poor social adjustment, 3) psychological distress, and 4) physical unwellness” (p.1059). Gabriela Rodríguez, coordinator of the campaign *Escuela sin violencia* in Mexico City, reports that bullying results in a severe problem that affects children’s physical well being; she exemplifies this with the testimonies from mothers of children who have suffered bullying and call the help centre in great desperation because their children are being affected in such negative ways as suffering from severe depression that they can no longer sleep and others present cases of constant vomiting (Pantoja, 2009).

In another study Gini and Pozzoli (2009) present a meta-analysis of the relationship that has been found between being a bully, being bullied and psychosomatic problems such as: headaches, backaches, abdominal pains, sleeping problems, bad appetite, and bed-wetting. The results presented by these authors reveal that children that were bullied and bullies had a higher risk of presenting psychosomatic problems than those that were not involved in these practices. As these authors state, bullying has become an issue that is encountered in several

countries. Their results showed a relationship between being a bully and being bullied with psychosomatic problems; therefore, it can also be presumed that bullying could represent a major global health issue.

However, the problems related to bullying do not stop here; in addition to the possible physical or psychological consequences, *bullycide*, a term formed by the combination of the words bullying and suicide, has been added to the list. The abuse and mistreatment between children can have as a consequence self-esteem and psychological problems that can drive adolescents to commit suicide. As it was already mentioned, bullying is a practice that is occurring in different countries and the dreadful consequences have attracted the attention of diverse members of society, such as teachers, school authorities, psychologists, and parents. In different forms they are looking for possible ways to deal with the situation.

Neil Marr, an international journalist and Tim Field, and anti-bullying activist, were concerned about the events occurring in the United Kingdom schools, where at least 16 children killed themselves each year as a consequence of bullying (Field, n.d). They believed that authorities such as the Department of Education and Skills were not completely aware of the implications these aggressive behaviours were having; for this reason, they decided to publish the book *Bullycide: death at playtime* where several *bullycide* stories were included, as well as recommendations that could help confront the problem. The authors report that each year in the United Kingdom “19,000 children attempt suicide, one every half hour, and that suicide is now the number one cause of death for 18-24-year-old males” (Field, n.d, ¶ 3).

The aggressive behaviours children display against their peers have become a central topic for educational and social matters. As described previously, the number of children affected by bullying may have considerable variations in each country. Nonetheless, the dramatic consequences and numbers found in certain nations have been useful to create a degree of awareness around the world. In addition to the concern for the increase of violent behaviours

among school children, Brodeur (2007) comments that school authorities, particularly in the United States, have recognised that violence is not only more common, but that it has reached groups of younger children.

According to Brodeur (2007), in the United States, in Philadelphia, between 2002 and 2003, 22 kindergartners were suspended; in Minneapolis, more than 500 kindergartners were suspended for fighting, rude behaviours and for not being co-operative; in Minnesota, almost 4,000 kindergartners, first and second graders were suspended for their rebellious behaviours and fighting. Moreover, Brodeur comments the case of Québec, where between 1985 and 2000, the number of elementary students with behaviour dilemmas had an increase of 300%. Furthermore, the author mentions that in Canada youth violent crimes is augmenting faster than for adults; in Québec, he mentions, the violent crime rate of adolescents is two times higher than the adults' rate.

Mexico is a country where bullying is also present in schools. Education authorities are concerned about it and different measures are being implemented to control the problem, and to help the children and families that are being affected (Royacelli, 2011).

2.3.2 Bullying in Mexico.

According to Gabriela Rodríguez, coordinator of the campaign *Escuela sin violencia* in Mexico City, approximately 80 cases of bullying in schools are dealt with daily in the Secretariat of Education in Mexico City (Secretaría de Educación del Gobierno del Distrito Federal) (Pantoja, 2009). Rodríguez said that at the help centre they receive each day in average 300 calls and internet reports from the affected children, teachers, and parents. These numbers give a general idea of the dimension of the terrible situation some children are living at schools.

Moreover, Raúl Plascencia Villanueva, president of the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico (CNDH, 2010) mentioned at the inauguration of the *Foro para una Educación sin bullying* that 40% of the population in elementary and secondary schools suffer from physical or emotional violence, in public and private institutions. In Mexico's primary schools, 41% of the mistreatments are verbal, 23% physical, 13% physiological, 11% are robberies and 8% sexual; 39% of the bullied children suffer this acts in their classroom and 33% in recess (Martha Debayle, 2010). Plascencia said that this phenomenon has developed during the last decades and that it affects seriously the Mexican childhood. Marina Gómez del Campo, member of the Mexican Parliament, affirmed that between March and June 2010, 13,633 bullying complaints were reported in Mexico City alone (Brito, 2010).

Regarding the dramatic dilemma of bullyicide, in 2009 in Mexico City a total of 190 students took their lives since they could no longer bare the harassments of their classmates (Brito, 2010). The concern has increased and several institutions are trying to find different options to diminish these situations since one out of six youngsters that suffer from bullying end up committing suicide (Arista, 2011).

The reasons behind this problem could well be diverse in nature according to Gabriela Rodríguez (Pantoja, 2009). She comments that the Mexican society is going through situations that are becoming more violent, and that children are the one who express aggressive behaviours in a direct way; whereas, adults show it in more subtle manners. In addition, Xóchitl Gallegos, researcher and psychologist at the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, mentions that among other causes of this global dilemma, an important factor is the lack of values within the family (Tristan, 2010). She also explains that children who behave violently with their peers are usually victims of aggressive practices at their homes. Nonetheless, among other elements, an important factor that has been considered to be a significant influence on these unacceptable behaviours is what children are exposed to by media.

2.3.3 Children's surroundings are to blame.

The environment where children develop has been, at some point, held responsible of the bullying problematic. Paloma Cobo (Martha Debayle, 2010) states that the surroundings of children affect their behaviors. She explains that the children of these generations live in a more aggressive society, where they are constantly in contact with violence, and exemplifies this with the internet and what this source makes available. The psychologist explains that youth violent conducts are a reproduction of what they see around them; the only difference is that they replicate it in smaller groups, with their friends or at schools. Supporting this point, the Secretary of Education in Mexico City, Mario Delgado Carrillo, states that in fact modern society is living in a more violent atmosphere, and that it can be found in the news, the newspapers, everywhere; however, he declares that societies must not get used to living with violence, to seeing it as something normal (Martha Debayle, 2010).

According to what was mentioned by Cobo and Delgado (Martha Debayle, 2010), the type of settings children are exposed to will determine the attitudes and behaviours learned. The examples provided by the Secretary of Education in Mexico City and the psychologist Cobo refer particularly to media; which are considered important distributors of information (Vasile, 2010). Vasile states that mass media can have three functions: educating, forming public relations, and promoting a particular policy or point of view. If media are having certain influence on the aggressive and counterproductive attitudes children are having with their peers, close attention should be given to what is being presented by those media.

Mario Delgado Carrillo is of the opinion that children need to be taught to coexist peacefully, without violence (Martha Debayle, 2010). Additionally, the president of the CNDH

said that the strategy to eradicate bullying is education and that efforts need to be made by teachers, parents and public institutions (Brito, 2010). Paying close attention and carrying out an analysis of what is being shown and said in the media children are in contact with might become a helpful tool since a clearer picture of the teachings children are receiving from these sources will be given. Therefore, the descriptions provided from the media analysis may help to provide some of the necessary solutions that can be considered to confront the dilemma of bullying.

As mentioned above, the content media presents to youth has created concern among certain parents, educators and other organizations. Brodeur (2007) comments that the norms that control media have been questioned, and explains that when citizens get involved with this topic and demand firm regulations to control media practices, the television industry interprets this as an attempt to obstruct their freedom of expression. By presenting this, the author leaves clear that for television companies, the law of commerce is the only regulation the television industries consider, putting aside the wellbeing, security, and happiness of children, who are the most vulnerable members of society. Brodeur says that when the industry is attacked with these charges, they claim that raising children is the job of the parents, not of media.

Since this investigation focuses on the particular case of Mexico, it is important to know what the regulations for the media industry are and to question if the Mexican government or the corresponding institutions are being firm or not with the application of those norms. In the following section the policies that protect the media consumer in Mexico will be presented.

2.4 Television policies in Mexico

The Mexican government's Department of Radio, Television and Film (Dirección General de Radio, Televisión y Cinematografía, RTC) was created in 1977 with the main

purpose of applying the laws and regulations the Secretariat of Governance (Secretaría de Gobernación) has stipulated for the radio, television, and cinema industries (Cortés, 2010). This author mentions that the RTC is in charge of classifying, transmitting, commercialising, distributing, or presenting materials through the media they regulate. Moreover, this institution states that their mission is to watch the compliance of the Federal Law that corresponds to television, radio, and cinema in Mexico. In addition, the institution claims that they also try to contribute to the strengthening of the national integration through the diffusion of messages that reaffirm the historical, democratic, cultural, and social values of the Mexican society.

What is more, the RTC is in charge of authorising the transmission of television shows that were produced in foreign countries, as well as the translations and dubbing of these programs (Cortés, 2010). Also, the institution has the power to carry out the necessary studies, investigations, analysis, and evaluations, to know what the effects of the television shows might be, as well as suggesting the measures that need to be taken for specific circumstances. Additionally, the RTC may ban a television concessionaire for transmitting a program that corrupts language, the use of bad words for example, that presents violence or that shows aspects that go against the moral or the good manners; all these aspects may be translated as bad and perturbing influences for the ideal development of childhood and youth.

In this chapter, relevant information related to the general topic was provided. First, the bullying issue was discussed, its consequences, as well as the specific case of Mexico. Also, a brief description of how discourse is involved in society and cognition was presented. In addition, an overview of how television has become an important part for people's lives was mentioned, and the particular case of children and this medium was mentioned.

The main objective of this study was to take a critical look at the discourse used in cartoons and to analyze it. The rationale behind this investigation is that the highest form of

bullying in Mexico's schools is verbal aggression with a 41% (CNDH, 2010). If television is considered to be an important source of knowledge for some children, and the content presented on it is violent, special attention should be given to the type of programs children are being exposed constantly and for long periods of time since children might be reproducing what they see on television with other children. What is more, special importance should be given to verbal violence because these types of harassments are not always considered as harmful, although they might have similar or worse consequences as physical assaults. Analyzing the language used in programs children watch might provide an idea of the examples children are acquiring from television and may help understand why children are having such aggressive behaviors with their peers. In the following chapter the methodology for this research will be provided.