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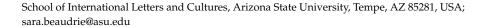
Developing Critical Language Awareness in the Heritage Language Classroom: Implementation and Assessment in Diverse Educational Contexts

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The main goal of heritage language (HL) education is to empower learners to explore and develop their cultural and linguistic heritage. To achieve this goal in classroom settings, HL educators are increasingly being called on to adopt critical approaches to language instruction. This *critical turn* moves forward efforts to implement educational equity and justice for minority students enrolled in HL courses (Beaudrie and Loza 2022).

Among the critical pedagogies available, critical language awareness (CLA) has gained growing attention in the field of HL education (Martínez 2003; Leeman 2005, 2012, 2018; Loza and Beaudrie 2022). CLA is a theoretical and pedagogical approach that strives to dismantle the power relations attached to languages and language use along with the arbitrary hierarchies that serve those in power. CLA aims to develop students' "operational and descriptive knowledge of the linguistic practices of their world, but also a critical awareness of how these practices are shaped by, and shape, social relationships of power" (Clark et al. 1990, p. 249). In traditional approaches to HL education, HL users, as minority speakers, are often chastised for their allegedly "non-standard" ways of speaking. At play are widespread language ideologies of monolingualism and the supremacy of monolingual, educated varieties of languages (deemed standard). These ideologies, typically reinforced in educational settings, devalue multilingual and bilingual practices as well as local varieties of the HL, often undermining students' ethnolinguistic identity. CLA challenges these power hierarchies in order to unveil the intrinsic legitimacy of all language varieties, thereby contesting discriminatory practices against minoritized populations while embracing social justice and educational equity. Current pedagogy suggests including CLA instruction in every HL classroom to help students to develop awareness of language and power, to value and appreciate all linguistic varieties, and to defend their own uses of a given HL in their communities. As Beaudrie and Wilson (2022) argue, HL maintenance is not feasible unless HL students become critically aware of the hegemonic ideologies that shape their societal language experiences and practices and are able to contest them in their multilingual/bilingual language practices. The traditional approaches to HL instruction that center on standardized varieties without validating all varieties produce undesired consequences, contributing to HL loss rather than maintenance. In contrast, a CLA awareness framework places students' varieties at the center of HL instruction to support a true focus on maintaining and developing students' linguistic repertoires in their HL and increasing their confidence so they can use their language meaningfully within their speech communities.

Recent research studies have highlighted several ways to incorporate CLA in classroom instruction (Holguín Mendoza 2018; Beaudrie et al. 2021; Leeman and Serafini 2016, among others). All these proposals address common learning goals (Beaudrie et al. 2019):

1. Students will view language variation as natural and recognize the intrinsic value of their own variety and all others;

2.　　Students will develop a consciousness of the political, social, and economic power structures that underlie language use and the distribution of the so-called prestige and non-prestige varieties;

3.　　Students will uncover dominant language ideologies that hide in daily monolingual/bilingual practices;

4.　　Students will be empowered to exercise agency in making their own decisions about language use and bilingualism.

In order to better understand how CLA can be successfully implemented in HL classrooms, this collection of papers examines the development of HL learners' CLA in diverse educational contexts.

The first paper, written by Wilson and Marcin (2022), presents sociolinguistically oriented student projects as a tool to foster CLA. In this study, students participated in semester-long collaborative learning communities with students in a distant state. Intermediate-level SHL and L2 learners used online tools to deepen their sociolinguistic understanding of US Spanish through three projects: (1) *Lexical variation*—using techniques from traditional dialectology, students documented lexical items used in their communities; (2) *Perceptual dialectology mapping*—using a map, students identified regions where people speak differently than they do and provided examples; and (3) *Spanish speakers in the census*—students used US census data to collect information about Spanish speakers and learn how to use that information as a critical tool. This process was facilitated by the use of Bloom's revised taxonomy as a tool to create tangible learning outcomes for CLA and assess students' learning and progress. The authors interviewed four students and analyzed their final reflection papers to measure improvements in CLA. They analyzed students' comments and isolated expressions of language experiences that either challenged hegemonic paradigms, such as the stigmatization of certain forms, or identified the role of hegemonic forces in collective or individual language behavior. The results showed that students, particularly SHL learners, came to the classroom with some level of language awareness from their personal experiences, but both L2 and SHL learners gained new critical insights through the class projects.

Next, Sergio Loza (2022) presents a qualitative study on oral Corrective Feedback (CF). The study data originated from semi-structured interviews with a language instructor and four SHL learners enrolled in an elementary-level, mixed SHL-L2 Spanish language course at a Hispanic-serving community college. Using a critical discourse studies approach, Loza interprets the potential discursive devices utilized in the classroom discourse and interview narratives (Reisigl and Wodak 2016; van Dijk 2016). The results show that the instructor employed oral CF as a mechanism with which to enact hegemonic language ideologies that belittled the SHL learners' non-prestige varieties. At the same time, the teacher advocated for an appropriateness-oriented approach that relegated learners' varieties to home and informal settings (see Beaudrie 2015; Leeman 2005). The instructor grounded her corrective practices in deep-seated beliefs about the "deficiency" of SHL learners' cultures and social backgrounds, which she considered to be the root causes of SHL learners' "problem", namely, that they speak non-prestige varieties of Spanish. On the receiving end, the SHL learners questioned the validity of their instructor's oral CF practices, indicating resistance and agency in defending their community's variety of Spanish, which they periodically viewed as more legitimate than the Spanish taught in the classroom. These findings lead to several recommendations for instructors to engage in reflective practices that examine the ideologically charged nature of CF in the context of SHL learning and apply the tenets of CLA to different programmatic and curricular contexts.

The next paper, by Eva Gómez García (2022), seeks to connect the development of CLA with ethnic identity formation. Her study transpired during a four-week CLA-based unit implemented in an intermediate SHL classroom. The unit featured the main thematic components of CLA along with a curriculum of learning objectives, content knowledge, and suggested activities to develop CLA (Beaudrie et al. 2021). To measure the effect of the unit on CLA development, students completed an existing questionnaire that addressed

topics such as language variation, language ideologies, and bilingualism (Beaudrie et al. 2019). To measure ethnic identity, at the beginning (pre) and end of the semester (post), students completed the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) and included comments with their responses. The results showed that the CLA levels increased from "somewhat high" to "high." In addition, the participants' ethnic–racial identity formation shifted toward ethnic identity achievement. Interestingly, students who were classified as achieved positive (high levels of exploration, resolution, and affirmation) appeared to exhibit higher levels of CLA while students who reported positive affect toward their ethnicity, but not exploring (foreclosed positive) or resolving (diffuse positive), seemed to have lower levels of CLA, at the 'somewhat high' level. Students' qualitative comments supported this interpretation and indicated that the critical approach adopted in the curriculum changed their concept of what speaking Spanish means. The author concluded that these findings indicate a link between students' CLA and their ethnic identity formation and that CLA could have contributed to students' ethnic-identity-related achievements over the course of the semester.

The fourth paper in this Special Issue centers on both SHL students and their instructors. Del Carpio and Ochoa (2022) conducted semi-structured interviews with four advanced university-level SHL students and their instructor in a CLA-oriented SHL program. In addition, the authors analyzed the students' writing assignments to triangulate the interview data and gain a better understanding of the language ideologies the students and instructor brought to the classroom, how these language ideologies were being maintained, and how the instructor engaged, or neglected to engage, with students' beliefs about language. The data analysis that was conducted consisted of directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) utilizing previously established ideologies that are intertwined with being a Spanish speaker in the US (Fuller and Leeman 2020). The findings indicated that students upheld common ideologies, especially the standard language ideology and language commodification and instrumentality ideology (Leeman 2012; Leeman and Serafini 2016; Lippi-Green 2012; Loza 2017; among others). The data also showed that some of the students and the instructor held "conflicting and competing ideologies," thereby confirming the findings of Lowther Pereira (2010, p. 248). This implied that while these students were able to align themselves with the goals of SHL course, they also exhibited behaviors corresponding to the perpetuation of damaging language ideologies that can be difficult to dismantle in merely one or two courses. Their instructor, who was aware of the students' negative beliefs about language, conveyed mixed messages about these ideologies that did not always align with the CLA approach to the course. The authors acknowledge that individual instructors should not be blamed for their beliefs because dominant ideologies are "being purposefully upheld by larger social, cultural, and institutional systems that extend far beyond individual people." However, they concluded with a call to examine or reexamine SHL teachers' training models.

To shed light on CLA with respect to teacher preparation and development, Cynthia Ducar (2022) presents a study of 17 high school Spanish teachers in the US Midwest enrolled in an online graduate course on SHL pedagogy. She analyzed changes in teachers' attitudes over the semester-long class through weekly online discussion boards, with posts ranging in length from 6000 to 8000 words per group (consisting of seven participants). Content analysis revealed that teachers initially showed a lack of respect for student varieties and were ignorant of US varieties of Spanish. Their goal was to help students improve their Spanish by teaching them "academic Spanish." These findings highlighted not only that the teachers had not received any type of SHL-specific pedagogical training during their teacher training, but that they also lacked general sociolinguistic knowledge and awareness of US varieties of Spanish. As the semester advanced, the teachers' attitudes began to change as they engaged with bilingual ideologies and practices and learned about the linguistic characteristics of US Spanish. As they became more critically aware, they expressed disappointment that their previous training had failed to expose them to these topics sooner. This study provides insights into how to successfully dismantle entrenched

ideologies with the goal of creating SHL classrooms that uphold the equity and social-justice-oriented vision of CLA for our students. Most importantly, it offers a wake-up call that undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs for all languages should include SHL pedagogy and CLA as central components of instruction.

The final article, by Mary Hudgens Henderson (2022), analyzes the development of CLA among 52 university-level Spanish students enrolled in an SHL course. The course focused on writing skills within CLA-oriented thematic units. Students' attitudes toward bilingualism, Spanglish, language variation, and prescriptivist grammar were measured through beginning- and end-of-semester surveys (Shin and Hudgens Henderson 2017). The students rated their agreement or disagreement with various statements on a four-point Likert scale and explained their answers in a text box. The CLA-oriented course content included analysis of grammatical constraints on code switching, the study of standard language and monolingual language ideologies, analysis of stigmatized grammatical features found in varieties of Spanish, and the coverage of English-influenced lexical items. Ten of the fourteen items were included in a factor analysis that yielded a statistically significant change between the pretest and posttest answers. Qualitative analysis of students' explanations of their answers showed that while some students adapted their language ideologies to the new information, others continued to hold hegemonic beliefs. For these students, one course in CLA was not enough to shift their attitudes. The author ends with a call for future CLA research to identify "CLA proficiency levels" as well as methods with which to differentiate students who hold deeply entrenched language ideologies.

Taken together, the six empirical studies in this Special Issue help progress our understanding of how to implement and assess CLA in the HL classroom. Overall, the findings provide evidence of CLA development after one semester of study but also indicate that achieving high levels of CLA may require more extended instruction over a longer period. Some participants appeared to hold deeply entrenched language ideologies requiring different types or amounts of intervention to alter. Further research exploring different options for these students is warranted. The diverse set of assessment methods used in these studies, from qualitative to quantitative measures, also enrich our grasp of effective methods for assessing CLA and its complexities (see also Serafini 2022). Finally, Ducar's study provided insights into the lack of teacher development in CLA, pointing to effective ways through which it can be promoted but also suggesting that high levels of CLA may require additional intervention. As she suggests, teachers, although well intentioned, often reinforce hegemonic language ideologies that may harm students' self-esteem and ethnolinguistic identity. Gómez García suggests that CLA plays a role in ethnic identity development and reinforces the notion that CLA is crucial for HL instruction. However, studies conducted with teachers who are HL/CLA pedagogy experts may paint an unrealistic picture of what can be accomplished in the typical HL classroom. Extensive training in CLA is crucial for any pre-service or in-service language teacher who teaches HL or mixed L2/HL courses. Further research on different kinds of CLA-based interventions, especially individualized interventions rooted in reflective practices and teaching observations (see Quan 2021; Beaudrie and Loza 2023), are sorely needed.

At a time when HL courses and programs are multiplying, it is imperative to focus our attention towards continuing to uncover how effective pedagogical practices that will have a positive impact on students' HL development can be implemented. CLA is central in these efforts, and we hope that this Special Issue will advance our agenda and thus provide not only quality pedagogical practices to our HL students but also more equitable practices in HL education. As students and teachers and all those involved in language education begin to question the damaging hegemonic ideologies regarding multilingual practices, we will make progress towards providing an emancipatory educational experience for HL learners and, more broadly, all speakers of minoritized languages.

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