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# For Critical Language Awareness and Against the “Exclusive-use-of-the-target-language” Myth: The Effects of Sociolinguistic Content in English in an Elementary Spanish Classroom

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Scholars have advocated for critical approaches to language education (e.g., Del Valle, 2014; Leeman & Serafini, 2016), including those that promote the development of *Critical Language Awareness, CLA* (e.g., Alim, 2010; Leeman, 2018). The goal is to develop students’ critical knowledge of the cultural, political, and social dimensions of language. To this end, Del Valle (2014) suggests the inclusion of language-related content units taught in the first or shared language from the early stages of language learning. This proposal entails revising strong beliefs such as the use of the non-target language in the new language classroom. The purpose of our research is to investigate whether including language-related content in English (the shared language) in an elementary Spanish language course helped students develop CLA without hindering class performance. Additionally, we explored if providing this content increased learners’ investment in the language. Results revealed that incorporating the CLA units did not influence overall class performance. Qualitative analyses indicated that students connected the content with their own social experience, which led to greater investment in the language. Finally, the content contributed to developing students’ critical awareness of linguistic ideologies and their impact on the construction of inequality as well as in enabling social change.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) foreign language report recommended the development of “translingual and transcultural competence” and encouraged departments to prepare students to decodify cultural narratives (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages 2007, 4-5). Scholars have since then advocated for critical approaches to language education (e.g., Del Valle, 2014; Leeman & Serafini, 2016), including those that promote the development of *Critical Language Awareness, CLA* (e.g., Alim, 2010; Leeman, 2018) hoping to develop students’ critical knowledge of the cultural, political, and social dimensions of language. Del Valle (2014) suggests that this strategy ought to be used in syllabus design from the early stages of language learning. Leeman and Serafini (2016) also emphasize the

importance of including considerations of variation and multilingualism as elements of a critical approach as they call for language education “to incorporate critical considerations of the sociopolitics of language and multilingualism in addition to discussion of aesthetic and cultural parameters” (p. 65). The goal is to help language learners develop critical understanding of how language is intertwined with social and political structures (Leeman, Rabin, & Román-Mendoza, 2011a).

In Freirean terms, learning is grounded in the learner’s own being, their interaction with the world, their concerns, and their visions of what they can become (Freire, 1970). While a critical approach should be adopted across the board, it is especially productive to adopt it with minoritized students so that they have access to a critical analytical framework that will help them reflect on their own language experiences and those of others in the institutions and societies they live in (Clark & Ivanic, 1997). This approach recognizes the different language practices of students and, as García and Sylvan (2011) claim, provides language minoritized students with opportunities to “become engaged in their own struggle for liberation and education (Freire, 1970) and to *invest* in the development of their additional language (Norton, 2000)” (p. 391). In a time where systemic inequalities are more visible than ever due to the COVID pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the rise of racist nationalism, it is important to provide minoritized learners with solid tools to identify and fight social injustices.

Many scholars and language teachers believe that a teaching approach where learners are expected to discuss complex issues critically is difficult at the early stages of language learning because students are not capable of engaging in discussions in the target language. This view is based on the monolingual assumption (Hall & Cook, 2012) that everything that happens in the class should be in the target language and is rooted in the monolingual and native speaker biases that have dominated Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and language teaching, and have placed the monolingual native speaker as the ultimate goal for learners of *new* languages<sup>1</sup> (Cook, 2005, 2007; Ortega, 2014, 2019). Negative consequences that have emerged from this scenario are the lower status attributed to non-native speaker teachers, the pressure imposed to language learners to achieve an unattainable ideal, and the absence of an appropriate context for learners to develop bi/multilingual and bi/multicultural identities and skills (Hall & Cook, 2012).

An important question that has been raised is how and why this monolingual perspective became widespread and accepted. Pennycook (2004) builds on Auerbach (1993) and Phillipson (1992) and envisions this monolingual emphasis in light of the global spread of English: “The approach to English teaching advocated by the English-dominant nations has been driven largely by economic and political concerns, promoting new books with new methods, English-only teaching methods, and native speaker skills over non-natives” (p. 279). These ideologies and practices around teaching English are deeply rooted in colonial constructions of English and are informed by “discursive constructions that promote monolingualism in English as a superior condition to multilingualism across other languages” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 158). The negative view of the use of the first language (L1) in language classes is often linked to the bad press attributed to the Grammar-translation method<sup>2</sup>, which stems from colonial discourses that perceive traditional approaches as static *periphery* in opposition to a new and better developing *centre* [see Pennycook, 1998, 2004]. As Hall & Cook (2012) claim, this perception has stereotyped and marginalized non-monolingual teaching practices around the world.

Fortunately, a multilingual turn (May, 2014) is slowly but surely making bi/multilingualism the object of inquiry rather than the second language (L2) in SLA (Ortega,

2019). Similarly, many advocates of bilingual teaching recognize learners' need to operate bi/multilingually preserving their own cultural and linguistic identities, which has favored an environment in which the use of students' *own-language*<sup>3</sup> might be viewed positively in the new-language classroom (Hall & Cook, 2012). In this regard, the TESOL field has embraced a plurilingual approach to the teaching of English (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013; Lin, 2013; Llanes & Cots, 2020; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013) that acknowledges the plurilingual nature of the classroom in multilingual settings (Taylor & Snoddon, 2013) and aims to incorporate translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) to soften the boundaries between languages in the classroom (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013).

In this research context, our study attempts to challenge a monolingual perspective in the new-language classroom by investigating whether including content about the sociopolitical nature of language in English (the own or shared language in the classroom) influences overall class performance in an elementary Spanish class when compared to a traditional class. Additionally, we explore students' perceptions of the sociolinguistics content, and if the inclusion of this content helps develop students' CLA and has an impact on students' investment in Spanish and the language learning process.

### OWN-LANGUAGE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

Despite current conversations about the positive use of own-language in the new-language classroom (Ghobadi & Ghasemin, 2015; Hall & Cook, 2012; Pennycook, 2004), and attempts done mostly in EFL/ESL classrooms (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2013), the reality is that these conversations are not always reaching the US language classrooms at the college level. The American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) continues to suggest using the target language during 90% or more of classroom time. Their recommendation is based on SLA evidence that learners should get as much exposure as possible to the target language for acquisition to occur (Krashen, 1982). However, there does not seem to be any research on how much non-target language is acceptable in class and on whether including more than 10% has a negative effect on language learning. As mentioned by Ghobadi and Ghasemin (2015), the arguments against the use of the L1 in the new language classroom have been mainly theoretical, so there is no clear evidence that using more than 10% affects language learning negatively. Edstrom (2006) argues that establishing guidelines “raises a problematic issue of measurement and skirts the analysis of L1 functions, thereby implying that all uses of the L1 are equally justifiable” (p. 282). The ACTFL recommendation also reproduces a monolingual bias, as it does not take into account that many language learners are multiple language users (Belz, 2002) and that the language classroom may be a multilingual community (Blyth, 1995; Edstrom, 2006). Moreover, as suggested by critical approaches to the teaching of languages, this recommendation does not acknowledge that language teaching should take into consideration the sociocultural context in which learning takes place (Leeman, 2014; Leeman & Serafini, 2016). For example, participants in our study are language minoritized and/or racialized learners of Spanish in the Bronx (NYC, where Spanish is a local language and where many native speakers of Spanish speak heteroglossically and translanguage (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015) using features from different varieties of both Spanish and English. Moreover, for many of our students, English is not the first, but the second or third language, and translanguaging in their languages (e.g., Tagalog and English) is common. For that reason, providing a pure Spanish monolingual environment reproduces the ideology that monolingual/monoglossic varieties are the most desirable (Leeman, 2014), reinforcing

learners' lower linguistic self-esteem, and limiting our learners' ability to function in a bilingual or multilingual environment.

Research on amount and/or use of own-language and target language by teachers (Duff & Polio, 1990; Edstrom, 2006; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008; Turnbull, 2001) shows wide variation. For example, while Edstrom (2006) reported using approximately 77% of Spanish in a first-semester Spanish course, Duff and Polio (1990) reported a range from 10% to 100% in 13 different language classes (Duff & Polio, 1990). Similarly, Turnbull (2001) described 9% to 89% of French use by teachers in Canadian schools. Importantly, variation may also occur among teachers of the same language, in the same institution, and implementing the same activities (Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Overall, these studies reveal that teachers do not adhere to a specific criterion, but rather adjust their language use to the context and demands of the class. As for how own-language is used, frequent functions reported (e.g., Edstrom, 2006; Polio & Duff, 1994; Copland & Meokleous, 2011) include grammar instruction, classroom management, empathy/solidarity, or lack of comprehension.

One of the goals of our study is to investigate whether including critical content in English (the own or shared language) influences overall class performance. Although there are, to our knowledge, no studies of this nature in the literature, own-language use has been found to play a significant role in language learning. For example, under a Vygotskian approach, research has revealed the positive role of using own-language (English) during L2 task completion in collaborative activities (e.g., Brooks & Donato, 1994; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Specifically, Brooks and Donato (1994) found that when students were allowed to “discuss the language of the task and its goals, even in English” (p. 272) learners were able to regulate themselves better during a problem-solving activity. Swain and Lapkin (2000) concluded that sensible use of own-language can support new-language learning and use.

More recently, an innovative study (Llanes & Cots, 2020) compared a business EFL class using translanguaging (with features of Catalan, Spanish, and English) to a class using an English monolingual approach. The results showed that the translanguaging group had a slight advantage over the monolingual group as revealed by their significantly higher scores on written lexical complexity. The researchers also observed a decrease in feelings of helplessness, embarrassment, and lack of confidence in the translanguaging group, which may indicate that students who translanguage perceive their linguistic repertoire as a powerful resource. Overall, this study shows that the use of a pure monolingual approach to teach a new language is not more beneficial than when the students' additional languages are allowed in the class. Edstrom (2006) encourages the use of the L1 in the language classroom to help students understand the relationship between languages and the realities they describe, or to avoid stereotypical ideas about Hispanic cultures that cannot always be achieved in the target language. Similarly, Pascual y Cabo & Prada (2018) suggest easing target-language-only policies in order to allow learners to have access to critical content considered as “fundamental building blocks” (p. 538).

In this research context, we believe that it is important to create a space for learners to examine language critically by incorporating readings and discussions in the own or shared language. Taking into account the wide variety of own-language use seen in the literature and the lack of evidence of a negative impact of such use, we do not expect that the inclusion of this content will affect overall class performance negatively.

## CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

As described by Del Valle (2014), although raising students' language awareness has been an explicit goal in proposals for how to teach Spanish at least since the creation of the American Association of the Teaching of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) in the US, it is important to differentiate whether “the narratives that present the chosen norm aim at naturalizing the choice” or rather “stimulate the students' understanding of the choice's political inscription” (p. 98). This latter perspective is in line with CLA (Clark et al., 1991; Fairclough, 1992), a proposal for language education that emerged from the traditions of *Language Awareness* and *Critical Discourse Analysis* in the early 1990s. With close connections to Freire's work on critical literacy and critical pedagogy, CLA attempts to raise students' awareness on “how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of” (Fairclough, 1992/2014, p. 215).

Central to Freire's philosophy (1970) is the idea that the oppressed are so influenced by the ideologies of the oppressors that they see the world and themselves through the oppressor's eyes. For that reason, it is important to engage all learners in the cultivation of a critical consciousness to identify social injustices they either experience (as *oppressed*) or maintain (as *oppressors*) and to be able to act on them.

Advocates for critical approaches in language education have highlighted the need to embrace CLA and critical pedagogy in the language classroom as a way to promote social change (Alim, 2010; Crookes, 2012; Del Valle, 2014; Glynn & Spenader, 2020; Leeman, 2018, 2014; Leeman & Serafini, 2016; Martínez, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Osborn, 2006; Parra, 2016; Pennycook, 2001, 2017; Quan, 2020, 2021).

Alim (2010) identifies the language ideologies of an educator teaching English to an ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse (70% Black, 25% Latino) high school student population. He, then, provides specific classroom applications of CLA and implications for sociolinguists and educators that center around the use of language to “resist, redefine and possibly reverse” (p. 214) power relations perpetuated through language. Among others, his activities include the transcription and sociolinguistic analysis of a conversation with a local hip-hop artist (“Real Talk” project) to understand the structure and systematicity of spoken speech. The goal is to raise students' consciousness about their position in the world—and how language can be used against them—and what to do about it (Alim, 2010).

Critical pedagogical approaches to the teaching of Spanish in the US have been also recently discussed and implemented in the field of Spanish as a heritage language (HL) (e.g., Leeman, 2018; Leeman & Serafini, 2016; Loza & Beaudrie, 2022; Martínez, 2003; Parra, 2016). These approaches are perceived as a step forward from appropriateness models, which see prestigious or standard varieties as more appropriate for formal or high-status contexts (Leeman & Serafini, 2016), thus perpetuating a *standard language ideology* (Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy & Milroy, 1999). In contrast with these appropriateness models that tell students that some of the forms they use are not “appropriate” or good enough for certain contexts without explaining why, Martínez's (2003) proposal recommends a classroom-based dialect awareness at the early stages of the Spanish HL curriculum that attends to the social functions of language variation. The goal is to develop students' understanding of the power relations associated with different language varieties, and to foster students' agency to resist hegemonic views that discredit their varieties.

Similarly, Leeman (2005) and later Leeman & Serafini (2016), and Leeman (2018) also

argue for the inclusion of sociolinguistics content in language education contexts to help learners question common beliefs about language variation and understand the political nature of language choices. Leeman (2018) and Leeman and Serafini (2016) offer numerous ideas for the classroom to develop students' awareness on issues of multilingualism, language variation, multilingual discourse, and language ideologies. Among others, they provide examples that include language data analysis of digital storytelling, written public spaces (linguistic landscape), or surveys and interviews regarding different varieties of Spanish.

Research has recently started to investigate whether these approaches taken in the Spanish HL classroom have impacted students' development of CLA (e.g., Beaudrie et al., 2019, 2021; Holguín Mendoza, 2018; Leeman et al., 2011a, b; Serafini, 2021, as cited in Serafini, 2022). Leeman et al., (2011a, b) incorporated a critical service component designed to strengthen CLA learned in class where college students of HL Spanish taught Spanish as a HL at a local elementary school. The study revealed that students developed new identities as language experts and social activists, thus resisting previous identities that perceived them as linguistically deficient.

Taking into account Martínez's and Leeman's proposals, Holguín Mendoza (2018) developed an entire curriculum designed to foster CLA in a HL program in a public institution in the US Northwest. The curriculum included activities that allowed students to reflect on terms such as Latinx and Hispanic, or stigmatized forms such as "haiga" or "ansina" and the "particular meanings these linguistic forms index" (Holguín Mendoza, 2018, p. 7). Holguín Mendoza (2018) described the implementation of the curriculum and the results of a study conducted among 63 students in two courses of the program. The study explored students' development of CLA using an attitudinal questionnaire that asked learners if they considered stigmatized Mexican forms correct or incorrect and if they would use those forms. The results revealed a significant improvement in attitudes towards certain language forms in one of the courses.

Beaudrie et al. (2019, 2021) developed and administered a CLA questionnaire among 301 students enrolled in several Spanish HL courses at four large, public universities in the US Southwest. A final version of the questionnaire was administered to 19 Spanish HL learners over a period of 14 weeks using a pretest/posttest design. Although the results indicated a significant improvement in students' CLA, as noted by the authors, behavioral items did not seem to perform as well as attitudinal items, which could be an indication that qualitative measures capture CLA development better. Beaudrie et al. (2021) later reported on evidence of CLA development from qualitative students' perceptions, which included reflections on linguistic diversity and the differential treatment of different language varieties.

These studies reveal the positive benefits associated with implementing a CLA curriculum in Spanish as HL programs in higher education US institutions. However, as Del Valle (2014) claims, this approach is central not only to the teaching of HLs, but also to the teaching of any new language. Recent research by Quan (2020) investigated whether incorporating critical service learning, US Spanish, and structured reflections in an intermediate to advanced Spanish L2 course developed students' CLA. CLA was measured by a questionnaire adapted from Beaudrie et al. (2019) and students' written reflections. The results of this study conducted in a predominantly white institution showed that at the end of the semester, students had developed awareness towards issues that affected Latinxs in the US, including linguistic discrimination, language maintenance, and the connection between language and identity. Serafini (2021, as cited in Serafini, 2022) also explored CLA development in a diverse (with both HL and L2) service-learning course where students provided support for Spanish literacy development in a local Spanish-English dual language immersion elementary school. Students acted as Spanish aids, conducted classroom

observations, and carried out critical service-learning tasks. CLA development was measured by quantitative (50-item, 7-point Likert-scale questionnaire) and qualitative measures (written blog reflections and open-ended survey responses). The results provided evidence of the dynamic nature of CLA, which was interpreted in reference to the students' positioning of themselves and others. Finally, Magro (forthcoming) observed how the inclusion of content about the sociopolitical nature of language played a role in raising Spanish advanced L2 students' CLA, motivation, and linguistic competence in a primarily white institution<sup>4</sup>. CLA development was measured by changes in qualitative interviews (from beginning to end of the semester) and content in the students' final exams. In our study, we are also interested in hearing students' voices qualitatively by exploring their perceptions of CLA content and CLA development through learners' answers to their exit questionnaires, post-reading homework, and instructor's journals.

As seen in the literature presented, CLA approaches have been incorporated in programs or courses where students (HL and intermediate to advanced L2) could use Spanish to reflect on issues related to the sociopolitical nature of the language. Although the inclusion of critical content in elementary new language classes (i.e., where students have very basic linguistic knowledge of the target language) is possible (see Lado & Quijano, 2020, for examples and impact of this approach), it does not always allow for an in-depth discussion of issues that may provide all learners with the critical lens to understand dynamics of power and inequalities associated with language. For that reason, Del Valle (2014) recommends including critical sociolinguistic content in English<sup>5</sup> from the very early stages of language learning. He suggests envisioning and testing syllabi "in which the development of communication skills is not conceived as the acquisition of a purely technical ability but imagined as the acquisition of a greater capacity to engage in communicationally challenging and socio-politically loaded encounters" (p. 370). Our study is, to our knowledge, the first to follow this recommendation hoping to explore whether including these sociolinguistic units in the shared language helps develop students' critical understanding of the cultural, political, and social dimensions of language. Taking into account that our students are language minoritized and/or racialized learners, we aim to raise their critical consciousness as a first step to improve their oppressed conditions (Freire, 1970), and, as a result, possibly also their level of investment (Norton, 2000) in the language learning process. An ultimate goal would be "the promotion of student agency or purposeful engagement with the world" (Leeman & Serafini, 2016, p. 63).

## INVESTMENT

*Investment* (Norton, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995) was developed to complement unitary and fixed notions of motivation in the SLA field that did not consider the realities of minoritized populations. Learners may be motivated to learn a language but not fully invested in classroom practices if they feel that the environment is racist, sexist, homophobic, irrelevant, or if it undervalues their own language (or language variety) and culture. Thus, if teachers provide an environment where learners feel respected and where they see the relevance of learning the language, they may invest in it "with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase the value of their cultural capital and social power" (Darvin & Norton, 2017, p. 3). Investing in a language also means investing in one's identity, which is complex, dynamic, and often a site of struggle. Consequently, educators should keep in mind that their choices will have an impact on the way learners position themselves and on the way they see and challenge how others position them.



Research on investment and identity has been fruitful in the last 20 years (see Norton, 2012; Darvin & Norton, 2017, for overviews). An example is a study conducted by Anya (2017) during a 10-week intensive Portuguese study abroad program in Brazil. She analyzed video-recorded student interactions, field notes, weekly student journals, writing assignments from student coursework, and interviews. The results of four case studies revealed how African American students co-constructed and negotiated multiple racialized, gendered, and classed identities, and how their investment influenced their learning of Portuguese. Also conducted in a study abroad context (in Spain), Quan (2019) explored learners' identity and investment in Spanish and how this investment related to their post study abroad speaking abilities. The results revealed that participants' idealized perception of the study abroad experience and their belief in the capital that Spanish could offer them led to competing identities and investment, and resulted in contradictory language learning behavior.

In a US educational context, Potowski's (2004) exploration of 4 Spanish learners (L2 and HL) in a two-way Spanish-English immersion program revealed that students' degree of investment in the language varied a lot depending on what they expected in return from the instructor (e.g., strengthening their identity as Spanish speaker and academically-focused student).

Finally, Lado and Quijano (2020) investigated how the inclusion of lessons with a critical pedagogical approach to teaching elementary Spanish in a diverse classroom allowed three language-minoritized learners to negotiate their identities and to be invested not only in the learning of Spanish, but also in their home language practices (Yoruba, Tagalog, and Spanish respectively). The critical lessons incorporated Spanish local and hybrid varieties and allowed learners to define themselves with the social categories of their choice rather than with pre-conceived notions determined by a textbook. Overall, this study revealed that when language-minoritized learners are given opportunities to reflect on critical issues related to their languages and identities, they become more invested in learning their own languages as they understand their relationship with the world and can negotiate it while incorporating the new language into their linguistic repertoire.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Considering the literature and open issues for research presented, we attempt to investigate the following research questions:

1. Does including CLA content in English in an elementary Spanish class influence overall classroom performance when compared to a regular elementary Spanish class?
2. What are students' perceptions of the CLA content? Does including CLA content in English in an elementary Spanish class help develop students' critical understanding and knowledge of the cultural, political, and social dimensions of language?
3. What is the impact of the readings and discussions on students' investment in their language learning process?

## **INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

This study took place in a public Hispanic serving institution (i.e., one that includes at least 25 % of Hispanic students, as defined by the U.S Department of Education) located in an urban area in the US Northeast (Bronx, NYC) where the majority of the population is Latinx and speaks Spanish frequently. As of fall 2019, 53% percent of students at this institution reported being Hispanic/Latinx. Additional ethnicities/races/status reported included: Black /Non-

Hispanic (30.3%); White/Non-Hispanic (6.8%); Asian/Pacific Islander (7%); Non-Resident Alien (2.7%); American Indian/Native Alaskan (<1%).

Although reporting being Hispanic/Latinx does not necessarily mean speaking Spanish, an average of 200 students per semester take one of the 4 levels offered for HL learners. This means that students enrolled in these courses are familiar with local varieties of Spanish. The institution developed its own Spanish heritage placement test, which also separates heritage from non-heritage learners (traditionally called L2 or foreign language learners in US institutions). Although L2 courses tend to be seen in the US as consisting of a uniform population (mostly monolingual, often white), the basic and intermediate language sequence at this institution consists mainly of language-minoritized and/or racialized students who may speak languages other than English and Spanish. Additionally, these courses also include Latinx students with almost no productive skills and low receptive skills in Spanish.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants and Classroom Context

Four first semester Spanish classes (2 +CLA and 2 –CLA) participated in the study. The protocol at this institution determines that students should be placed in the first semester if they have taken less than two years of Spanish in high school or if determined by the placement test. The initial pool consisted of 87 students. To make both groups as comparable as possible, we did not include participants with more than three absences, those who did not complete at least 60% of the online homework, or those who reported experience with Spanish at home. These criteria reduced the pool to 46 students (n= 21 in the +CLA group, and n= 25 in the –CLA group). The average age was 21 in the +CLA group and 20 in the –CLA group. Finally, there were 16 females and five males in the +CLA group, and 19 females and six males in the –CLA group. Tables 1 and 2 show the birthplace of students in both groups as well as their self-reported L1, L2, and age of arrival to the US (when born outside the US).

**Table 1**

+ CLA Group. *Birth Place, L1, L2, and Age of Arrival to US*

Birth place	N	L1	L2	Age of arrival to US
US	9	English		
	1	Arabic & English		
	1	Mandarin	English	
	1	Twi	English	
	1	English	Patois	
	1	English	French	
Vietnam	1	Vietnamese	English	13
Philippines	1	Tagalog	English	11
Nigeria	1	Igbo	English	7
Pakistan	1	Urdu	English	4
Grenada	1	English		17

Jamaica	2	Not reported	2, 18
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**Table 2**

–CLA group. *Birth Place, L1, L2, and Age of Arrival to US*

Birth place	N	L1	L2	Age of arrival to US
US	13	English		
	1	English	Tagalog	
	1	Urdu & English		
Ghana	1	Akan	English	7
	1	Twi	English	11
Nigeria	1	Pidgin English	English	22
Guyana	2	English		9
Bangladesh	2	Bengali	English	18, 20
Jamaica	3	English		4, 11, 16

## Procedure

On the first day of classes, participants completed a paper-and-pencil consent form and a background questionnaire. The background questionnaire asked students about their previous home and formal language experience, language practices, and interest to take the class and learn Spanish. At the end of the semester, participants completed an exit questionnaire where they were asked about their experience in the class. Additionally, learners were asked about possible changes in their level of engagement with learning Spanish. Students receiving the CLA content were asked about their opinion on the readings and discussions, and if the content had an impact on their interest in learning Spanish and on succeeding in the class.

The four classes were taught by the same instructor and were exposed to a similar teaching approach.<sup>6</sup> To ensure that the same instructor could teach all classes (to make the groups as comparable as possible), classes were taught in two different semesters (one +CLA and one –CLA per semester). All classes met twice a week for one hour and 40 minutes. While students in the –CLA group followed the departmental syllabus developed by the coordinator of the program, the +CLA group followed an adapted syllabus where students were presented with five CLA topics distributed throughout the semester and discussed in English. The topics presented were the following (in order of appearance in the syllabus): 1) Variation and change, 2) language attitudes, 3) language and gender, 4) Spanish in the US, and 5) language and identity.<sup>7</sup> The day before the topic was discussed in class, the instructor posed some questions as a pre-reading activity. For example, for language attitudes, students were asked, among other questions, if they thought there was a right or wrong way to speak English. After class, the instructor posted the readings with additional homework questions to be answered after completing the readings (which were also in English). The following class started discussing the readings and questions. The average time spent talking about the CLA topics (post-reading) was 20 minutes per class. During those same 20 minutes taught in English, the –CLA group completed additional activities designed to practice the material covered that day in

Spanish. The data from the questionnaires and homework was complemented with the instructor's journals, which included comments and reflections mostly from the days where the discussions occurred.

## Assessment Tools

Following departmental guidelines, three tests were distributed at different points during the semester to measure language progress on different areas (grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and listening). At the end of the semester, participants completed a required final exam, which was used to compare final class performance between groups. The maximum score on each of the assessment tools (three tests and a final exam) was 100. The exams in the +CLA group included one question about the readings. The score for this question was part of the student's exam grade in the class but not computed in our analyses to make the assessment tools between groups fully comparable. Finally, we wanted to incorporate an external assessment tool to complement those completed as part of the course. For that reason, learners completed a Spanish placement test on their last day of classes.<sup>8</sup> This test is adaptive, and therefore does not have a maximum score.

## RESULTS

In order to answer the first research question, whether including CLA content in English in an elementary Spanish class influenced class performance when compared to a regular Spanish class, quantitative analyses were conducted to compare scores in the assessment tools completed by both groups. Given the quasi-experimental nature of the design and the inability to control for every factor that could be playing a role in each group's final performance (e.g., class dynamics, amount of work time spent at home by each student), we approach the quantitative analyses with caution to explore whether the inclusion of these units in English could be indicating that students in our +CLA group were at a disadvantage when compared to a group that received additional practice in Spanish instead of the discussions in English.

### Quantitative Analysis

Independent samples t-test were conducted to compare test results in both conditions. The results revealed that there was no significant difference in the scores for any of the chapter tests [test 1,  $t(44) = 0.730$ ,  $p = .470$ ; test 2,  $t(44) = 0.444$ ,  $p = .660$ ; test 3,  $t(44) = .123$ ,  $p = .903$ ]. Additionally, there was no significant difference neither in the scores on the final exam,  $t(44) = 0.214$ ,  $p = 0.832$ , nor in the scores of the placement test completed on the last day of classes,  $t(44) = .994$ ,  $p = .350$ . Descriptive statistics for each of the assessment measures by group are presented in Table 3. The overall high standard deviations are not surprising as they reflect a wide range in students' scores, which is often the case in class assessments. Although the mean for the placement test in the -CLA group was almost 15 points higher than in the +CLA, this difference was not statistically significant. The standard deviation for the placement test also indicates that its distribution was very scattered; this may be related to the exclusive use of multiple-choice items, which may have favored guessing.

**Table 3**  
*Means and Standard Deviations on Assessment Measures*

Group	N	Test 1		Test 2		Test 3		Final		Placement	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
+CLA	21	89.50	6.73	87.36	7.13	81.90	9.24	76.92	11.27	172.48	53.11
-CLA	25	87.78	8.84	86.45	6.82	82.24	9.60	76.25	10.06	187.28	52.85

### Qualitative Analyses

In order to explore students' perceptions of the sociolinguistics content, CLA development, and level of investment in the learning of Spanish, we looked at three sources of qualitative data: 1) answers provided by the +CLA group in open questions in the debriefing questionnaire, 2) students' homework, and 3) instructor's class journals. In this project, we understand CLA development as a change in students' awareness of issues related to the sociopolitical nature of language. Additionally, we explore investment by looking at verbalizations that denote how students engage with Spanish and the language learning process.

To analyze the data, we followed open coding (Cohen et al., 2011), which has been previously used to investigate students' perceptions and evidence of CLA (Beaudrie et al., 2021). We looked first at the answers provided in the exit questionnaire to identify student perceptions and verbalizations that would reveal a change in students' CLA and level of investment in the language. Next, we read students' homework carefully to identify additional evidence of CLA development and investment, and to delve into some of the results found in the questionnaire. Finally, data was complemented with notes from the instructor's journals. In this section, we provide a summary of results, which will be interpreted further in the Discussion section.

Overall, all students in the +CLA group (except for two who did not make any comments) found the readings interesting and informative. No students made any negative comments about the readings, except for one who mentioned that the readings were interesting although "some were long." Importantly, in none of the three sources of data collected students questioned or showed discomfort towards having to do readings and discussions in English in a Spanish class. Specific comments in the questionnaire highlighted that the content in the readings was new to them (examples 1 through 4). The use of phrases such as "mind-opening", "eye-opening", or "never really thought about" certainly indicates that the content provided in the readings and discussions changed how students perceive language.

- (1) "The readings were very useful and opened my mind to other things and topics."
- (2) "The readings were interesting, they provide more insight into the language."

- (3) “It is something I never really thought about so I was happy to read them. It educated me and made me think more because we never really thought about them.”
- (4) “The discussions were very interesting. I think talking about language itself really is eye opening and to know why and how people speak was interesting.”

Additionally, half of the students were able to make connections to their own sociocultural reality by acknowledging the presence of Spanish in their local context. By using terms such as “relate” and “connect” (examples 6, 7, 8, and 9), students acknowledged that the content in the readings was relevant to their everyday lives, thus making it more meaningful and relevant.

- (5) “I found the readings enlightening as it has to do with my daily life as a New Yorker.”
- (6) “I particularly enjoyed Spanish in the USA because especially in the Bronx is something I could relate to.”
- (7) “Due to the readings, I was able to relate what I was learning in class to my everyday life.”
- (8) “They [the readings] all helped to relate language and the class to real life.”
- (9) “I am able to connect Spanish with my daily life and learning Spanish is not as distant anymore.”

Comments such as “Spanish is not as distant anymore” (example 9) support previous research (Lado & Quijano, 2020) that has revealed that the inclusion of critical content raises students’ awareness on the presence of Spanish in their community, thus validating Spanish as a local—rather than as a foreign and distant—language.

This overall positive reaction towards the content discussed and the connections they made with their community were also perceived in the class discussions as students were eager to participate by bringing specific examples from their reality. Interestingly, one student (example 10) was not only able to connect the readings and discussions to Spanish but also to her language and culture.

- (10) “I speak broken English patois because it is part of my culture and it gives me an understanding of how people may perceive me.”

This comment, which reproduces a colonial standard language ideology, reveals that the student developed awareness towards how certain stigmatized varieties are perceived, including her own. Similarly, other students mentioned that the content allowed them to become aware of misconceptions and attitudes associated with language (examples 11 and 12). Overall, students’ use of words such as “understand/ing,” “aware,” or “think” (examples 11, 13, 14, 15) in the answers to the questionnaires indicated that the readings made students become aware of the specific issues discussed.

- (11) “...helpful with understanding misconceptions and attitudes about languages and Spanish specially.”
- (12) “...relate language and the class to real life attitudes about them.”
- (13) “...made me understand and look at language differently.”
- (14) “...made me feel aware about the situation.”
- (15) “...it educated me and made me think more.”

This form of consciousness-raising seems to have helped another student understand and identify her “unconscious stereotypes” (example 16), which made her reorient her listening practices to account for their role in perpetuating linguistic discrimination. This change in her practices could be interpreted as evidence of how CLA content promotes students’ agency in contesting hegemonic practices, which is precisely one of the goals of a CLA approach to teaching languages (Leeman, 2018).

(16) “I became aware of unconscious stereotypes that I had about the language. Having read and hearing the discussions I am now able to be mindful of when I am stereotyping an individual and not to do it anymore.”

We decided to look closely at this students’ homework to find out what areas made her more aware of her biases. She reflected on the definition of standard language and “other” varieties, which are perceived as “wrong”, and on the existence of language academies (example 17).

(17) “These academies try to instill within society the belief that any other form [referring to non-standard forms] is unnatural and therefore wrong.”

An examination of all students’ homework revealed additional evidence of the type of knowledge that students learned. The areas that elicited more comments were variation and language attitudes, language and identity, and Spanish in the US, with the latter being also the one that led to more participation during the in-class discussions. Concerning variation and language attitudes, and similar to the student mentioned above, students seemed to become aware of the notion of standard language and its implications (examples 18 through 22).

(18) “In the Spanish speaking world, the Castilian Spanish spoken in central Spain is considered the standard. This does affect other countries because it creates a division of one being better than the other. Other countries may feel less because of how they speak compared to the ‘standard’. It could affect employment opportunities and even social environments. This could be a form of discrimination because of personal judgments about someone because of how they speak or where they are from.”

(19) “People may feel proud or high self-esteem if their Spanish was spoken close to a ‘standard’. On the other hand, other people might feel belittle just because their Spanish was not closer to a more acceptable standard.”

(20) “Other countries will feel they are beneath another country because they do not speak exactly the same way. There is no such thing as a ‘standard’ Spanish.”

(21) “Language is a complex concept and it is hard to say what is the ‘right’ way of speaking because everyone speaks differently.”

(22) “Language attitudes can cause certain groups of Spanish speaking people to feel inferior to others.”

(23) “...people are ‘labeled’ according to how they speak. Most people are not taken seriously and oftentimes denied employment.”

As shown with the use of expressions such as “feel less”, “belittle”, “beneath”, “feel inferior”, or “not taken seriously” (examples 18, 19, 20, 22, 23), students reflected on the danger of perpetuating a standard language ideology and the socio-affective implications that

speaking a so-called non-standard variety has for some communities. Examples 18 and 23 show that students also understand how this ideology leads to discriminatory practices, including limiting employment opportunities. Evidence of awareness of the differential treatment of some language varieties also appeared in the qualitative data analyzed by Beaudrie et al. (2021), where students were able to understand, like ours, that one variety is not better than another. Our results also align with those in Gasca Jiménez and Andrada-Rafael (2021), Lado and Quijano (2020), and Leeman and Serafini (2020) in that students approach the learning of a language with deeply rooted language ideologies, and that the language classroom provides a space for students to reflect on their own beliefs.

When discussing language and identity, students acknowledged the conflicting nature of this connection, one that they recognized as mediated by society (example 24).

(24) “In society, sometimes a person is criticized for being Spanish but being unable to speak Spanish at all. They probably feel less of a Hispanic, the more someone emphasizes the issue.”

Students also noted that when language loss occurs, speakers do not lose their identity (examples 25 and 26), thus challenging an ideology that is common among Latinxs that conflates being Latinx in the US (or belonging to any other language-minoritized culture) with speaking Spanish (or the language of that minority) (Tseng, 2021; Urciuoli, 2008). The use of “nationality” (example 25) adds an additional layer and seems to be connected to a “birthright paradigm” (Parmegiani, 2010), which allows minorities to claim a “national” identity despite their lack of command of the language.

(25) “I feel that loss of language does not make a person less Hispanic or Latino because their nationality came from their ancestors and family origin.”

(26) “No one is less a part of their culture just because they cannot speak the language.”

Additionally, students verbalized that when speakers are impeded to speak their language (if they speak it), they may not be able to fully express who they are (examples 27 and 28).

(27) “I believe that if you are not able to speak Spanish, then you cannot effectively communicate with those of your group, you will not feel a sense of belonging or feel as if you fit in.”

(28) “If people are not allowed to speak their native language, then they are not fully representing who they are [...]. A native language is an expression of one’s culture and culture is part of our identity”.

The use of “in society”, “they cannot speak”, “are not able to speak”, or “not allowed” (examples 24, 26, 27, 28) seems to be indicating that students connected issues of language loss to structural pressures. Tseng (2021) found that Latinxs attribute language loss “from the hegemonic society in which socialization and acquisition are embedded” (p. 125). Our results reveal that including CLA content may help learners become aware of hegemonic forces that impede language maintenance. This awareness became apparent also when discussing Spanish in the US and after reading about the “English only” movement: students reflected on the need to preserve



and maintain Spanish (or any specific HL), and expressed their disagreement towards imposing English as a possible official language in the US (examples 29 and 30).

(29) “We should accept all languages because it makes a diverse country, which reflects the people. Everyone is not the same and having an official language could make one group better than another.”

(30) “English should not be the only acceptable language in the USA.”

As for whether students increased their level of investment in the learning of Spanish, half of them mentioned explicitly in the questionnaire that the readings and discussions changed the way they perceived Spanish and language in general (31 through 37).

(31) “My views with language changed a little. I did not care much or saw the importance of learning a language but now it is different.”

(32) “The readings affected how I viewed language and changed the way I studied.”

(33) “The readings expanded my learning desire to learn the language.”

(34) “Due to the readings...I was able to see the connections which made learning Spanish even more interesting.”

(35) “They [the readings] had a tremendous effect. The readings made me want to understand Spanish even more and the culture of Spanish speaking countries.”

(36) “I definitely think they [the readings] assisted me in enjoying and most of all comprehending the class. These readings and questions were helpful.”

(37) “[The discussions]...were very intriguing and interesting in that it [sic] helped me to understand Spanish language more.”

The use of terms such as “changed”, “affected”, “expanded”, or “had a tremendous effect” (examples 31, 32, 33, 35) revealed that the readings had a direct impact on students’ investment in learning the language. Students made a connection between the CLA content learned and their level of engagement with Spanish and/or their language learning process, which they attributed to the fact that the readings made Spanish and its local culture more relatable and enjoyable. The instructor’s journals also reflected the enthusiasm with which the majority of students participated in the discussions<sup>9</sup>. Interestingly, the instructor noted in her journals that, for many students, participation in the discussion sessions increased when compared to participation in regular Spanish activities (where mostly Spanish was used). In line with Llanes and Cots (2020), we believe that the use of English in the discussions may have alleviated feelings of helplessness and lack of confidence that are common among language learners when only the target language is expected. Additionally, the use of English may have allowed learners to engage in the content more and, as a result, to increase their level of investment in the classroom practices and language learning process.

## DISCUSSION

### Use of Shared-language

Overall, we cannot conclude that students who read and discussed sociolinguistics content in English were either advantaged or disadvantaged when compared to students who had the traditional syllabus. In other words, asking students to read five texts on language and spending

an average of 10 minutes (pre-reading) and 20 minutes (post-reading) in class five times during a regular semester discussing the readings in English did not influence their overall performance in the Spanish class as measured by the classroom assessment tools (three tests and the final). Additionally, there was no difference among groups on the placement test implemented at the end of the semester. These results suggest that using more than the recommended 10% of the shared language to discuss CLA content in the classroom was neither detrimental nor advantageous for the students' overall experience in the class. These results do not align with the monolingual assumption that everything that happens in the classroom should be in the target language, but rather support recent approaches that recognize the plurilingual nature of the language classroom (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013; Hall & Cook, 2012; Llanes & Cots, 2020; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013).

The implications of avoiding a pure monolingual environment are beyond those having to do with specific language learning outcomes. The class and institution where the study is conducted is clearly a multilingual community (Blyth, 1995), where a large number of students in each class speak a language other than English. Additionally, students live in a multilingual community where English, Spanish, and heteroglossic forms of these and other languages are spoken. Therefore, avoiding a pure monolingual approach aligns better with the sociocultural reality of the students. Nevertheless, such an approach is equally important in less diverse contexts (i.e., those in which the majority of students are mostly white monolingual English native speakers) because it helps to fight against the monolingual bias and against those stereotypes associated with bi/multilinguals and their varieties by taking into consideration the bilingual reality (Pascual y Cabo & Prada, 2018).

In line with Edstrom (2006), we support the use of the shared language to help students understand the relationship between language and the realities the language describes, or to avoid stereotypes about Hispanic cultures. More specifically, and consistent with Pascual y Cabo and Prada's (2018) proposal, in this study, we support the use of the shared language to talk about critical sociolinguistic content at the early stages of language learning hoping to help students acquire critical understanding and knowledge of the cultural, political, and social dimensions of language (Del Valle, 2014).

## Critical Language Awareness

Our findings indicate that students' perceptions of the CLA content were positive. They found the readings interesting, useful, mind-opening, and educational. The majority of students also reported that the content was new to them, which reveals that despite the fact that many students are language-minoritized bi/multilinguals and/or had taken language classes in high school (mostly Spanish), they had never been exposed to content about the sociopolitical nature of language. It is unfortunate that students were not exposed to this type of content earlier in their education process, as it is clear that it helped them understand their own reality. In line with CLA approaches, including these readings and discussions seemed to allow readers to "connect meaningfully with local contexts by viewing local cultures and language practices as powerful resources for learning" (Alim, 2010, p. 214).

Specifically, the readings allowed learners, in their own words, to "become aware of unconscious stereotypes" or to understand "misconception and attitudes about languages." This was the case mostly for Spanish, a local language for all our students, but also for their own native languages and for languages in general. For example, as previously mentioned, one student was able to connect the content discussed about Spanish (Spanglish specifically) to an

English-influenced Patois, her home language, which made her become aware of the role that language plays in how people may perceive her. Developing this form of consciousness-raising is one of the goals of a critical approach to language learning. Leeman (2018) claims that CLA approaches allow learners to examine language variety and “the reasons and mechanisms by which certain varieties—those associated with low socioeconomic status or racialized speakers—are stigmatized, as well as the sociopolitical implications of such stigmatization” (p. 345). Students’ comments evidenced that they became aware of the sociolinguistic complexities of language variation and the implications of speaking certain stigmatized varieties (e.g., Spanglish, Patois, ‘accented’ English) as opposed to those varieties that are closer to a so-called standard. For example, when students learn that Castilian Spanish is considered by many the Spanish that should be taught and learned, they acknowledge that speakers of other varieties may feel inferior and understand this as a form of discrimination that could have an impact on employment opportunities. When verbalizing that “there is no such thing as a ‘standard’ Spanish,” or that “there is no right or wrong way of language” students are connecting it with the idea that a standard language is a belief (i.e., an ideology) perpetuated by institutions such as official language academies. By doing so, students become aware of one of the institutional mechanisms that contribute to the stigmatization of certain varieties (Leeman, 2018). Importantly, as revealed by the student who claimed that she became aware of when she was stereotyping and acted on it, by becoming aware of these ideologies, students may be able to exercise agency to critically engage normative thinking (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

With regards to language and identity, as noted before, students noted how speaking certain varieties plays a role in people’s perception of others. Since our students are mostly language-minoritized and/or racialized learners, they may have identified discriminatory or racist attitudes towards them. For example, an African student from Nigeria mentioned in the homework: “If someone has an African accent, they may think the person is smart, poor, or dirty. So how we speak or our accent plays a role in how people judge us.” By using “us”, this student is acknowledging that she, as well as other speakers with African accents, may be perceived as “smart, poor, or dirty.” The use of “poor” or “dirty”, which are stereotypical characteristics associated with “blackness” (Alim et al., 2016) in connection with an African accent, suggests the student’s recognition of a white listening subject who perceives their language as racialized (Flores & Rosa, 2015). The readings did not include specific discussions on language and race from a raciolinguistic perspective (Alim et al., 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015), but based on our findings, we think this is an area that should be included in future iterations. As Anya (2017) notes, Black students (and we would argue here that any non-white students) include what is relevant to them in their academic and social learning experiences “even when we do not actively incorporate considerations relating to racialized identities” (p. 217). Thus, including readings on raciolinguistics would allow students to delve into the role of language in the construction of their own racial and ethnic identities. For less diverse populations and in line with what Quan (2020) and Magro (forthcoming) found with more advanced learners exposed to CLA content, these readings may allow learners to become aware of their own unconscious biases and prejudices towards certain varieties and their speakers.

An important issue for our students was whether speaking (or not) Spanish or any HL makes someone less “part of their culture.” Their comments revealed the conflictive nature of the relationship between language and identity, which is certainly a site of struggle for language minorities. Whereas a few students mentioned that speaking the HL is important to “feel a sense of belonging”, the majority concluded that not speaking the language does not make somebody less part of that culture, thus challenging ideologies that identify being Latinx with

speaking Spanish (Tseng, 2021; Urciuoli, 2008) and recognizing a “national” (heritage) right to claim their identity (Parmegiani, 2010). Students also identified society as the force that puts pressure into certain groups to not speak and maintain their languages, which leads to them not “fully representing who they are.” Similarly, all students showed a strong negative opinion towards an “English only” policy or against the existence of an official language, which they understood as a form of discrimination towards language diversity that “could make one group better than another.”

In sum, the student feedback collected in our study seems to indicate that the inclusion of a CLA component facilitated students’ discussion related to critical awareness of linguistic ideologies and their impact on social organization, social change, and resistance to change (Alim, 2010).

## **Investment**

An additional goal of this project was to explore whether having learners read and discuss issues related to the sociopolitical nature of the language had an impact on their level of investment in Spanish and their language learning process. We considered students’ comments and instructor’s notes on class discussions as they offer a small but important window into students’ “choices and efforts in advancing goals of multilingualism” (Anya, 2017, p. 55). The findings revealed that the readings had an impact on their willingness to understand Spanish and its culture, and on how they approached the learning of the language. In other words, the readings and discussions seemed to have helped students be more invested in their own language learning process. One of the students gives us a hint of why this may have happened: “Readings do want to make you want to be interested in learning a language just because of the experiences people face.” It seems that by learning about the sociopolitical nature of the language, students became more likely to connect with the experiences that Spanish speakers face in their community, which led them to understand and enjoy the language more. In line with results in Lado and Quijano (2020), providing content that leads to the development of CLA allowed learners to connect with the language in a way that changed how they approached learning Spanish, which they saw as a local rather than foreign language. Students perceived that the content learned was relevant to their sociocultural reality as it provided them with information on what it means to speak Spanish in their local context. Importantly, a couple of students also verbalized that the readings had changed how they viewed languages in general, with one explicitly mentioning that they affected how she studied.

By learning about standard and stigmatized varieties, Spanish in the US, language attitudes, and identity struggles that local Spanish speakers face, students understand their relationship with the local community and engage with the language learning process as a way to become closer to that community. Students want to belong and build identities within the community, so “they invest time and effort into learning and doing what they believe” (Anya, 2017, p. 29). By doing so, students feel that they “acquire symbolic and material resources which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power” (Darvin & Norton, 2015 p. 37). Ultimately, our results show how investment allows us to explore the role of human agency and identity in engaging with their language learning process (Kramsch, 2013).

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although every effort was made to make groups comparable for the quantitative analyses, we acknowledge the limitations imposed by the quasi-experimental nature of our study and consider our study a pilot that should be replicated with a more robust design. Moreover, although our goal was to explore the effect of including CLA content on classroom performance as measured by the assessment tools included in the classroom, future research should incorporate reliable language learning measures to investigate language development.

Regarding the qualitative results, a few students showed no evidence of CLA development or investment in the questionnaire (although some form of CLA development was evident in all students' homework), which may indicate that students opted not to comment or were not engaged enough with the content to write an elaborated comment in the questionnaire. It is also possible that our measures did not fully account for sources of conflict (as in the case of language and identity) or ideological tensions. As noted by Lado and Quijano (2020), this type of approach "does not impose any type of vision on students but provides them with opportunities to self-reflect hoping that they develop critical linguistic awareness" (p. 157). Future research should include additional quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative measures (e.g., interviews, class observations, students' journals) to provide a broader picture of students' experiences. Additionally, and in order to provide more opportunities for learners to self-reflect, future research should combine the sociolinguistics content (e.g., readings, audiovisual materials) with Spanish lessons designed with a critical approach (e.g., Lado & Quijano, 2020).

Finally, our results are relevant for populations and contexts similar to ours (i.e., language-minoritized learners in urban areas with a large number of Latinxs). However, as Quan (2020) notes, "the work of dismantling inequities should not fall solely on marginalized populations" (p. 900). We concur and support research that shows how this approach is equally important in less diverse contexts to allow students to become aware of their ideologies and privilege as well as social injustices that affect others (e.g., Glynn & Spenader, 2020; Quan, 2020; Magro, forthcoming). Future research should continue to explore the impact of this approach and other critically oriented approaches on different types of populations and contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The results of our study, as discussed in the previous section, allow us, on one hand, to argue against the near-mythical character of exclusive use of the target language in the new language classroom and, on the other, to advocate for a reconceptualization of "new-language teaching" as a component of a broader program of language education. Firstly, inclusion of sociolinguistics contents in English in the quasi-experimental group's syllabus had neither beneficial nor detrimental effect on the students' linguistic progress as measured by standard classroom assessment tools. If our results are further confirmed by new research, we can comfortably continue to experiment with inclusion of sociolinguistics contents from the earliest stages without concern that we might be impairing the conventionally understood language learning process as the incremental acquisition of grammatical forms, lexical items, and communicative functions.

Secondly, the quasi-experimental group's development of critical language awareness resulted, at least in part, from the perception that classroom content was relevant to the interpretation of their lived sociolinguistic experiences. It is precisely this organic connection between the classroom and their social experience that leads students to greater investment in language learning and renders them, perhaps, more likely to further explore linguistic issues.

We find this affect-based initial investment crucial to a later development in students' linguistic education, when linguistic problems can be tackled with some degree of affective distance.

Finally, the syllabus' critical component seems to have worked towards its goal: developing students' awareness of language's implication in the construction of inequality as well as in enabling social change. If we embed "new-language teaching" within a broader project of linguistic education and if we understand education as a critical endeavor, we must engage in course design and classroom strategies that promote student agency, by fostering their ability to use knowledge as a potentially emancipatory tool for social change.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> We follow Hall and Cook's (2012) use of the term *new-language* to refer to the learning of what is usually known as second or foreign language because, for many of our students, Spanish may be the third or even fourth language, not the second. We acknowledge that Spanish is not entirely new for our students due to their close ties with the local Latinx community and to their limited high school experience with the language. The terms *second (L2)* and *foreign language* are used at times in our article to acknowledge the literature using those terms.

<sup>2</sup> A method that was originally used to teach Greek and Latin and is based on teaching grammar in the L1 and translating texts from the new language to the L1.

<sup>3</sup> Hall and Cook (2012) use the term *own-language* to refer to non-target language use in the classroom (traditionally L1). Our students and instructors have different own-languages, but English is the language that they all share and use when communicating in class (when not using Spanish). For that reason, we will later use *shared-language* when referring to the use of English in the classrooms that participated in our research. Nevertheless, in order to account for the different terms used in the literature, we use *shared-language*, *own-language*, or *L1* interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> Although the study includes a majority of L2 learners (23), there were also 7 HL.

<sup>5</sup> In a US context, where English is usually the shared language in higher education.

<sup>6</sup> Although the program is not content-based or task-based per se, the department encourages contextualizing language learning (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) with content (cultural, etc.) and implementing tasks as much as possible so that students benefit from a more inductive approach.

<sup>7</sup> Texts 1, 2, 3, and 4 are from Mar-Molinero (2006) and reading 5 is Zentella (2002).

<sup>8</sup> The placement test used is the WebCape exam, developed by Brigham Young University in the '80s and widely used in the US to place incoming students into new-language classes at the college level.

<sup>9</sup> Even those who reported not having read the readings but still participated in the class discussions.

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