

---

# A PEDAGOGY OF GUILT: A FREIREAN CRITIQUE OF A HEGEMONIC ETHOS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Amy E. Kuiken  
Wilkes University

---

The aim of this article is to develop a critical awareness of a pervasive hegemonic ethos and its dehumanizing impact on Foreign Language (FL) classrooms.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, I draw from Paulo Freire’s discussion of subordination and transformation, *i.e.* of oppression and humanization, as a critical lens through which to view current trends in FL instruction particularly in the United States and invite FL teachers everywhere to reimagine their own praxis in the classroom setting.<sup>2</sup>

The impetus for this analysis stems from my own experience as a French language instructor beginning over a decade ago. Professional development workshops emphasized research that supported maximizing the use of the target language (TL) to help students achieve proficiency.<sup>3</sup> Departmental meetings focused on strategies for conducting lessons entirely in the TL, while parents and educators pointed to immersion programs as evidence of rigor—“serious” language study of the highest caliber. As I moved and took jobs in different schools and settings, the message remained clear: immersion was optimal, therefore instructors ought to rely on the TL as much as possible in their lessons. However, as I observed the utility of other languages in my classroom, I grew increasingly critical of (what I saw as) an unexamined push for immersive FL instruction. Paradoxically, though I could cite reasons for not conducting lessons entirely in French,<sup>4</sup> I still felt guilty about not doing so.

What finally shifted my thinking and feeling on this point came as a result of engaging with scholarly works on effective language instruction. First, I learned that the question of immersive versus non-immersive instruction was

---

<sup>1</sup> I use the term *Foreign Language* to connect the field to its more historical context, although the term *World Language* is often now preferred.

<sup>2</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M. B. Ramos (New Delhi, India: Classics, 2017), 25. Freire’s definition of praxis—“reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it”—captures the relationship that I aim to evoke here between teachers’ feeling, thinking, and doing.

<sup>3</sup> Often called a *second language* (L2), *target language* (TL) may refer (often more accurately) to any language being studied.

<sup>4</sup> In my view, such an approach failed to take into account varying levels of student motivation, reduced my ability to combat anxiety in the classroom, ignored the reality of external time constraints, and overlooked the human element by failing to acknowledge that language exists for people (and not the other way around).

in fact a dynamic and “ongoing debate” for scholars.<sup>5</sup> Far from being a settled issue, scholars were naming it “the most fundamental question facing second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, language teachers, and policymakers.”<sup>6</sup> This question had generated a wealth of scholarship advocating for the “judicious use” of students’ other languages in TL classrooms.<sup>7</sup> While the debate raged over what exactly ‘judicious use’ entailed, few voices were arguing for the total exclusion of students’ first languages (L1s). In addition, I found that scholars had linked teachers’ use of other languages with teacher guilt feelings in this debate;<sup>8</sup> some even proposed developing a more critical awareness in teachers to combat a situation viewed by many as the result of linguistic stigma and hegemonic attitudes.<sup>9</sup> The discussion was vibrant and critical—and I quickly saw its potential to impact my own praxis as it reframed my experience from the personal to the political. Yet almost as swiftly, I realized that the discussion examined the immersion question almost exclusively as it related to teaching English to speakers of other Languages (ESOL) and not my FL teaching context.<sup>10</sup> Issues of teacher guilt feelings, teacher critical awareness, stigma, and hegemony still remain largely a blind spot in FL learning theory and practice today. Where ESOL scholarship has been a hotbed of critical ideas, FL—particularly in the United States—has largely been left out in the cold.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Şeyda Savran Çelik and Selami Aydın, “A Review of Research on the Use of Native Language in EFL Classes,” *The Literacy Trek* 4, no. 2 (2018): 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Macaro, “Overview: Where Should We Be Going With Classroom Codeswitching Research?” *Codeswitching in University English-Medium Classes: Asian Perspectives*, eds. Barnard & McLellan (2014): 10, quoted in Amanda Brown and Robert Lally, “Immersive Versus Nonimmersive Approaches to TESOL: A Classroom-Based Intervention Study,” *TESOL Quarterly* (2019): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Brown and Lally, “Immersive Versus Nonimmersive Approaches,” 1. I acknowledged a vast amount of literature already written on the issue. Also, see Hossein Bozorgian and Sediqe Fallahpour, “Teachers’ and Students’ Amount and Purpose of L1 Use: English as Foreign Language (EFL) Classrooms in Iran,” *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research* 3, no. 2 (2015): 67–81.

<sup>8</sup> Brown and Lally, “Immersive Versus Nonimmersive Approaches,” 1–2; Fiona Copland and Georgios Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2: Complexities and contradictions,” *ELT journal* 65, no. 3 (2010): 270–280.

<sup>9</sup> Such as Çelik and Aydın, “A Review of Research,” 7–9. Also, see Mowla Miri, Goudarz Alibakhshi, and Mahnaz Mostafaei-Alaei, “Reshaping Teacher Cognition About L1 Use Through Critical ELT Teacher Education,” *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 14, no. 1 (2017): 58–98; Jennifer Bruen and Niamh Kelly, “Using a Shared L1 to Reduce Cognitive Overload and Anxiety Levels in the L2 Classroom,” *The Language Learning Journal* 45, no. 3 (2017): 368–381; Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 270–280; Miri, Alibakhshi, and Mostafaei-Alaei, “Reshaping Teacher Cognition,” 58–98.

<sup>10</sup> ESOL is also popularly referred to as English as a Second Language or ESL.

<sup>11</sup> I was not the only language teacher that lacked awareness of the debate: in their study of English teachers in Cyprus, Copland and Neokleous called it noteworthy that “despite the case for L1 teaching having been made fairly forcibly in the literature as a pedagogic

In what follows, I identify an ideological hegemony that prizes an immersive approach to language learning, wherein FL instructors in their classrooms operate as “beings for another.”<sup>12</sup> This loss of pedagogical autonomy weakens their efficacy and may even render FL instructors “slaves” (to borrow G. W. F. Hegel’s language) as evidenced by their compliance with immersive approaches or their guilt feelings linked to non-compliance. In this, I draw on Freire’s ideas to identify a “consciousness of the master”<sup>13</sup> and the need for transforming the resultant “objective reality.”<sup>14</sup> Unlike their ESOL counterparts, many FL teachers have yet to apply Freire’s critical ideas to their own situation. By being left out of the debate, FL teachers are perhaps less likely to contextualize their guilt within a critical framework. This is of vital importance however, if FL educators are to grapple with issues of hegemony and their own dehumanization—not only to become more effective in the classroom, but more “fully human.”<sup>15</sup>

#### THE 90/10 RULE: A PEDAGOGY OF THE REASONABLE

To develop this analysis, I begin by demonstrating why current FL guidelines themselves need not be the focus of efforts to transform “objective reality,” as national FL guidelines and the supporting scholarship are hardly didactic to begin with.

Recently, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) reaffirmed its 90/10 recommendation for teaching in the TL (meaning that instructors use the TL at least 90 percent of the time and any other languages in the classroom less than 10 percent of the time) except in the case of total immersion programs (where the TL is used 100 percent of the time).<sup>16</sup> As the lead organization in the development of national FL standards widely adopted in the United States,<sup>17</sup> ACTFL’s position on maximizing TL use in FL instruction

---

tool . . . this finding does not seem to have reached these teachers, who here professed some unease about using the L1 to teach their learners” and “anecdotal evidence suggests that many [bilingual English teachers] feel the same way,” “L1 to teach L2,” 278–279. Patrick Gaebler, when reporting his own feelings associated with the decision not to teach exclusively in the TL, wrote that he was “starting to understand that many language teachers share my guilty conscience.” “L1 Use in FL Classrooms: Graduate Students’ and Professors’ Perceptions of English Use in Foreign Language Courses,” *CATESOL Journal* 25, no. 1 (2014): 66.

<sup>12</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Freire, 23; While Freire’s connection to Hegel may be more familiar to many readers, it is also important to mention the influence that political theorist Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony had on Freire in this discussion.

<sup>14</sup> Freire, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Freire, 21.

<sup>16</sup> “Use of Target Language in Language Learning,” *ACTFL*, accessed July 31, 2019, <https://www.actfl.org/guiding-principles/use-target-language-language-learning>.

<sup>17</sup> “ACTFL/CAEP Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers Approved.” *ACTFL*, January 22, 2014, <https://www.actfl.org/news/press-releases/actflcaep-program-standards-the-preparation-foreign-language-teachers->

---

is worth noting: the organization has stated that although “The target is to provide immersion in the target language unless there is a specific reason to NOT use the target language. . . . Educators need to be purposeful in their use of the target language in the classroom” and “not just to use the language for the sake of using it.”<sup>18</sup> Thus ACTFL’s guidelines, which allow for teacher discretion, are not overly dogmatic. This position is backed by an enormous body of research which demonstrates that the judicious use of other languages in the classroom can be even more effective than a monolingual approach in terms of acquiring a TL.<sup>19</sup> The organization itself has proudly described the national standards it helped to develop as “broad, visionary, and flexible.”<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the technical wiggle room granted by influential governing bodies such as ACTFL and the wealth of supporting scholarship, in the United States the number of local immersion programs calling for no less than 100 percent use of the TL has been growing steadily.<sup>21</sup> This is concomitant with a prevalent ethos surrounding FL instruction today that takes immersion for granted as a highly effective approach to foreign language instruction.<sup>22</sup> One finds myriad claims that immersion programs are “by far the fastest way to learn a foreign language.”<sup>23</sup> In my own anecdotal experience as a French language instructor, a view commonly held by parents and educators was “the more French used, the better.” This more-is-better ethos is not wrong *per se*; Krashen’s seminal work largely solidified the field’s agreement on this point that students do benefit from increased exposure to the TL.<sup>24</sup> I do not intend to argue against 90 percent-plus TL goals; these are sound principles for language acquisition

---

approved; a full version of the “American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (2013)” can be accessed at

<https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/CAEP/ACTFLProgramStandards2013.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> “Use of Target Language in Language Learning,” *ACTFL*.

<sup>19</sup> Bruen and Kelly, “Using a Shared L1,” 368–381; Jang Ho Lee and Ernesto Macaro, “Investigating Age in the Use of L1 or English-only Instruction: Vocabulary Acquisition by Korean EFL Learners,” *The Modern Language Journal* 97, no. 4 (2013): 887–901. For a pithy synopsis of both sides of the debate, see Brown and Lally, “Immersive Versus Nonimmersive Approaches,” 1–5.

<sup>20</sup> “ACTFL Program Standards (2013),” 20.

<sup>21</sup> Ashley Lenker and Nancy Rhodes, “Foreign Language Immersion Programs: Features and trends over 35 years,” *The ACIE Newsletter* 10, no. 2 (2007): 5, <http://carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol10/BridgeFeb07.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Lenker and Rhodes, “Foreign Language Immersion Programs,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> “Language Immersion Programs: EF Immersion Schools,” *EF Education First*, accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.ef.edu/pg/language-immersion/>.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1982).

---

from the standpoint of cognitive linguistics.<sup>25</sup> While it is always possible to dispute the precise percentage (as indeed many do), this is not my focus here. Rather, this analysis is concerned with the implications of a pervasive—and I argue *unreasonable* (in the sense of uncritical)—approach to language instruction in FL classrooms.

#### HEGEMONY: A PEDAGOGY OF THE UNREASONABLE

One potential impact of this well-meaning yet uncritical popular push for 100 percent TL instruction in American FL classrooms is a situation of linguistic hegemony: an endorsement of one language can be misinterpreted as a call to negate other languages in that environment. After all, if educators accept “the more TL the better,” then it might also reasonably follow that “the fewer other languages used, the better” and finally, by extension, to assume that using no other languages at all is ideal. This extreme assumption, however, leads to a *de facto* state of linguistic hegemony, and what emerges from this line of reasoning is often the stigmatization of other languages which have come to be viewed as potentially detracting from the measurable and prized goal of TL acquisition. Given the link between language and identity, it comes as no surprise that such a detractive view of language can negatively impact second language acquisition and has been harshly criticized by some scholars.<sup>26</sup> While a stigmatizing hegemony devalues identities and harms students’ prognoses vis-à-vis language acquisition, by rendering other languages “off-limits” it may also create a kind of pedagogical hegemony for language teachers. Boundaries are placed on pedagogical experimentation when educators believe they have been locked into a particular pedagogical approach. The rigidity of those boundaries is likely to be influenced by how powerful the hegemonic ethos is.

What suggests that this particular linguistic hegemonic ethos is indeed powerful—acting as a “consciousness of the master” in the praxis of FL teachers—has not been demonstrated by teachers’ total compliance with 100 percent TL ideals. In fact, this level of compliance in FL has often not been the case;<sup>27</sup> multiple studies have shown that the amount of TL used by instructors has varied significantly.<sup>28</sup> It is still possible, however, to appreciate the force of

---

<sup>25</sup> This may raise the question as to whether sound linguistic principles pushing for TL exposure are in fact inherently part of the linguistic hegemony, but it is crucial to note that also from a linguistic viewpoint, 90 percent and 100 percent are quite different.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Leeman, Lisa Rabin, and Esperanza Román-Mendoza, “Identity and Activism in Heritage Language Education,” *The Modern Language Journal* 95, no. 4 (2011): 481–495.

<sup>27</sup> One finds many supporting materials available to “help” teachers with this epidemic “shortcoming.” See, for example, Douglass Crouse, “Going for 90% Plus: How to Stay in the Target Language,” *The Language Educator*, October 2012, [https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TLE\\_pdf/TLE\\_Oct12\\_Article.pdf](https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TLE_pdf/TLE_Oct12_Article.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Aleidine Moeller and Amy Roberts, “Keeping It in the Target Language,” *MultiTasks, MultiSkills, MultiConnections: Selected Papers from the 2013 Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*, ed. Dhonau (2013), 22.

this ethos by examining teachers' guilty feelings as a result of their noncompliance, which I discuss below.

#### LANGUAGE TEACHER FEELINGS: A PEDAGOGY OF GUILT

When teachers have chosen *not* to use the TL, it has often been accompanied by guilt feelings.<sup>29</sup> Language teachers—operating under an ethos whose bottom line is maximum TL use—face a choice: comply, or feel guilty about not complying.<sup>30</sup> The prospect of guilt feelings has caused language teachers to think twice about exploiting the different languages available in a given situation, regardless of their own personal or professional judgements about what languages might be most suitable. According to Copland and Neokleous, guilt feelings caused the teachers to “negatively evaluate perhaps their greatest asset: their L1 proficiency.”<sup>31</sup> As a result of this guilt, another casualty of the hegemony described above is the capacity of many language teachers—as experienced, *reasonable* practitioners—to be fully self-determining (*i.e.* “fully human”) in their own classrooms.

Such undesirable feelings may discourage teachers from otherwise viewing L1s as viable resources; faced with the prospect of experiencing guilt feelings associated with the L1, language teachers could be less willing to consider effective and innovative pedagogical strategies that involve any language other than the TL. Teachers who do continue to use students' L1s in class experience guilt when unable to reconcile conflicting assumptions such as those discussed by Moeller and Roberts, who reported that teachers saw their L1 use as necessary yet still “errant and lamentable.”<sup>32</sup> Others have found that teachers have not always accurately reported their amount of L1 use. Copland and Neokleous posited that contradictions between perception and practice were a result of teacher guilt feelings which resulted in teachers “feeling damned if they use L1 and damned if they do not” when trying to square theoretical ideals with practical realities.<sup>33</sup> Unable to reconcile the uncritical mandates of linguistic

---

<sup>29</sup> Elsa Roberts Auerbach, “Reexamining English only in the ESL classroom,” *TESOL quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1993): 14; Brown and Lally, “Immersive Versus Nonimmersive Approaches,” 1–2; Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 270–280; Gaebler, “L1 Use in FL Classrooms,” 66–94.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of guilt as a “self-critical emotion,” see Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi’s article “Reconsidering the differences between shame and guilt,” *Europe’s journal of psychology* 14, no. 3 (2018): 710–733. For Miceli and Castelfranchi, “guilt implies the conviction of having responsibly broken a norm” meant to benefit the common good; it also implied perspective-taking—particularly seeing the impact of one’s actions through the eyes of others. This concern with impact is consistent with Mawhinney and Rinke’s analysis of teacher guilt as an “emotional labor,” which they linked to teachers’ feelings of care for and responsibility to their students. (“I Just Feel So Guilty,” 1094–1095.)

<sup>31</sup> Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 279.

<sup>32</sup> Moeller and Roberts, “Keeping It in the Target Language,” 22.

<sup>33</sup> Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 271.

hegemony with their own judgements, teachers have consequently found their decision-making process characterized by habitual guilt feelings. The potential impact of this cannot be overstated, with countless language teachers having reported feeling guilty in falling short of TL-only ideals.<sup>34</sup>

This guilt phenomenon is not specific to the most recent generation of language teachers either; a study carried out by Rosamond Mitchell between 1980 and 1984 found that close to a third of a sample of 59 language teachers in Scotland experienced guilt-like feelings, observing that many teachers said they felt they had not used the TL enough. Mitchell attributed this to “methodologists” who had “succeeded in inducing a sense of guilt in teachers.”<sup>35</sup> These “methodologists” were those preoccupied with “general principals” and arguably represent one embodiment of a hegemonic immersive ethos.<sup>36</sup> For Mitchell, their alleged impact on FL instructors was considerable; she observed that some teachers seemed to “confess” what they saw as their own unprofessionalism and “tended to shoulder the ‘blame’ in a personal manner.”<sup>37</sup> Teachers outside Mitchell’s “‘guilty’ group” also agreed that TL as “the norm” was stressful.

As Mitchell’s study highlights, language teacher guilt is a phenomenon not limited to current language teaching in the United States and has existed at least since communicative language teaching’s early years in the 1980s.<sup>38</sup> In fact, not only language teachers, but educators in general, have long experienced negative feelings over their shortcomings in the classroom,<sup>39</sup> and educators

---

<sup>34</sup>Bozorgian and Fallahpour, “Teachers’ and Students’ Amount and Purpose of L1 Use,” 67–81; Brown and Lally, “Immersive Versus Nonimmersive Approaches,” 1–2; Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 270–280; Friederike Fichtner, “Learning Culture in the Target Language: The Students’ Perspectives,” *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German* 48, no. 2 (2015): 229–243; Graham Hall and Guy Cook, “Own Language Use in ELT: Exploring Global Practices and Attitudes,” *Language Issues: The ESOL Journal* 25, no. 1 (2014): 35–43. While beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that women have been found to experience habitual guilt feelings more intensely than men: see Itziar Etxebarria, M. José Ortiz, Susana Conejero, and Aitziber Pascual’s article, “Intensity of habitual guilt in men and women: Differences in interpersonal sensitivity and the tendency towards anxious-aggressive guilt,” *The Spanish Journal of Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2009): 540–554.

<sup>35</sup> Rosamond Mitchell, *Communicative Language Teaching in Practice* (London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, 1988), 28.

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Mitchell, 1. Communicative language teaching (CLT) emerged in FL classrooms in the mid-1970s as a departure from methods of language teaching that had emphasized academic, rather than social, uses of language. CLT is based on socio- and psycholinguistic research, calling for one’s “active involvement” with the TL to develop proficiency.

<sup>39</sup> Andy Hargreaves and Elizabeth Tucker, “Teaching and Guilt: Exploring the Feelings of Teaching,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 7, no. 5–6 (1991): 491–505; Karl F. Wheatley, “The Potential Benefits of Teacher Efficacy Doubts for Educational Reform,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 18, no. 1 (2002): 5–22; Lynnette Mawhinney and

would do well to examine the broader context. However, the guilt associated with a perceived inability to measure up to pedagogical ideals embodied in the current monolingual ethos is arguably unique to the language teacher's experience.<sup>40</sup> While teacher guilt has been linked to burnout and described as “the most dangerous of . . . emotions,”<sup>41</sup> the danger for language teachers in particular lies in the effects of guilt feelings that diminish teacher choice and ultimately limit pedagogical toolkits. While these reasons alone are enough to raise concerns, it is Freire's analysis that reveals a more fundamental reason—beyond diminished teacher choice and weakened FL toolkits—that compels us to challenge an entire “objective reality” shaped by linguistic hegemony. Indeed, we are asked to consider its impact on our being “fully human” as individuals and a society.

“HUMAN IN THE PROCESS OF ACHIEVING FREEDOM”: A PEDAGOGY OF  
THE OPPRESSED

So that people might become more “fully human,” Freire argued for liberation through collaborative student-teacher relationships with the aim of liberating both the oppressed and the oppressor.<sup>42</sup> Both Freire and his predecessor Hegel held that individuals' critical self-consciousness and freedom were essential to this process of liberation or becoming more “fully human.” But whereas Hegel's analysis viewed desiring the negation of the other as a part of an inexorable dialectical process between master and slave, Freire's analysis called for the negation of oppressive institutions and societal forces; in so doing, Freire imagined something more transformative than Hegel's conception of a merely subjective freedom.<sup>43</sup> For Freire, liberation and humanization could not be achieved simply by flipping the oppression from the oppressed onto the oppressor, but rather by both sides working together in the co-creation of a new

---

Carol R. Rinke, “I Just Feel So Guilty: The Role of Emotions in Former Urban Teachers' Career Paths,” *Urban Education* 53, no. 9 (2018): 1079–1101.

<sup>40</sup> Margo DelliCarpini and Susan Adams, “Success with ELLs: Writing in the ESL Classroom: Confessions of a Guilty Teacher,” *The English Journal* 98, no. 3 (2009): 117–120; Samantha J. Hawkins, “Guilt, Missed Opportunities, and False Role Models: A Look at Perceptions and Use of the First Language in English Teaching in Japan,” *JALT Journal* 37, no. 1 (2015): 29–42.

<sup>41</sup> Mawhinney and Rinke, “I Just Feel So Guilty,” 1081.

<sup>42</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>43</sup> Alex Sager, “Rereading Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” June 30, 2017, <https://alexsager.com/2016/05/08/rereading-paulo-freires-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed/>.

---



order.<sup>44</sup> This co-creation would be an “act of love” necessarily initiated by the oppressed.<sup>45</sup>

Freire recognized that such revolutionary action was not without obstacles; when developing an awareness of their ability to impact society, the oppressed risk conflating ‘freedom’ with ‘power over others,’ thus initially aligning themselves with the oppressor. Freire saw this as a “manifestation of the slave’s fear” and held that because the oppressed have adopted and internalized the guidelines of the oppressor, they feared their own freedom, which would require them to replace these oppressive standards with “autonomy and responsibility.”<sup>46</sup> Freire observed that the oppressed nevertheless lack the self-confidence to pursue autonomy due to their “belief in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor.”<sup>47</sup> Freire also suggested that because the oppressor’s image had been internalized, challenging the oppressor “provoked guilt feelings” in the oppressed.<sup>48</sup> That some language teachers can articulate positive reasons for disregarding TL-only guidelines, yet paradoxically still admit their averseness toward doing so,<sup>49</sup> offers compelling evidence that these oppressive guidelines have been internalized; in her work regarding linguisticism, Skutnabb-Kangas went so far as to describe a “colonization of the mind.”<sup>50</sup> For Freire, the reality of internalized oppression made seeking freedom all the more necessary as an “indispensable condition for the quest for human completion,”<sup>51</sup> and fear would thus need to be overcome in order to transform the “oppressive reality.”<sup>52</sup> He proclaimed that “If what characterizes the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master, as Hegel affirms, true solidarity with the

---

<sup>44</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 41; In a linguistic version of a new order, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas imagined a rather utopian “‘multilingualism for all’ paradigm.” For more, see Lara Handfield’s essay, “Teaching Agency and Double Agents: Reconceptualizing Linguistic Genocide in Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 4 (2002): 557, in which she reviews Skutnabb-Kangas’ book, *Linguistic Genocide in Education—or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Luis A. Lei, “Hegel and Critical Pedagogy,” *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2016): 1–5; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 21; Like Freire, Nel Noddings has also valued responsibility, calling it a “powerful concept for teachers” in her critical analysis of contemporary educational standards—particularly when contrasting it with the concept of accountability, *Education and democracy in the 21st century* (Teachers College Press, 2013), 8.

<sup>47</sup> Noddings, *Education and democracy*, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Noddings, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Bozorgian and Fallahpour, “Teachers’ and Students’ Amount and Purpose of L1 Use,” 67–81; Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 270–280; Hall and Cook, “Own Language Use in ELT,” 35–43.

<sup>50</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas as found in Handsfield, “Teacher Agency and Double Agents,” 556.

<sup>51</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Freire, 26.

oppressed means fighting on their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these ‘beings for another.’”<sup>53</sup>

Freire’s caveat was that the oppressed would tolerate their exploitation so long as they lacked awareness of the underlying causes.<sup>54</sup> It is uncertain to what extent FL educators are aware of the situation confronting them,<sup>55</sup> but if one accepts that a fundamental concern of education is our humanity (Freire spoke of “life-affirming humanization”<sup>56</sup>) then it becomes the task of FL educators to develop an awareness—their own and others—of that which impacts the ability to become “fully human.” Freire held in particular that the purpose of a libertarian education was reconciliation,<sup>57</sup> not turning oppressed into oppressors, “but rather restorers of the humanity of both.”<sup>58</sup> This conception of education offers FL educators the potential to become “no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom.”<sup>59</sup>

It is difficult to imagine how the field of FL *tel qu’il est* can participate in the liberation of students and the reconciliation of oppressed and oppressor when many FL instructors are unaware of their own unliberated status. But they *must* grasp the vital importance of liberation, given the potential societal impact of such a hegemonic view. Much is at stake in the future in the public sphere, such as the question of the roles of English and Spanish in the United States, for example. If FL programs across the United States do little to familiarize students with multilingual paradigms, the prospect of finding a critical mass of citizens able to imagine the creation of a new order becomes increasingly more difficult; the language debate in America thus remains binary and potentially antagonistic, with the future always either belonging to the Spanish language *or* the English language. But never both.

While the implications of preserving the hegemonic status quo are overwhelming, Freire’s analysis offers FL educators a starting point, proclaiming that:

<sup>53</sup> Freire, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Freire, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Graham Crookes, “What Influences What and How Second and Foreign Language Teachers Teach?” *The Modern Language Journal* 81, no. 1 (1997): 71–75; Crookes argued that FL teacher education “rarely makes clear” how “FL instruction is a cross-cultural enterprise with strong political connections” that often reflect international power dynamics. FL teachers have continued to hold “an apolitical, ahistorical view of language”, in spite of FL teaching having been at times “a direct instrument of colonialism.” Crookes cautioned that if the applied linguistic research driving FL teacher training does not question the “status quo of the political enterprise of language teaching” it would continue “to prop up what is an inequitable enterprise.”

<sup>56</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Freire, 45.

<sup>58</sup> Freire, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Freire, 49.

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the liberating force for motivating action.<sup>60</sup>

This motivating action becomes possible when language teachers are perceived as having agency rather than as passive instruments, to borrow a distinction explored by Handsfield.<sup>61</sup> She maintained that portraying teachers passively was akin to “deskilling” them.<sup>62</sup> Such deskilling is dehumanizing; in Handsfield’s view, language teachers have been “constructed as non-actors within the educational system and as passive technicians unable to make curricular decisions . . . in other words, as objects to be manipulated by and for the powerful within the system.”<sup>63</sup> Freire’s call to action is therefore concerned with humanization, i.e. freedom.

#### FROM ESOL TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE: SEPARATE PEDAGOGIES

Freire’s call to action for liberation, while inspiring, faces an important challenge: what Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza have identified as “American foreign language teaching’s historical lack of attention to the social and political.”<sup>64</sup> On this point, one observes a disconnect between ESOL and FL disciplines. The work of Bale and others has targeted this disconnect by exploring relationships between ESOL and FL,<sup>65</sup> but the literature on language education in the United States has more typically focused on issues pertaining to either ESOL *or* FL, without much synthesis. Take, for example, the discussion above of hegemony and stigmatization in language learning. Far from being speculation on my part, this has already been observed in the case of American ESOL teaching where English routinely held a uniquely privileged status in the classroom at the expense of other languages and identities.<sup>66</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas referred to English being acquired at the expense of other languages as “subtractive dominant language learning” and noted the pervasiveness of a zero-sum approach with regard to languages.<sup>67</sup> A well-documented movement to

<sup>60</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Handsfield, “Teacher Agency and Double Agents,” 550.

<sup>62</sup> Handsfield, 550.

<sup>63</sup> Handsfield, 550.

<sup>64</sup> Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza, “Identity and Activism,” 481–495.

<sup>65</sup> Jeff Bale, “Heritage Language Education and the “National Interest,” *Review of Research in Education* 38, no. 1 (2014): 166–188; Ofelia García, for example, developed the notion of a political “schizophrenic double-bind” which she saw as linking the fates of both fields (as quoted in Bale, “Heritage Language Education,” 170).

<sup>66</sup> Stephen May, “Justifying Educational Language Rights,” *Review of Research in Education* 38, no. 1 (2014): 232.

<sup>67</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas, *Linguistic Genocide in Education*, xxxiii, 118.

reject this situation in ESOL instruction has led to efforts to reverse the negative stigma by elevating students' other languages along with English;<sup>68</sup> those in the field continue to point to the positive impact that such a shift has had on language acquisition in ESOL classrooms.<sup>69</sup> It is once again a testament to this divide that while ESOL educators and researchers have been concerned with this social and educational impact of linguistic stigma for over a decade,<sup>70</sup> the conversation about devaluing first languages in American FL classrooms is still quiet.

The same disconnect is apparent in practice as well; ESOL and FL programs often have separate resources, terminology, staff, training, materials, classrooms, populations ("immigrant children" vs. elite "English-speaking, college-bound students"<sup>71</sup>). Though differences in terminology are often necessary, I suggest that this further obscures the connections that ESOL and FL have. While students in ESOL are frequently referred to as "heritage language" learners, students in FL (who are quite often native English-speakers) are not considered heritage language learners (due to English's dominant status in the United States). A connection is less readily perceived between the college-bound, native-English-speaking American citizen in her FL French class and the resettled Arabic-speaking immigrant student in her ESOL classes, for example. However, Kelleher defines a heritage language as any non-dominant language in a particular social setting;<sup>72</sup> I suggest, to a certain extent, that this applies to English in the context of an immersive FL classroom under pressure to conform to 100 percent TL use.

Rather than argue that English is currently facing an existential threat (as is the case with other heritage languages in America<sup>73</sup>), my purpose of aligning the status of English in FL settings with other devalued heritage languages in American ESOL settings is to underscore Freire's point: although some may be content that "justice" has prevailed—after all, a less powerful language has been elevated at the expense of a historically dominant, "imperialist" English—the same linguistic-hegemonic oppressive system

<sup>68</sup> Carolyn O'Gorman-Fazzolari, "Becoming Bilingual: Examining Teachers' Perceptions and Practices for Achieving Bilingualism and Biliteracy in English and Spanish in a Two-Way Dual Language Bilingual Education Program," *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 3203 (2017), 30. <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/3203/>

<sup>69</sup> Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza, "Identity and Activism," 481–495.

<sup>70</sup> Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza, "Identity and Activism," 481.

<sup>71</sup> Bale, "Heritage Language Education," 170.

<sup>72</sup> Ann Kelleher, *What is a heritage language?* Heritage Briefs, Center For Applied Linguistics, 2010, accessed October 12, 2019, <http://www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/What-is-a-Heritage-Language.pdf>; Kelleher also points out that alternate terms such as "community language" and "home language" have been used to express the concept.

<sup>73</sup> Erin Haynes, *What is Language Loss?* Heritage Briefs, Center For Applied Linguistics, 2010, accessed October 12, 2019, <http://www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/what-is-language-loss.pdf>; Handsfield, "Teacher Agency and Double Agents," 545.

responsible for devaluing heritage languages is still alive and well. This time it is negating identities in the FL classroom. If we do not see the connection between the fates of heritage languages in ESOL and FL, the linguistic oppression (albeit with roles exchanged) continues to operate. Not only that, it risks being silently reinforced; students and teachers continue to believe, unchallenged, that it is normal in any and all environments to ask which language is operating at the expense of all other languages.<sup>74</sup> Educational institutions do nothing to contest linguistic hegemonic ideas, and the potential impact of it on society at large goes largely unchecked. In this way, FL teachers, faced with societal pressure to conform to monolingual pedagogical practices, unwittingly become perpetuators of linguistic hegemony.

#### DEFIANT ACTS OF LOVE: A PEDAGOGY OF HOPE

Lest this analysis inadvertently depict FL instructors as ESOL’s cousins mindlessly working for a “consciousness of the master,” the fact that FL teachers, like their ESOL counterparts, have reported guilt feelings is actually quite hopeful. These guilt feelings suggest that language teachers are bound by this linguistic hegemony and yet—in spite of this pressure—they are still *not* complying with monolingual expectations 100 percent of the time.<sup>75</sup> The more FL teachers identify parallels between socially-aware critical ESOL practices and their own practice, the more readily they can view their acts of noncompliance as revolutionary acts of defiance, as creative “act[s] of love.”<sup>76</sup> I suggest that this relates to Freire’s discussion when he wrote, “Little by little . . . [the oppressed] tend to try out forms of rebellious action. In working towards liberation, one must neither lose sight of this passivity nor overlook the moment of awakening.”<sup>77</sup>

These rebellious acts connect to a critical and vibrant discussion in educational philosophy. Freire’s moment of awakening, for instance, evokes Noddings’s “critical open-mindedness,”<sup>78</sup> which she felt was needed to recover from the harm done by imperialist thinking. For Noddings, a critical praxis rooted within an ethic of care was also very much a part of teachers’ “deeper responsibility to students.”<sup>79</sup> And other scholars, such as Giroux, Kanpol, Shor and Pari, whose work on resistance situated in their exploration of larger social issues surrounding education and democracy align with Freire’s call to rebellious

---

<sup>74</sup> Leonard Freeman and Bea Staley, “The Positioning of Aboriginal Students and Their Languages Within Australia’s Education System: A human rights perspective,” *International journal of speech-language pathology* 20, no. 1 (2018): 177; Freeman and Staley make a parallel argument in the case of Australia’s One Literacy movement.

<sup>75</sup> Diane Ceo-DiFrancesco, “Instructor Target Language Use in Today’s World Language Classrooms,” *MultiTasks, MultiSkills, MultiConnections* 1 (2013), 6; Copland and Neokleous, “L1 to Teach L2,” 270–271.

<sup>76</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 19.

<sup>77</sup> Freire, 38.

<sup>78</sup> Noddings, *Education and democracy*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Noddings, 3.

---

action.<sup>80</sup> But because FL instruction has been regarded as removed from the overtly politicized questions of education and democracy that have surrounded heritage languages and ESOL, Freire's critical pedagogy has impacted ESOL and FL in different ways. Where it has played a role in redefining pedagogical approaches and the student-teacher relationship in ESOL, critical pedagogy in FL, if it is used at all, has mainly impacted curriculum content, such as lessons *about* diversity, culture, and social justice.<sup>81</sup> Paradoxically, this approach may actually serve to obscure power and privilege in students' and teachers' objective reality.<sup>82</sup> And very often, critical pedagogy is simply absent from FL discussions; an article prepared for ACTFL's newsletter *The Language Educator* listed a range of reasons teachers gave for being reluctant to teach in the TL, without mentioning any critical pedagogical issues at all.<sup>83</sup> Yet FL teachers do not need to reinvent the wheel in struggling for their liberation from a monolingual ethos; in the field of ESOL, scholarship pertaining to the thinking, feeling and doing of ESOL instructors and students exists in abundance on this point, from which FL educators might readily pull. It is therefore vital that FL take advantage of this connection to help them heed Freire's call for "serious self reflection" that impacts praxis.<sup>84</sup> For these reasons, I argue that FL teachers need look no further than the field of ESOL and its application of Freire's critical pedagogy for a roadmap of how to reimagine their own reflective and emotive praxis as an issue of social justice and care for themselves, their students, and society at large.

---

<sup>80</sup> For an extensive annotated bibliography of these and others' work in critical educational theory, see Jon E. Pedersen and Samuel Totten, eds. *Educating About Social Issues in the 20th and 21st Centuries—Vol 4: Critical Pedagogues and Their Pedagogical Theories*. Vol.4 (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2014).

<sup>81</sup> One example of the application of Freire in an ESOL setting was shared by Charlton Bruton of Burapha University, who wrote, "Having taught . . . for over 25 years, it wasn't until I started to use Paulo Freire's 5 step problem-posing process (social action learning) that I began to see real engagement. During the process I give the students the option to use their native language when necessary . . . For me the problem-posing process helps students contextualize the content to their own lives which gives the content personal meaning with their native language as support." Charlton Bruton, post to "Regardless of learners' language ability, should the teachers speak the target language during the class?" Research Gate Forum, January 1, 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/post/Regardless\\_of\\_learners\\_language\\_ability\\_should\\_the\\_teachers\\_speak\\_the\\_target\\_language\\_during\\_the\\_class](https://www.researchgate.net/post/Regardless_of_learners_language_ability_should_the_teachers_speak_the_target_language_during_the_class).

<sup>82</sup> Constance Ellwood, "Uninhabitable Identifications: Unpacking the Production of Racial Difference in a TESOL Classroom," in *Race, Culture, and Identities in Second Language Education: Exploring Critically Engaged Practice*, eds. Ryuko Kubota and Angel Lin (New York: Routledge, 2009): 111.

<sup>83</sup> Crouse, "Going for 90% Plus," 23.

<sup>84</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 39.

## CONCLUSION

The force of a 100 percent TL pedagogical ideal has led educators, students and communities to accept percentages as rigid ends rather than discretionary means, which are then imposed—as Hegel and Freire’s “consciousness of the master”—on FL instructors as evidenced by FL teachers’ reluctance to go against monolingual pressure in spite of their own professional judgement that it may not be the most effective approach in all situations. If our biggest concern in FL teaching is with measurable percentages, we risk devaluing this professional judgment and making FL instructors into Hegel’s “slaves” limited by pressure to comply and guilty feelings. Recent scholarship has underscored the importance of empowering teachers to make their own pedagogical decisions,<sup>85</sup> but it is imperative that language educators themselves develop a critical awareness of the forces influencing their praxis. Handsfield recognized that ignoring teachers “in any discussion of educational change or reform is to doom that discussion to failure.”<sup>86</sup>

Rather than completely miss the resulting pedagogical, human, and social collateral damage, we can recognize, as Freire did, that any situation in which “‘A’ [hinders ‘B’ in] his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression.”<sup>87</sup> It is imperative to acknowledge that framing the experience of FL educators in this way must not serve to take anything away from others’ historical and catastrophically tragic experiences of oppression. However, by understanding this as oppression, FL teachers can view their guilt feelings not simply as the result of personal shortcomings, but as a product of persistent and pervasive dehumanizing oppression in need of dismantling. FL educators have an opportunity to reimagine themselves, their students, and their society as “no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom.”<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Bruen and Kelly, “Using a Shared L1,” 11; Şeyda Savran Çelik and Selami Aydın, “A Review of Research on the Use of Native Language in EFL Classes,” *The Literacy Trek* 4, no. 2 (2018): 1–2.

<sup>86</sup> Handsfield, “Teacher Agency and Double Agents,” 553.

<sup>87</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> Freire, 23.

---