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WHAT MEXICAN DEAF CULTURE AND EPISTEMOLOGIES BRING TO CRITICAL SPANISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS

I would have you understand deafness is no handicap.
Rather it is the ignorance and attitude of the majority that make it inconvenient.
One's very approach to life made thus by deafness, may be more mature,
more aware, and more encompassing than yours.

–Dr. Mervin Garretson
To You Who Do Not Understand

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In this article, we elaborate on our journey as researchers and educators developing cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). Moreover, we describe a pedagogical approach to developing critical literacy among hearing and Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) students in higher education enrolled in the School of Architecture and Design (SAD) at a Mexican university. We argue for a Critical Sociocultural Linguistic Literacy (CriSoLL) approach. CriSoLL-based pedagogies have the potential to support students in critically evaluating their own sociolinguistic practices and developing other languages and styles beyond notions of "correctness" and normative cultural hegemony in academic settings that still follow and perpetuate ideologies of "deficiency." Through CriSoLL, as a team of researchers and educators, we have started developing materials to develop critical literacy. In this paper, we also share these Open Educational Resources as thematic units that offer opportunities for shifts in attitudes and beliefs about how people's ways of communication are perceived and the social meanings associated with how they look and/or sound. We believe this approach supports creating a more inclusive campus climate that better understands and serves all students.

Keywords: Deaf and Hard of Hearing ◆ critical literacy ◆ critical pedagogies ◆ language education ◆ U.S.-Mexico border

Introduction

This article explores our experiences as researchers and educators in cultivating cultural humility, understood as the continuous learning to collaborate with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds while acknowledging social hierarchies and power dynamics (see Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). Moreover, we describe a pedagogical approach to developing critical literacy among hearing and Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) students in higher education enrolled in the School of Architecture and Design (SAD) at a Mexican university. We argue for a Critical Sociocultural Linguistic Literacy (CriSoLL) approach that brings critical awareness and knowledge regarding four relevant elements (Holguín Mendoza, 2022; Holguín Mendoza & Sánchez Walker, 2024). One element in CriSoLL is developing Critical Language Awareness (CLA) (Fairclough, 1995) to identify implicit language ideologies and power relations in sociolinguistic practices. CLA problematizes appropriateness models that "block a critical understanding by ideologically collapsing political projects and actual practices, and they block a creative and critical language practice by foregrounding normativity and training in appropriate behavior" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 251). A second aspect of CriSoLL emphasizes acquiring background knowledge of speakers' historical context and how language and languagers become stigmatized or marginalized. The third element emphasizes literacy of social hierarchies and relationships through power and difference, such as racial literacy or in relation to (dis)abilities. In this type of literacy, intersectionality informs us how multiple identity elements cluster and intersect, creating different experiences and forms of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991), which in turn affect how

people interact in the world. Lastly, the fourth element centers on developing a deeper understanding of sociopragmatic and stylistic language variation and how certain language forms index and enregister different social meanings (Agha, 2007), particularly those related to race and ability, but also to class, gender, Indigeneity, and sexuality, among others. Using these four elements of CriSoLL (see Holguín Mendoza & Sánchez Walker, 2024), we propose tools to develop deep reflexivity, including cultural humility, to disrupt ableism, racism, and "deficit ideologies" in general terms. Additionally, we include some examples of these pedagogical practices and materials.

As a teaching philosophy, the CriSoLL approach invites educators and students to collectively interrogate education's role as a normalizing system within modernity that perpetuates the status quo within capitalist societies (see de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2012; de Oliveira Andreotti, 2014). We aim to pay closer attention to our pedagogical practices and how they contribute to societal power dynamics. We strive to take direct action against the language subordination process (Lippi-Green, 2004) in education and society at large which promotes a standard language variety above others as a national symbol as well as social capital to achieve economic and social success. Within this language subordination process, the "other" non-standard varieties acquire social meanings of backwardness, ignorance, and/or deficiency (Lippi-Green, 2004). Through these types of associations in Western societies, people have been marginalized and racialized through their linguistic practices (Baker-Bell, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Further, the discriminatory practices in Western education systems reflect unjust structures that not only oppress and exploit people but are unrealistic and, as such, are actually failing.

Through CriSoLL, as a team of researchers and educators, we have started developing materials for Mexican DHH students (as well as for students from all backgrounds) in a collaboration between two institutions of higher education on the Mexico-U.S. border region to develop critical literacy. Although most DHH people self-identify themselves with the "disability" label, many others prefer to describe their identities differently (Ladau, 2021). For instance, some people prefer *person-first language*, which stresses that people should not be defined by their disabilities, such as referring to "people who use wheelchairs" (Ladau, 2021, p. 11). Other people prefer *identity-first language*, acknowledging disability as what makes them who they are (Ladau, 2021). Our proposal centers on developing this kind of knowledge as critical literacy and awareness of different cultures among communities long marginalized and oppressed, not only for students but also for educators alike. This approach supports creating a more inclusive campus climate that better understands and serves all students on both sides of the border. We have included engaging activities that offer opportunities for shifts in attitudes and beliefs about how people's ways of communication are perceived and the social meanings

associated with how they look and/or sound. We are conscious that this is a preliminary attempt within a small interdisciplinary group of researchers and educators in higher education. We understand that the road to sociolinguistic justice is long and strenuous. However, we are determined to continue our journey even when we know we may not see many real changes in our lifetimes. Based on previous and ongoing research on CriSoLL applications on Spanish language education for SHL (Spanish Heritage Language) and L2 (additional language) learners (Holguín Mendoza, 2022; Holguín Mendoza & Sánchez Walker, 2024; see also Boyero Agudo, 2023; Mendoza Casanova, 2024; Sánchez et al. 2024; Venegas, 2024), our proposal not only aims to develop critical literacy but also to increase students' confidence in their social and language skills and open up opportunities for other students from more privileged backgrounds to engage more meaningfully in academia and, ultimately, in society. Transformation towards a more inclusive society unfolds when we engage in practices that develop our awareness and change our attitudes, biases, and responses to social oppression and adversity.

The first author is a first-generation, cisgender, hearing Mexican-border woman with an academic background in sociolinguistics. Her understanding of Mexican DHH people and their cultures is limited. However, as a critical researcher and educator, her efforts center on better understanding the experiences of DHH students, as well as the multiple relationships they frequently navigate inside and outside their communities. The second author is a hearing Mexican cisgender woman. She possesses an academic background in graphic design theory and its application to graphic composition. With this research project, she has started studying LSM to collaborate with DHH students in the creation of LSM teaching materials for the Architecture and Design area of studies at her institution on the Mexican side of the border. She seeks to promote inclusive LSM self-education approaches for DHH and hearing students. The third author is a white, European, cisgender, hearing woman with a background in education. As a former K-12 Spanish teacher, she is aware of the need to develop inclusive classroom materials that promote critical thinking for all students. Her academic work focuses on community-centered approaches to teaching Spanish using the four elements of CriSoLL. As such, she is dedicated to learning more about the experiences of DHH students and how Spanish classrooms may incorporate critical approaches that promote linguistic agency in students' various interactions both within and outside the classroom. The fourth author is a cisgender, hearing Mexican woman, mother of a young deaf woman, and LSM user for approximately twenty-four years. Through the years accompanying her daughter and other DHHs in her community, she has witnessed how these communities of Mexican DHH people navigate life in dominant hearing Western cultures. She makes use of her background in graphic design and experience with LSM to develop inclusive teaching materials for LSM learning in collaboration with different campus sectors to improve the experiences of DHH students. The fifth author is

a deeply deaf cisgender woman who uses LSM and grew up in a hearing family. She earned an undergraduate degree in Arts and works as an activist and advocate to defend and promote the rights of DHH people. As a result of this research, as well as previous experiences, she is interested in continuing with the design of educational material that promotes sociolinguistic justice within the promotion of LSM. Specifically, she is concerned with applying the four elements proposed in CriSoLL to the design of educational materials, as well as contributing to student success in the area of graphic design.

As a team, we are committed to a journey of deep reflexivity, acknowledging our own subjectivities as hearing people wanting to learn about the experiences of discrimination of Mexican DHH people. We are dedicated to creating more learning spaces and opportunities to develop a critical awareness of sociolinguistic practices and how historical events have shaped and still structure the hegemonic culture, where we relate to each other within power and oppressive relationships. We seek to implement the findings of our research in a way that transforms the educational experiences of Mexican DHH and strengthens their sense of community connection and belonging. Moreover, we hope our findings and pedagogical developments are applied in the U.S. Spanish language classrooms to promote critical literacy regarding Mexican border DHH cultures.

Mexican and Latinx Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in higher education

There is a lack of research on pedagogical approaches for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) students in higher education in the U.S. (Skyer, 2023), particularly for DHH students of Color. García-Fernández (2022), a DeafChicana scholar, exposes how even though the work of researchers on critical approaches such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) have been monumental:

> the lived experiences and issues of critical scholars of Color–in an aural society–are deeply ingrained in hearing epistemology. As such, the discourse around language rights and accent discrimination focuses on spoken and written languages such as Spanish, Indigenous, or/and English, regardless of whether the specific context is related to education or the greater society. The automatic exclusion of sign language is not even a conscious decision. (García-Fernández, 2022, p. 47)

García-Fernández criticizes Deaf epistemology for its Eurocentrism and proposes Deaf-Lat to challenge "the shortcomings of a White Deaf-centric historical and ideological representation of Deaf-Lat students" (2022, p. 68). Researchers and Educators who center their work on Deaf-Lat epistemology(ies) strive to transcend both conventional audistic knowledge frameworks and Euro-American Deaf epistemological perspectives that fail to acknowledge the complex

identities of Deaf-Lat students (García-Fernández, 2014, p. 68). More explicitly, García-Fernández states that:

> 1. Deaf-Lat scholars employing Deaf-Lat epistemology look beyond Euro-American Deaf culture, Deaf identity, and ASL. Deaf-Lat epistemology also stresses the importance of recognizing all intersecting identities of Deaf-Lat students such as race, ethnic, class, gender, sexual, nationality, phenotype, language, immigration status, and religion.
>
> 2. Deaf-Lat scholars compile scholarship about the richness of Deaf-Lat epistemology(ies) to counter traditional epistemological audism and racism, and Deaf-centric epistemological racism.
>
> 3. Deaf-Lat scholars assure Deaf-Lat students are in the center when they are involved in the process of research. In this process, Deaf-Lat students are empowered to share their experiences and knowledge.
>
> 4. Deaf-Lat epistemology is built on knowledge about Deaf-Lat students. It builds on questions about who interprets Deaf-Lat experiences, and how the knowledge gained is being legitimized or not.
>
> 5. In the process of collaboration, Deaf-Lat scholars further expand the definition of Deaf-Lat epistemology by conducting research on the experiences and lives of Deaf-Lat students.
>
> 6. Deaf-Lat scholars in education employing Deaf-Lat epistemology acknowledge their role in the area of advocacy where they fight to end academic social injustice. (García-Fernández, 2014, p. 68)

In this way, Eurocentric Deaf epistemology is aggravated by other "deficit" ideologies, generalized misbeliefs, and by lack of research and critical analysis (Swanwick, 2017) that "results in weak, un-reflexive praxis that, as some research shows, negatively affects classroom-based pedagogical practices for teachers and learning experiences for students" (Hunter, 2015; Skyer, 2023, p. 120).

Moreover, Henner (2024), using a CripLinguistics framework that combines disability theoretical approaches with linguistics, exposes how non-normative languaging is often scrutinized and assessed through a "clinical gaze," in which people, many of whom are still young children, are given labels such as "*disordered language, atypical language*, and *specific language impairments*, among others. They are then othered from 'typically developing children'" (Henner, 2024, p. 23). In this sense, Henner (2024), following Haagaard (2022), defines disability as "a fluid state wherein people are viewed as harmful to society depending

on how many resources, in money, time, or caregiving, are required to help them behave in ways that society considers ideal. The harm is calculated by outlays of resources (e.g., cash or time, among others); disabled people are necessarily more expensive than abled people," a model that has been known as "parasitic disability" (Henner, 2024, p. 22). Henner (2024) adds that Critical Disability Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma & Hardy, 2021) counterparts parasitic disability theory in that those labeled as "non-normative" need special interventions at the expense of the school and the community resources.

In Mexico, DHH students are continuously marginalized within deficit paradigms that ignore Deaf Cultures (Campos Bedolla et al., 2017; Cruz Cruz & Cruz-Aldrete, 2013; Jullian Montañez, 2002; Martínez Buenabad, 2015) and epistemologies and prevent them from gaining access to education. At the same time, DHH students are pressured to acquire standardized written and oral Spanish varieties, particularly standard written ideals (Cruz-Aldrete, 2008). DHH university students wanting to pursue a higher education degree in certain areas of expertise lack access to academic materials given that scholarly texts are not available in LSM—the first and primary language of many DHH people. Due to historical discrimination and lack of support for DHH people, much of the specialized vocabulary in academic texts simply does not exist in LSM. Reading scholarly articles, attending class lectures, and writing their assignments, among other academic activities, present a challenge for DHH students who might not fully understand academic concepts that are new to them in written Spanish (Cruz-Aldrete, 2008). Further, because Spanish is a second language for many of them, and because of a lack of support in their K-12 education, they often produce second language forms that are considered "non-standard" both orally and in writing and that are either not accepted or perceived as "deficient" by many of their university educators and peers (Cruz-Aldrete, 2008). Their spelling, as well as their morphosyntactic and phonetic uses, might differ from that of "standard" Spanish, so students are mistakenly deemed as cognitively lacking within ideologies of "deficiencies" rooted in racism and eugenics (Cruz-Aldrete, 2008; see also Skyer & Cochell, 2020).

Deficit perspectives and ableism in education for the DHH community have not occurred in a vacuum. Education for DHH people in Mexico and the U.S. has historically been characterized by debates regarding an emphasis on the teaching of oral languages and restraining the teaching of sign languages. These marginalizing perspectives are still present in all levels of education and continue to exclude students from participating in critical and deep, thought-provoking discussions in the classroom. More importantly, for university students, their experiences become, in many cases, deeply frustrating and, in many other cases, traumatic. Many of the misunderstandings and difficulties in Deaf education today are the product of historical

unawareness, ignorance, linguicism, and other discriminatory ideologies that have resulted in paternalistic maltreatment at the very least (Bauman, 2008).

Moreover, there is a long history of racist ideologies that have dehumanized people who do not conform to an ideal of "health" and "racial purity" based on hegemonic whiteness (Ferri & Connor, 2014). It goes without saying that these ideologies of deficiency go beyond education. However, our scope as researchers and instructors in higher education is limited, and our concern centers on supporting students who suffer harmful linguistic discrimination not only from society at large but also from institutions while trying to obtain a degree in higher education.

Linguicism and raciolinguistic ideologies in higher education

Our team has observed that education for DHH people in Mexico has historically also been characterized by debates regarding an emphasis on teaching oral languages and restraining the teaching of sign languages. Because of dominant ideologies that prioritize oral communication, as well as a lack of resources and awareness of DHH students' needs in terms of their language development, many DHH students (and their families) have not been given proper support for learning LSM (Cruz-Aldrete, 2014). In Mexico, much of the education offered to DHH people was based on teaching them Spanish orally, even though many DHH children could not acquire it successfully to understand or communicate thoroughly (Cruz-Aldrete, 2014). According to Cruz-Aldrete (2014), this resulted in a continuum of children who did not acquire a language, others who had learned some oral Spanish but did not know LSM, and others with limited knowledge of both LSM and Spanish. In this way, many of these children have been deprived of acquiring a first language (L1) and thus have had limited exposure to sociocultural concepts and knowledge to develop their learning and cognitive abilities (Cruz-Aldrete, 2014). Our team observed how DHH students in higher education in Mexico are assumed to possess 'superior proficiency' in Spanish, primarily written, without considering these historical and sociocultural facts regarding the violent oppression of DHH people and communities in the country.

Moreover, through our journey in developing cultural humility and critical literacy, we now better understand these students' experiences and are better prepared to create opportunities for other educators to develop critical awareness and literacy about the ways in which we need to make changes to education systems in higher education in general. More specifically, by working on this project, as researchers and as educators in the area of Architecture and Design (on the Mexican side of the border) and Spanish Heritage language education (on the U.S. side of the border), we have become aware of our own hegemonic and paternalistic practices. On

the U.S. side of the border, Mexican and other Latinx Spanish Heritage language (SHL) students have been marginalized because of the Spanish varieties they speak and write. While SHL scholars and educators have made gains in transforming the pedagogical models that have perpetuated marginalizing language ideologies about the language varieties many Latinx students bring to the classroom and the racialization of them and their communities, these conditions persist in many university programs across the U.S. Moreover, intersectionality as the complex configuration in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination convene and intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized people or groups (Crenshaw, 1991), allows us to expose the unique experiences of DHH students as well as to better understand other experiences of linguistic discrimination that are still normalized and mostly unaddressed in higher education (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Martínez & Train, 2020). We address linguicism as a type of racism argued on language practices (Mahboob & Szenes, 2010; Phillipson, 1992). We also consider how this kind of discrimination correlates ideologies of language with those of race or what has been theorized as raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Nowadays, we can no longer legally discriminate against people for their perceived race, yet societies still discriminate against others for their linguistic practices or "lack" of them (Lippi-Green, 2004). Nevertheless, in liberal Western education where a discourse of meritocracy and "equal opportunities" prevail, "underachievement" or "lack of success" is often blamed on the students without consideration or acknowledgment of the real system of whiteness in which all institutions inhabit and perpetuate (García-Fernández, 2020; Kubota, 2004; Lawyer, 2018).

A unique interdisciplinary and transnational collaboration

The authors of this paper first established a collaboration between their two institutions across the Mexico-U.S. border in 2019. Since the beginning, we understood that Mexican and Latinx border Deaf Culture and Deaf Communities' knowledge should be incorporated as the basis of our project. However, we recognized that we were unprepared to immerse ourselves in Deaf Education and theory. As a team, we knew we would have so much to learn regarding the experiences of DHH students in Mexico; however, our journey has been even more challenging. First, we had to navigate the COVID-19 global pandemic, including closing the international border between Mexico and the U.S. Moreover, even when we knew the multilayer aspects of critical awareness that we needed to study, we were unprepared to come out of our comfort zones in order to accept what is needed to intervene and disrupt hegemony and normalcy in higher education. Later, we realized that this project would take us on a long personal journey first and on another learning process as a group. After many years, we are now more critically aware and better prepared to recognize that all education should be inclusive and open to Deaf diversity and Deaf Culture. Following and adapting Skyer and Cochell's (2020) research objectives, as well as following a decolonial approach (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2014; Guerrero-

Cantor, 2019; Lawyer, 2018) in the first stages of our research in the collaborative project described here, we asked the following research questions:

1. Regarding Deaf education in institutions of higher education, what power relationships exist between dominant standardized language varieties such as LSM, oral and textual Spanish, as well as other marginalized varieties such as non-language communication modes?
2. What type of critical literacy practices promote equitable social relations, as well as critical consciousness and literacy in education for DHH?
3. How would decolonial and diverse education look like for DHH?
4. How could CriSoLL materials be adapted to develop critical literacy in relation to DHH students?

Eugenics and the origins of "deficit" ideologies and ableism in academia

During our journey as a team, we have identified the main audist normalized narratives, informed by raciolinguistic ideologies, that marginalize DHH students in the education system and society in general. First, early in our research on Deaf Education, particularly in Mexico, we saw the clear relationship between racist ideologies and ableism (e.g., Dávila, 2015; Ennis, 2015). Moreover, since half of the team had already been working on Critical Pedagogies in relation to Spanish as a Heritage language in the U.S., we were able to relate and contrast dominant audist narratives regarding the "deficient" Spanish oral and written proficiency and abilities of DHH people within raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) marginalizing Latinx bilingual students in the U.S. (e.g., Martinez & Train, 2020). Since its origins as a discipline in the 1960s, educational linguistics has attempted to address the relationship between language, education, and social disparities (Flores & Saldívar García, 2020). While the scope of this area of study has moved toward the understanding of sociolinguistic discrimination and sociolinguistic justice, there is still much work to do (Charity Hudley et al., 2020). We aim to engage critically with the ideological foundations behind academic language's discursive practices while building on the work of other scholars and educators who are challenging the "deficit perspectives" of racialized bilingual students in marginalized communities. In this way, we align with proposals that do not focus exclusively on linguistic solutions. According to Flores and Saldívar García (2020), educational linguistics has been "complicit in the production of a theory of social change that identifies the root of the challenges confronting racialized bilingual communities as linguistic and the solution as the modification of their language practices" (p. 188).

In this manner, our team focused a large amount of time and resources on developing a more solid background on the origins of social discrimination of DHH and their communities. It was

not a surprise to learn about how discrimination and marginalization based on social class, as well as race, have historically been factors in the discursive construction of (dis)ability and ableism (Ferri & Connor, 2014; Franklin, 1987). However, we became aware that in the particular case of DHH people, oppression has other numerous ideological layers that require multiple interrogations and hyper-reflexivity that allow us to understand the unequal systems of knowledge and power production in the educational system and society at large.

"Deficit" ideologies in modern academia have long-term roots. Mid-nineteenth-century "freak" shows exploited non-normative bodies, encompassing ideologies and discourses of social class, cultural deficit, and "feeblemindedness" (Franklin, 1987). These ideologies proliferated in the 1920s, reflecting the eugenics movement, and continued flourishing in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly these discourses of poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ennis (2015) exposes how eugenic ideologies have been present for most of the early accounts of DHH people. In his research on the largest and most prestigious institution of education for deaf people in the world, Gallaudet University on the U.S. East Coast, Ennis (2015) explores the discursive intersections of eugenics, heredity, marriage, and reproduction as they occurred in the publications of this institution, which since 1862, the time of its foundation, was called the National Deaf Mute College.

Moreover, historical accounts have also shed light on the complexity of the conflation of several types of ideological approaches implemented throughout the years. For instance, Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone and husband to Mabel Gardiner Hubbard, a deaf woman, actually advocated for deaf people during his participation in the Eugenics Society when some of his colleagues preferred more severe eugenic measures such as preventing them from marrying and procreating, fearing that they would contribute to the spreading of DHH children into society (Ennis, 2015). Oralism, in contrast to manualism, an educational approach for DHH people that favors lipreading and speech without using hands, was essentially eugenic (Ennis, 2015). As a matter of fact, oralist educators and health workers, among other stakeholders in the academic literature, including Bell, are depicted as the main actors coercing DHH people not to have children. Ennis (2015) specifically states that this literature "on deaf history invariably frames all issues as a binary process of assimilation and resistance, i.e., oralists enforcing oral methods on the deaf, and deaf people's resistance through the use of sign language" (p. 38). In summary, eugenics definitely affected DHH people, and its long-term discursive effects are not only still prevalent in academia and society at large but are more subtle and harder to estimate than loathsome eugenic measures such as abortions and sterilizations (Ennis, 2015).

In this manner, as DisCrit scholars seeking to "understand the social function of deficit culture by examining political inequities based on the social constructions of disability and race,"

(Ressa & Danforth, 2023, p. 150) have observed, injustice and discrimination target people's bodies and minds, viewing both as "impaired and dark-skinned" (p. 150). Thus, "dis/ability" and "race" have been discursively co-constructed and used to legitimize and reinforce each other in defining and perpetuating "inferior" beings (Dávila, 2015; Ressa & Danforth, 2023). Within this project, we seek to understand the relationship between raciolinguistic ideologies, ableism, and whiteness. The process of racialization came to exist based on categories of "people of color" invented against the naturalized condition of whiteness as the normalized way of existing. Whiteness was invented for people racialized as white to function "through the assumption of a purity condition for themselves in the context of a colonial relation with other peoples of different shades" (Marinot, 2003, p. 23). Our objective is to create more spaces not just to talk about race, racism, ableism, and linguicism, but to learn how to disrupt oppression for social transformation.

Eugenics and "racial improvement" in Mexico

Similarly, the eugenics and mental hygiene ideologies that emerged and proliferated in the first part of the 20th century in Mexico were fundamental for the social engineering program established after the Mexican Revolution (Urías Horcasitas, 2004). Following Galton's social Darwinism, from 1920 to 1940, the Mexican government centered on "improving" society. Their goal was to stimulate the creation of a physically and medically "regenerated" population. On the one hand, elite anthropologists and ethnologists designed an "Indigenist" initiative in order to integrate all Indigenous groups into the rest of the population through mestizaje (Urías Horcasitas, 2004). On the other hand, following new developments in the world, medicine in Mexico also proposed establishing prophylactic measures to prevent "degenerative inheritance" that was believed to cause addiction to alcohol and drugs, as well as mental illnesses, sexual deviation, and criminal propensities. Moreover, since its foundation in 1931, the Mexican Society for Racial Improvement engaged in campaigns to inform the population about the presupposed relationship between inheritance and mental illnesses, addiction, and criminality (Suárez & López Guazo, 2005). Biological determinism became the dominant explanation of all social phenomena in Mexico (Suárez & López Guazo, 2005).

In this way, the development of biological determinism and reductionism in Europe and the United States granted more power and representation to doctors and anthropologists closest to the elites in Mexico. Racist ideologies became hegemonic, and meritocracy was explained by hereditary characteristics and proposals to sterilize people with inferior IQ results (Suárez & López Guazo, 2005). This ideological reductionism highly influenced Mexican politics and policy implementation. By the 1930s, eugenics consolidated in Mexico along with nationalism and the establishment of the Mexican Society of Eugenics and Racial Improvement (Suárez &

López Guazo, 2005). Unlike other countries, Mexican eugenics promoted a "beneficial" racial blending among Indigenous people, Criollos, and Europeans. Additionally, along with other Latin American countries, Mexico promoted regulation of procreation and sterilization; many of these programs were established in the state of Veracruz in the 1930s, a state with a historically high representation of Afro-Mexicans from slavery in Mexico (Vasquez, 2010). These particular ideological trends were influenced by beliefs about "moral weaknesses and deficiencies;" and were also influenced by eugenics proponents in the U.S., who emphatically recommended sterilization in the whole Mexican territory (Vasquez, 2005).

Additionally, the discourses surrounding disabilities and education in academia have been overly focused on the "achievement gap" and the overrepresentation of certain students in special education, such as historically underserved racialized students (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002), as well as socioeconomically disadvantaged and disabled students (Ferri & Connor, 2014; Trent, 2010). There is still much work to do in relation to changing perceptions of "correctness," "purity," and "ability" under colonial Western ideologies. As Puerto Rican philosopher Maldonado-Torres (2004) observes, the darker side of modernity constitutes the "epistemically neutral subject" who comes from a privileged background that tends to believe that their understanding of the world is valid for the rest of beings. Maldonado-Torres (2004), drawing on the writings of Mignolo and Quijano, exposes how *coloniality of power,* as an analytical concept that helps us understand the current and dominant Eurocentric knowledge production and control, has been in power after the preliminary European colonization period. Coloniality of power as a type of universalism dominates discourses of "the other" as "uncivilized" and does not allow educators and students to accept other types of knowledge and of being in our current society. In this way, a focus on deep self-reflexivity as an "opening to modes of being not anchored in (allegedly) universal reason" (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2014, p. 88) is urgently needed.

Challenges for Deaf students in a border Mexican university

In 2020, the Office of Student Services (Coordinación General de Servicios Estudiantiles y Gestion Escolar, CGSEGE) at the Mexican university in Mexicali, Baja California, identified seven deaf students and sixteen more with hearing loss among the student body. Ten of these students were students on the Mexicali campus. Together, the Ensenada, Tijuana, and Mexicali campuses have admitted a total of twenty-three deaf students in the last two years (Martínez Soto, 2022, p. 139).

This team of educators, particularly those who work on the Mexican campus, identified the need to design materials that support Spanish language development among DHH students. They also corroborate the existence of Eurocentric epistemologies under the coloniality of

power within the requirements for students in this institution (Mendoza Casanova, 2024). This parallels other sociolinguistic and raciolinguistic ideologies found in other contexts, such as the area of Spanish Heritage language education (including the teaching of oral and written skills) in the U.S. However, as described above, ableism toward the DHH community possesses its own set of biases and ideologies that represent many obstacles for them. Thus, there are several challenges that DHH students in this Mexican institution of higher education face while trying to complete their degrees. One of the main challenges for these students is the requirement to register for six to eight courses per semester at SAD to maintain full-time status. This academic load represents a great challenge for DHH students, particularly because they lack access to educators and sign language interpreters fluent in LSM and reading materials that connect with images to facilitate comprehension.

DHH students in Mexico currently have access to K-12 education through the *Modelo Educativo Bilingüe Bicultural*, MEBB (Bilingual and Bicultural Education Model). This approach not only supports a DHH person in acquiring LSM but also a family member. In this way, the DHH student can also acquire Spanish as a L2 with the support of family and also establish a connection with the local DHH community. This MEBB approach opens the door to DHH people to a space where two languages and two cultures co-exist (Cruz-Aldrete, 2008). Although students arrive at the UABC campus having studied under the MEBB approach, there are still many challenges for them.

For instance, SAD in this Mexican border university has already supported DHH students by providing a digital voice transcription system consisting of a microphone headset, a laptop, and the university's Wi-Fi connection. The class instructor must wear the headset so the DHH student is able to receive the transcription. However, it is necessary that the instructor speak clearly in order for this system to work, and a good Wi-Fi connection is required. Moreover, the instructor must restate the other students' questions or lend the headset to another person speaking so the DHH student can follow. However, this transcribing software does not distinguish between different voices, and it may be difficult to distinguish different people speaking on the transcription. More importantly, specialized academic language by subjects can make comprehension challenging. This is one of the biggest challenges because DHH students must carry the burden of conducting their own research trying to understand academic concepts in every subject. In the field of Architecture and Design, as with many other academic areas of study, academic vocabulary has been gradually incorporated into LSM as a few deaf students have completed undergraduate and graduate degrees within the last decades. However, most of the vocabulary has not yet been systematically codified. In other words, there is a need to create many lexical items in LSM (Mendoza Casanova, 2024). Even though deaf students use Spanish in their academic interactions and written assignments, it is imperative for them to possess the

technical terminology of their professions in their first language. As more DHH students complete their higher education degrees, there will be a need to develop more academic neologisms in LSM in every profession.

In addition to developing more lexical items in LSM, it is important for academic institutions to rethink how they provide instruction for DHH people. While supplying tools such as headsets are a starting point for beginning to include DHH people in class discussions, they place the burden on the DHH person to adapt to a classroom format and curriculum that is not necessarily inclusive and relevant for them. Instead, institutions could recognize that their lesson plans should reflect the lived realities of the DHH population, thus lessening the communication barriers and allowing for an inclusive space where DHH students feel like they belong. Further, trained LSM interpreters in the classroom are necessary for DHH to communicate in their first language. Nonetheless, the first course of action for our team is to create more opportunities within the institution and elsewhere to develop critical literacy skills regarding Mexican Deaf Culture and Epistemologies that promote change in attitudes and the creation of more networks of support for these and other students with disabilities.

Critical sociocultural linguistic literacy (CriSoLL) for DHH sociolinguistic justice

In this section we describe the virtual Open Educational Resources (OERs) that we created as CriSoLL-based thematic units that attend to 1) the development of Critical Language Awareness (CLA), 2) the historical contexts of normalized Western European knowledge and the coloniality of power that has been maintained, 3) the literacy development about intersectional hierarchical social relations (including racial and (dis)ability relations, among others), and 4) the stylistic nature and sociopragmatic elements of sociolinguistic practices, as well as the symbolic power of language (Holguín Mendoza & Sánchez Walker, 2024). To develop these thematic units, we have undertaken in-depth, collaborative research at two universities on the Mexico-U.S. border, each one of these institutions on each side. As an interdisciplinary and transnational team, we have also engaged in a continuous journey as researchers and educators developing cultural humility, learning to collaborate with people from Mexican border Deaf Culture and knowledge while acknowledging our own positionalities, privileges, and power dynamics (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). We acknowledge that the materials we created are just the first stage. To create these units, first, we had to internalize this material and truly understand it. This has been an unanticipated and unavoidable long process in which we had to humbly and deeply reflect, first individually and then as a group, on the true reasons for our participation in this project. This is an important step necessary for acknowledging that we do not aim, nor are prepared, or should "save" anyone. We had to leave these paternalistic notions behind and accept that we needed to embark

along with students and other colleagues in CriSoLL development ourselves as well. During this journey, as a team, we took one introductory course of LSM taught by two Mexican DHH people who were supported by the fourth author as an accompanying interpreter. During this period, we were able to reflect on our understanding of this contextualized Mexican border Deaf Culture. Moreover, we were able to question what was being projected as an "ideal" and "good" education and question our own ideologies and biases within coloniality of power. All team members started this project with different levels of knowledge regarding Mexican border Deaf Culture and Critical Literacy; thus, our answers to these educational interrogations differed.

Other factors also played a role in the ways in which we differ epistemologically and ideologically. On the Mexican side of the border, one of the members knew LSM, as previously mentioned, and had deep and numerous connections with the local Deaf Community. Since we are still in the preliminary stages of this project, we have conducted no formal survey among DHH students at the Mexican institution. However, our connections with the local Deaf Community made it possible to identify a deaf student from the Faculty of Arts at UABC Mexicali Campus and two deaf LSM advisers and teachers in Tijuana who specifically collaborated in the project as consultants. Thanks to their self-learning practices and interest in teaching LSM to deaf people, they guided us to observe the graphic and linguistic qualities that should be present in the design of printed teaching materials, coupled with the understanding of Deaf Culture and their communication styles in written Spanish (Castro Caballero & Mendoza Casanova, 2024; Mendoza Casanova, 2024).

On the other hand, on the U.S. side of the border, the team has had experience working and conducting research on critical literacy and developing the CriSoLL framework. This preliminary research on critical literacy in Spanish as a second language and as a Heritage language (SHL) education showed that people engaged in CriSoLL-based courses and materials become more critically aware of raciolinguistic ideologies that marginalize non-standard language speakers as well as their own sociolinguistic practices and their choices to index their identities and attitudinal stances (Holguín Mendoza, 2018, 2022a, 2022b; Venegas, 2024, see also Mendoza Casanova, 2024). Based on this research on Spanish language education in the U.S., we created several pedagogical units to develop CriSoLL concerning border Mexican DHH Cultures. The objective of this first stage of our collaboration is to address the dominant power relations that we found to exist between standardized language varieties such as LSM and Spanish (oral and textual), as well as other marginalized varieties and non-language communication modes in higher education institutions in relation to Deaf education. We are committed to *ethical responsibility* (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2014) and avoiding the romanticization of "otherized" and minoritized groups; thus, we seek to interrupt biases and

assumptions through critical literacy among DHH and all students, researchers, and educators who have internalized coloniality of power.

Two of the online OERs that we developed will be described here. Unit 1, titled "Conociendo diferentes comunidades y maneras de comunicación" (Knowing different communities and ways of communication), introduces general knowledge about disabilities and the basics of interacting with DHH.[1] The first topic develops CLA about language myths such as the misbelief that only some people have "an accent" and that accents are "incorrect" ways of speaking, or the myth that European languages, such as French or Spanish, are "more developed" than Indigenous languages in colonized regions in America, and the rest of the world. Moreover, the exercises included in this unit are designed for participants to reflect on the stylistic nature of human linguistic practices and disrupt normalized prescriptive notions regarding the standard language varieties. The objective is that educators and students become aware of language hierarchies as co-constructed along other social hierarchies such as race and (dis)abilities. Figure 1 (see next page) illustrates one of these activities in Unit 1.

[1] This thematic unit is also based on another CriSoLL OER on Sociolinguistics basic concepts: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1X905BiqtOxHySWLR_gYwgtsNSR7LCbcEX0qa036_fqE/edit?usp=sharing

Figure 1. Excerpt from Unit 1 "Conociendo diferentes comunidades y maneras de comunicación" (Knowing different communities and ways of communication).

Activity 3 | We all communicate in different ways

Step 1. Answer the following questions using your own knowledge and individual language uses and styles of communication.

1. Do you know of any form of communication different from the one you use?	2. Why are there different forms of communication between groups of people in our community?	3. Why are certain forms of communication not given more attention and consideration in society in general?
4. Do you know any place in the city or area where you live where you can learn a form of communication different from yours?	5. How does learning another form of communication contribute to your training?	6. Do you think that the forms of communication have changed over the years, over the centuries? How do you perceive them now?

Step 2. Watch the first minute of the following video (tap the image to access the link) and with a classmate make a list of the signs that you were able to identify, understand or relate to the language used by Justina Miles.

Video de YouTube *Interpreter Justina Miles performance at the Rihanna's Super Bowl Halftime Show COMPLETE* de Volta Music (15 de febrero, 2023). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4996X5hUZ8	Share with the rest of the group the signs you wrote down on your list and discuss how you were able to identify them and relate them to your own language.

In this excerpt from Unit 1, we can observe how participants will be able to develop critical literacy in relation to ableism, racism, and linguicism and the relationship between all these forms of discrimination through normalized discourses. The unit presents opportunities to learn more about the historical and contemporary backgrounds that continue to conform these social hierarchies and forms of oppression and how coloniality of power operates. This first unit finishes with an exercise introducing a general reflection on different linguistic practices and languages used within communities of the Deaf and Blind.[2]

Unit 2, titled "Conociendo las comunidades de personas sordas" (Knowing Deaf Communities' Cultures), reflects on the topic of Deaf Culture, starting with a video on the historical facts regarding DHH people in Mexico and LSM. Additionally, this second unit, designed

[2] To access Unit 1, please visit https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kCZAkI3vpdsM_VaSm0QFk_9rVd2uHioFP6YObVrbUqY/edit?usp=sharing

necessarily as a sequence of the previous one, continues the sociolinguistic reflections on the difference in stylistic communicative practices of people, particularly between DHH people. To develop critical awareness and literacy regarding some of the biases and stereotypes about DHH people and their different ways of communication, this unit presents some informative academic and non-academic readings, as well as videos from activist groups creating awareness, proposing alternative solutions, and protesting ableism. Participants have many opportunities to work individually and in groups to develop their ideas and disrupt some of the myths and biases that they may possess. The objectives of this unit also include the development of knowledge of social meanings indexed by ableist and racist language forms and discourse, as well as social hierarchical relations. These discussions coincide with topics in their Architecture and Design curriculum since we cannot study the way in which social relations are established in interaction without studying semiotics, the signs and symbols, and how and to whom they are directed (see Agha, 2007; Tunstall, 2023).[3]

Moreover, in this second unit, students and educators can also learn some words and expressions in LSM (García Ramírez, 2021) and more information about the *Modelo Educativo Bilingüe Bicultural*, MEBB (Bilingual and Bicultural Education Model) for DHH communities in Mexico. It is important to note that these sociohistorical facts about LSM and the MEBB are presented alongside opportunities to critically observe their political effects and not as "neutral and absolute" responses and solutions to support DHH communities in Mexico. The last activity includes instructions for a larger project. Individually or in groups, students must creatively propose some type of intervention to create awareness using their social media or other venues in regard to biases and myths about the topics studied in these units.[4]

Additionally, following previous work by the U.S.-based team (see Sánchez et al., 2024), original symbols were created by the third author within the units to raise awareness among all educators and students about the lack of graphic elements that contribute to deaf students' identification with the activities. These symbols on the upper right corner introduce each activity in all the units and allow for visual and simplified identification of the communication skills fostered within each activity, namely: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication (according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, ACTFL, 2024).

[3] To access Unit 2, please visit https://docs.google.com/document/d/181Ii_GAbYwB8qIz3oFfFcRBjxbdvSMKQOsLs_icsuJ4/edit?usp=sharing

[4] The complete OER thematic units can be found at Pedagogías Críticas para la Enseñanza de Lenguas https://www.crisollpedagogiascriticas.org/

These OERs, organized as thematic units, develop the four elements of CriSoLL: 1) Critical Language Awareness (CLA), 2) historical contexts, 3) relationships within power and difference structures, and 4) the dynamic, stylistic nature of languages and their symbolic power. Not less importantly, the development of critical literacy is a continuous, never-ending process that requires deep self-reflexivity. To better understand what deep self-reflexivity entails, we follow critical scholars and educators (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1994) who have long exposed how a deep understanding of hierarchical social relations requires us to have difficult conversations that go beyond simple assumptions. This entails the need to examine how our various identities (race, class, gender, ability, and many more) influence our perceptions and practices. Understanding inequities based on ability and race, for instance, and how they affect people and entire communities, help us to identify and challenge discriminatory practices in educational settings and beyond. When we recognize how communication requires deep and mindful engagement and cooperation between speakers, we better understand power dynamics and differences between groups. In this manner, it is important to incorporate a "pedagogical emphasis on 'dissensus' in order to support the development of their ability to hold paradoxes and not be overwhelmed by complexity, ambiguity, conflict, uncertainty and difference" (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2014, p. 88). We aim to continue creating other materials that can be used as introductory topics in general courses, not only in SAD but across campus and in teacher-oriented workshops. Additionally, team members at the U.S. university plan on using these materials to introduce Deaf Cultures in Mexico and other Spanish-speaking regions, in Spanish language courses. These are small steps, but we are committed to continue this journey.

Not less importantly, we aim to challenge racism, ableism, and other types of discrimination at the institutional level. Our project's objective includes to hold institutions accountable for the lack of support DHH students face. Members of this team on the Mexican side of the border are already consultants and members of committees working to provide access and support to students with disabilities at the university level. Our whole team is committed to continuing advocating for creating visible and palpable changes in attitudes, practices and resources for DHH and other students facing discriminatory practices in our institutions and society at large.

Conclusion

As researchers and educators, we hope that the critical knowledge and awareness that we can generate in our classrooms supports both students and educators in enacting effective social responsibility and more just sociolinguistic practices in our communities. CriSoLL-based pedagogies support students in critically evaluating their own sociolinguistic practices and developing other languages and styles beyond notions of "correctness" and normative cultural

hegemony in academic settings that still follow and perpetuate ideologies of "deficiency" (Boyero Agudo, 2023; Holguín Mendoza & Sánchez Walker, 2024; Mendoza Casanova 2024; Sánchez et al. 2024; Venegas 2024). Within this critical approach, the goal is not only to support students from marginalized groups but also to bring critical consciousness and literacy and foster empathy and cultural humility among researchers and educators so that we are better equipped to question our own adherence to paradigms of social hierarchies. Our proposal on CriSoLL challenges scholars, educators, and university administrators to critically explore hierarchical relations and create real change. In this proposal, we have reflected on the type of critical pedagogical practices that promote equitable power relations, as well as critical consciousness and literacy in education. We have also created materials that critically disrupt the coloniality of power in education for DHH and other students from minoritized groups. We are cognizant that our proposal is still preliminary, and we still have much to learn. Nevertheless, we hope these efforts create more equitable, anxiety-free, and enjoyable learning environments for DHH and all students, while expanding access to OERs with full institutional support.

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