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WHOSE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES? RE-EMERGING AS AN UNLEARNER IN THE SPANISH CLASSROOM

About this piece:
This article is the result of a dialogue with my mind, my body, my ancestors, and my experiences of living in an unceded land where monolingualism exists despite the pervasive presence of other languages. Therefore, I start with the Acknowledgement of Country. I would also like to flag my purposeful use of Spanish language. I advise the reader to keep in mind that those Spanish words used interchangeably with English belong to me and to my own internal linguistic perspective. I transfer those words from my mind/heart/mouth to this contribution without thinking but as part of my repertoire. Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) would call this *translanguaging*.

Acknowledgement of country:
English: In this course, students and educators acknowledge the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung language groups of the Kulin Nations, and their traditional unceded lands on which we find ourselves today teaching this course at RMIT University. We respectfully recognise Elders both past, present, and future. My respect also extends to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, as well as any Aboriginal people present in this course and any Indigenous people from others part of the world.

Español: En este curso, estudiantes y educadores reconocemos a los grupos lingüísticos Woi Wurrung y Boon Wurrung de la Naciones de Kulin, en cuyas tierras tradicionales no cedidas nos encontramos hoy enseñando este curso en la Universidad de RMIT. Presentamos nuestros respectos a los Ancianos y a las Ancianas tanto a los antepasados y las antepasadas como a los y las actuales. Mi respeto también se extiende a todos las personas Aborígenes e Isleños del Estrecho de Torres de Australia, así como a cualquier Aborigen presente en este curso y a cualquier Pueblo Indígena de otras partes del mundo.

Keywords: Sensing/thinking ◆ un/learning ◆ Spanish language ◆ co-learning ◆ pedagogical practices

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If one speaks from this land as a non-Aboriginal person to this site, one, first and foremost, needs to Acknowledge Country[1]. I enact this responsibility, as an uninvited guest, as a displaced person from the Náhuat lands, by starting my classes with an Acknowledgment of Country, and even in this article as a speech act. That is, more than just with words, I attempt to respectfully offer a greeting, and an invitation for reflection that may inspire one to accept that Aboriginal sovereignty has never been ceded by the powers not only of the former or present settlers. I do the Acknowledgement in English, then Spanish and then in Woiwurrung by sharing *Womin Djeka*[2]. It is important to Acknowledge Country in each linguistic world I inhabit as each respective culture exists as I do as an uninvited guest on unceded Sovereign Indigenous land. I recall Dr Xóchitl Levya Solano (2019) in her talk at a conference named '*Las Americas*' in Germany, greeting us with a good morning in German, Spanish, and English, then in her own Indigenous language. *Buenos días* in her Indigenous tongue means *cómo está tu corazón*, because, as she says, our heart both feels and thinks. Dr Solanos's greeting encouraged me to explore or *buscar* with curiosity more on sensing/thinking pedagogies and on my ancestors' language as an educator. She said that when we talk about *descolonización*, no matter in which field, it is important to "*movernos de lenguas imperiales a lenguas otras que podemos llamar subalternisadas, lenguas de pueblos orginarios, es un salto mayor y un reto mayor*"[3]. Then she asks, how do we *sentipensamos la descolonización*? I pause, reflect, and then respond. We can only engage in sensing/thinking decolonisation by starting from our own experiences, our own struggles. It is imperative, therefore, to state my purpose through the *pluriversal* worlds in which I live.

1 In Australia, Acknowledgment of Country shows respect to Traditional Custodians and recognises the continued connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It also recognises that they are the custodians and carers of their unceded land and that their sovereignty has never been ceded. When I do my acknowledgment, it is an invitation to make it more personal and include aspects that I think are important to acknowledge as guests on their lands and waters. I do this to avoid a repetition of empty words that mean nothing to me.

2 **womin - to come**
dji - I'm asking you to come
ka - purpose

It is translated as Welcome, to come with purpose/what is your purpose? It is a statement and a question (N'Arwee't Professor Carolyn Briggs, 2020).

3 "moving from imperial languages to other languages that we can call subaltern, languages of Indigenous peoples, and that is a greater leap and a greater challenge" (Translated by the author).

In the same year, 2019, my cousin was planning to visit us from El Salvador. She asked me *'¿qué quieres que te lleve?'* I said I wanted a Náhuat dictionary as Dr Solano's words were still resonating with me, and I wanted to learn the language of my ancestors. My cousin could not find it in the city, but one of her friends went to *un pueblo* in Santo Domingo de Guzman where Náhuat is taught and obtained a copy for me. This text has become a very precious book for me. What does this have to do with teaching Spanish? The reason I'm sharing this story is to highlight to the reader that in order to un/learn-teach a colonial language, I needed to encounter my ancestors, which requires effort beyond what is currently readily available. We need to look harder, connect deeper and be resourceful when working to sow the seeds. Teaching and learning without colonialism is a practice, and it takes work to teach in a decolonial way.

I am now finally learning Náhuat from a Tamachtiani[4] who lives on the Náhuat lands. He always says "are you rescuing Náhuat or is Náhuat rescuing you? This has strengthened my courage and wisdom to bring the history of other *Primeros Pueblos* to my class.

Introduction

This article is a result of my process to reconcile the paradoxes in the teaching of a colonial language—Spanish—as a forcibly Salvadoran displaced person, in a settler colonial site. Every morning the first statement I see and read out aloud, more than once, is "*Who are you in conversation with*?" I remember writing it in my dairy, but I don't recall where I read it or heard it initially, so I will not claim those words to be my own. However, I will say that it is a question I reflect on every day before I go to work and prepare my lessons. Thus, this article is also the result of conversations (some real ones and others imaginary), lessons, and teachings by bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Tamachitiani[5] Clelia O. Rodríguez. Thinking otherwise about de/colonising the boundaries that exist in the discipline of Languages, in particular, for me, the Spanish language, and how as one who has unlearnt, can re-learn, re-exist, re-connect, and weave all this together and take it to my classroom. I can hear my kumpanshin (*amiguita*, little friend in Náhuat), Dr Tania Cañas, whispering her words to me "Spanish is a language, yet not a singular one" (2022, personal communication).

4 Tamachtianit in the Náhuat language, an Indigenous language from El Salvador, literally translates as teacher, profesor or profesora, it is a non-gendered language, but it means more than a teacher who only teaches a language.

5 Tamachtianit means to me more than a teacher, I cannot use it or name anyone Tamachtiani. I call Dr. Clelia O. Rodríguez Tamachtiani to show respect because her teachings come from a land-pedagogy, from her ancestors, from the Náhuat land. Throughout this contribution, I will use Tamachtiani Clelia as a familiar, close, and respectful relationship that I have built with her.

Therefore, this article is an offering of my unlearnings on what it means to me to teach the Spanish language and culture, a language that I know better than my ancestors' language (Náhuat). A language with a Mesoamerican accent, a language that somehow identifies who I am. A language that somehow my life led me to teach, a language that I am trying to decolonise and embrace. A language that I teach to my son and that helps me to communicate with those who I love. A language that I teach on a settler colonial site, at a university in Australia, recognising it as a colonised spaced. Remembering Martin Nakata's work on the cultural interface, in which he explains that:

> In this space are histories, politics, economics, multiple and interconnected discoursers, social practices, and knowledge technologies which condition how we all come to look at the world, how we come to know and understand our changing realities in the everyday, and how and what knowledge we operationalise in our daily lives. (2007, p. 9)

Through this de/colonising autoethnography I offer and share my relation to the Spanish language as an educator and unlearner with the aim to enact all these reflections in a pedagogical space. Thus, I reflect and remember:

> What then is the relation between thinking and making? The theorist and the craftsman would give different answers. It is not that the former only thinks and the latter only makes, but that the one makes through thinking and the other thinks through making. (Ingold, 2007, p. 6)

I use this method to express how I am coming to understand and create my own theory of knowledge, *conectada* in my own experiences. As hooks reminds me:

> When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two — that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other. (1994, p. 61)

In addition to framing my experiences within an autoethnographic methodology, I share three practical tasks that I use in the Spanish language classroom in higher education, which encourage students to use their language, whatever that might be, to communicate beyond the language. These lessons come from my own process of teaching and un/learnings. From my continuous critical-sensing reflections towards practices that deconstruct and co-create relevant cultural and historical contexts to foster transformations *cuando* I am teaching. Adding to expand our vision with more questions to keep our intrapersonal reflection:

- What does it mean to engage with colonial history through language learning, and teach a colonial language like Spanish on stolen occupied lands of so-called Australia?
- How does the making/remaking of Spanish (as one tends to do in the diaspora) offer new ways of thinking and making worlds? Why, what, how and who is included/ excluded/represented to educate our students on who we are and are not?

I end this article by sharing how I am still working to sow and pose questions to continue the reflection on our responsibility as language educators of colonial languages—Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, English, and so on.

Positionality por qué I teach

> *The language we use is an expression of who we are, and when we are told it is not good enough, it is a veritable assault on our voice, our sense of self. (Dina López, 2019, p. 129)*

I am from the ISTHMUS[6] part of Abya Yala[7] known as Centroamérica, to be exact from the Nawat people, Náhuat land. My land, my ancestors, my history, my body, my journeys, my displacement, my learning and unlearning, *mis temores, mis dolores, mis éxitos y caídas* have marked lines of who I am and continue being by evolving, absorbing, embracing, and embodying new practices, new cultures, new teachings, new experiences, new languages, and new knowledges.

Now, it is important to share my story, in relation to my language, place and my intersections. The purpose of this is to share how I currently teach the way I teach because of continuous

6 In this article, I will be using Isthmus to refer to Centroamérica, which has become a synonymous of those lands. "Isthmus, in the context of Centroamérica, connects the northern and southern hemispheres, Western and Global South, Pacific and Atlantic, and the whole of the Americas as Mesoamérica. Central America is the only place on earth where an isthmus, as a geographic landmass, forms an intercontinental and interoceanic site" (Cañas, 2022, p. 6).

7 For those unfamiliar with the term Abya Yala, "the concept emerged towards the end of the 1970s in Dulenega, or what, for others, is today San Blas, Panamá, a Kuna Tule territory. Abya Yala in the Kuna language means "land in its full maturity." […] After the Kuna won a lawsuit to stop the construction of a shopping mall in Dulenega, they told a group of reporters that they employed the term Abya Yala to refer to the American continent in its totality. After listening to this story, Takir Mamani, the Bolivian Aymara leader, and Tupaj Katari, one of the founders of the indigenous rights movement in Bolivia, suggested that indigenous peoples and indigenous organizations use the term Abya Yala in their official declarations to refer to the American continent" (Del Valle Escalante, 2014, p.1).

growth and deep reflections as an educator. To also show how my experiences with language-culture, which have been reprimanded in my teaching, have had a powerful effect on my pedagogical development; to show that every educator matters and that the best lessons come from our own experiences; to show that we can collectively, as educators, acknowledge the diversity of the Spanish language-culture particularly when we teach Spanish in diasporas.

In 1996, I was supported and encouraged by one educator from the Global South at a university in Australia where I was studying for my master's degree. *Elle*[8] had said that I could teach Spanish, having already completed my bachelor's in applied psychology, a graduate diploma of teaching, various courses in education, linguistics, and a teaching qualification on second language acquisition under my belt. Despite all these degrees and "knowledge", this was not enough for the coordinator of the Spanish program, also from the Global South, as the coordinator felt that my Salvadoran Spanish could *dañar* students learning Spanish. The educator who supported and encouraged me to teach suggested that I could sit in a language course for Spanish heritage students, a course that they were teaching, to perhaps appease the coordinator into allowing me to teach. I welcomed the idea. That class taught me a lot about how to teach intergenerational students learning Spanish, and I am grateful for that opportunity. This, however, was not enough for the coordinator, who asked me to sit and observe other teachers' classes, including *su* own and to be observed by *elle* during my teaching for an entire year.

I was made to believe that there was something wrong with my Spanish, particularly due to growing up in Australia (Central American Spanish and from a person who could *manejar el inglés*, too). I was also an emerging scholar and being made to feel inadequate which added to my insecurity. I always had self-doubt, wondering if I was teaching right, and particularly the content that I was given to teach. As a sessional/casual teacher, I was obliged to use a particular book, but sometimes I would sneak some material (e.g., culture of countries that were never mentioned in the book or if they were mentioned they were stereotyped) that still related to the curriculum without undermining the coordinator's course plan as I was aware that all students would have the same test. I was *tanteando*. As Audre Lorde used to say, however, "if you can't change reality, change your perceptions of it" (1982, p. 18). Therefore, I saw this as a learning process, but one underpinned by my annoyance for sitting countless hours in those classes.

8 I will use elle, the non-binary neopronoun equivalent to 'they' singular in English, and corresponding possessive pronoun su, 'their', to avoid identifying people involved as the community of Spanish language teachers in Australia is very small.

Once, during the coordinator's observations on my many classes, I was told that *elle* was surprised that I could teach. I felt happy. Sadly, now that I reflect, the reason I desperately needed validation was because I was constantly made to doubt my abilities, often doubted and linguistically shamed. Somehow, I got my confidence back when the coordinator sat during one of the oral exams and was again surprised at how more than eighty per cent of students under my teaching had passed. When I look back, I felt somehow grateful to have been under a microscope as it made me work harder to prove myself. However, it also made me disheartened as I lost myself, and I became someone else. I changed my language, accent, and vocabulary just to fit in and please the coordinator. Even my dad reprimanded me more than once for faking it or pretending to sound like someone I was not.

I have now become a coordinator at another university. In this role, I encourage the teachers who work with me side by side to shine in their classroom and embrace their stories, accents, vocabulary, and language. When I have students, especially from diverse Spanish backgrounds, I create spaces where they are encouraged to use the Spanish language passed to them by their *abuelos, abuelas, tías, tíos*, and parents, whose language is deeply layered with *experiencias callejeras*, familial, cultural, political, and historical experiences. I encourage this group of students to bring their language, without the fear of being told their English or Spanish is improper (Otheguy et al., 2015). I am tired of hearing some students from Latin American backgrounds say that their Spanish is bad because they have been told by high school, Spanish Saturday school or university teachers that they speak a "funny" Spanish or Spanish from *la calle*; that they do not speak the "colonial" Spanish from Spain. I am tired of those students asking what type of Spanish they will learn as they want to learn the "proper" Spanish. My lessons start from the day these students take their placement test, and I stop them, others or even me from shaming them. Somehow, we must start teaching what it really means to speak Spanish. We need to go back to history and connect it to the present.

As my kumpanshin Tania reminds me, Spanish does not own us—we can play with language to ensure it reflects our circumstances and experiences. We do not have to mould ourselves or our experiences to fit Spanish in. Doing so does not mean we cannot communicate with one another because, as we see in Spanglish, these things happen organically. In the classrooms, I unlearn colonial Spanish by reducing the Eurocentric elitist standards that traditional language learning imposes. I remind students from various backgrounds, with other accents to share their own language-culture words with us, and that there is no need to translate them, just a need to explain the meaning of the words. I remind them to embrace who they are, to be proud of their ancestors' words, to use them freely with the rest of the class and to teach us about them. #DecolonisingTheEars as Tamachtiani Clelia says. We speak the way we do to survive. We

resist because it is important to remember and to embody that "teaching anti-colonial discourses, along with a simultaneous recognition [means] that this discourse is not static" (McGloin, 2009, p. 37).

Method

Tira lo abstracto y el aprendizaje académico, las reglas, el mapa y el compás.
Tantea sin tapaojos. (Anzaldúa, 1988, p. 227)

I have always liked to write two or three words in Spanish in my articles as it comes naturally. For a long time, I was not aware that such method could be used in academia until I started reading the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, and, of course once I learnt to politically read her, I understood the purpose of it. Indirectly, this woman, mentor, and scholar has encouraged me to write and play with my Spanish. My Spanish words keep flowing more and more when I write without the fear of translating. I only do it when my body asks me to write it, when I embody those words and I find that it would not express the same meaning in English, something that I am starting to feel with the words I use in Náhuat.

Tamachtiani Clelia reminds me of *Cuanta tela por cortar debo tener!* in one of her emails addressed to me. She also reminds me of who I am and where I am from, who indirectly has encouraged to actively learn Náhuat, rather than just having a dictionary. Words that I will never forget when I prepare my lessons or face any challenges in my teaching. If I had written this article two years ago, my voice would have been so different. I would have written it and expressed my thoughts in a conventional academic English style (which I recognise as baggage of colonialism); an apologetic, with one voice, and in a linear order. Therefore, I choose to *tantear* as Anzaldúa reminds me, by writing this article in a way that my *sentipensar* comes to my mind, my heart, and my body. So *tanteo*.

Academia defines autoethnography as a research method, but I prefer to say that it is a me-search method, as Tamachtiani Clelia has taught me. It is indeed a search for my personal experiences in which I describe and reflect my practices and experiences on the ground, in the classroom - what takes place there, and how much I reflect out of it. *Tanteo* by challenging the writing style in this article to be able to write an honest text. A model that I take into my class, and that I relate to language learning and teaching by enabling students to express themselves in this way in the learning environment. Translanguaging and Spanglish are acceptable in my class.

There are different approaches to collect "data" dynamically and creatively in autoethnography, (e.g., vignettes, poems, drawings, self-observations, self-reflective writing, recalling, and retelling). We can call it autoethnography, narratives, testimonies, or voices. Or we may call it nothing at all like Anzaldúa did, who, as a silenced voice from marginal and intersect experiences, challenged the academic space by not only sharing her personal stories, but also by interchanging Spanish and English in her writing. Any curiosity of oneself starts with a desire to explore one's position in connection to the world and share something close to one's heart, in my case, my teaching. As Hernandez et al. (2022, p. 33) state, "It is through critical self-exploration of our embodied experiences, using our whole self (engaging our mind, body, emotion, spirit) that transformative learning outcomes are thought to be most profound". All approaches to autoethnography require critical intrapersonal reflection and some type of transformation. When we share our story, we want others to relate to it, cause transformation in them; to touch their life, their teaching, their fears without the aim to change people but to make them think and feel at the same time.

Hernandez et al. (2022) also discuss the individual autoethnography (IAE), which provides the space for a self-reflexive process, allowing us to take "a path of self-examination and self-evaluation in relation to others and contexts to deeper self-learning and discovery. This intimate exploration into the self is likely to inspire changes toward further development and improvement" (p. 14). I then wonder what critical self-reflection and improvement mean as a teacher teaching Spanish in a university in Australia. I have to be honest that when I re-read that quote, I cannot stop thinking of the word "self" and ask what it truly means, as I hear Maria Montejo's voice in Tamachtiani Rodríguez's (2023) space "become the good you are beyond the self". From an Indigenous knowledge perspective, she says there is not a self, there is the belief that we are a collective and connected to many things. Therefore, I reflect that developing my "self" is not possible in isolation as I am a collective self. I am a student, and a teacher, a maker, and a theorist. When I think of me-search I don't think of solely myself. As I have learnt in the Náhuat language that the verb *ser* (to be) does not exist as we are collective and cannot exist in isolation or under constrictions of self as noted above; it is *Ni* and *Ti* at the same time (*yo* and *vos/tú*) that is the difference.

Pedagogies

> *If we are truly committed to the work of decolonizing, we must listen to the silences, that which is not written, and pay attention to the internal dynamics of communities and how we label their experiences (Clelia O. Rodríguez, 2018b, p. 33).*

I ask myself, whose pedagogical practices do I bring to my classroom and to my teachings? Anzaldúa reminds me of the richness of inbetweeners, and how I can apply my being in-between my lessons and my teaching. Bell hooks reminds me of the love for teaching from a place of purpose and a calling to create spaces for those voices made silent. Tamachtiani Clelia reminds me that a pedagogy of liberation means liberating myself from my own internalised colonialism, without which I would not be able to do the work I do in my classroom.

The teachings of these three women encourage me to be in constant conversations with myself, working towards other ways of thinking, teaching, and feeling as educators, as a Spanish language teacher on unceded lands and a woman of colour from Central America with an accent in both English and Spanish. A Spanish accent when I speak English and a neutral accent when I speak Spanish, as the Salvadoran accent I have lost. This feeling of in-between languages and tongues (from Anzaldúa's perspective of taming languages) makes me reflect on Bettina Love who says that language is a "critical component of a persons' identity" (2019, p. 20). It also reminded me of the time I was reading her book while travelling by tram, and a white man approached me and asked what I was reading. When I said, "Abolitionist teaching and the …", he did not let me finish. He abruptly stopped me and said, "I don't speak with people who have an accent". My response was "me neither", then he began yelling at me that he didn't have an accent. That day I introspectively deepened my relationship with language even further. Spanish is a colonial language, as is English. So, if I know the language of my culture, and I learnt a powerful language such as English, why then did I feel like something was missing?

My intention is not to claim that this story reflects the experiences of other educators teaching Spanish or any other colonial language, as the popular speaker and writer Chimamanda Adichie reminds me—there is not a single story. However, I think it is important to hear *this* story in order to challenge what we understand to be the dominant narrative of what it means to speak Spanish "fluently", particularly among the Spanish-speaking diasporas. Spanish is not a singular language, and there is not a single story that can encompass the nuances of it as a colonial language.

Possibly, my story/experience extends understanding—that the difference in struggles has the relatability to build solidarity. Perhaps, my story could also remind other educators of the same struggles, feelings, and experiences teaching or learning the Spanish language and culture within their own intersections. In the hope of finding other ways, colours, and shapes to teach the Spanish language-culture that addresses their own story, the colonial history, and non-binary possibilities that all co-exist in such a language. Perhaps other Spanish language educators, no matter their geographical/educational context, could reflect further on their unlearning when

preparing their lessons and creating inclusive spaces in their classrooms. I neither intend to compete against western knowledge nor claim that I know it all, however, as bell hooks shares in her book of Pedagogy of Hope, my aim is to liberate the minds of our students rather than indoctrinating them (2003, p. 1), to liberate spaces so that students feel they can travel their world of Spanish in this context without judgment. To hold a space where Anglo-Australian and non-Anglo-Australian students can be exposed to new learnings (sensing/thinking), new knowledges for some (Indigenous history), new cultures (variety of Latin American countries), new his/her/their/stories (Afro Latinos), *nuevas verdades* (racism), realities not so new in the land of Abya Yala and Náhuat Lands.

Sensing pedagogies: Impacts on my identity as una profe and an ulearner

From a theoretical reflexivity, *sentipensante* (sensingthinker, Fals Borda, 1981, Rendó, 2009), pedagogy of liberation (Rodríguez, 2018a, 2018b), and from an ISTHMUS place, I share the messiness of re-evaluating my work in a Eurocentric colonising institution. Before the messiness of COVID-19, I was re-discovering the work of bell hooks, which once was my inspiration for teaching before I put aside her work for a while. However, indirectly, and dialogically, she rescued me. By reading her books again, Pedagogy of Hope and Teaching to Transgress, have challenged me to think about my own identity not only as a displaced woman from ISTHMUS living in a western country, but as person learning and living in three languages: English, Spanish, and Náhaut (in addition to other worlds afforded by the mingling of all three) and also as a scholar and educator in a western university. Universities that rarely deviate from their conventions damage learning potential of university students/scholar by limiting the perimeters of how we produce knowledge, of what we may and may not stylistically write and publish.

In the process of finding new knowledges alongside new practices to apply in my teaching, I had the opportunity to come across the readings of *sentipensante* by Orlando Fals Borda (1981), a Colombian sociologist who wanted to know the culture of fishermen of the Colombian coast. While learning and working with them, Borda learnt the concept of *sentipensantes* (sensingthinkers), a term that means to act with heart and mind. I immediately considered this a great way of teaching, and wondered how I could implement it since such a term has been applied in sociology and anthropology fields. At this point I was completely ignorant of what *sentipensante* pedagogy really is. In search of learning more about this "new term", I found a book published by Professor Laura Rendón (2009), who uses the sensing/thinking pedagogy approach. In her book, she states that this pedagogy is based on "wholeness, harmony, social justice, and liberation" (p. 132), and explains how she dug deeper into her roots in order to

apply it in her teaching at universities in the United States. In the text, she discusses, as I have, that there are many educators out there who have been using sensing/thinking teachings under the radar, unconsciously or without a given term.

When I attended Tamachtiani Clelia's teachings, I re-learnt how to embody and read text and colours. The penny dropped deeper, and I started applying my senses even more within myself and on my teachings, and to my independent practice of creative tasks (assessments), to my marking (which I still trying to figure out how to do in a decolonising form), and to the crafting of my curriculum as when I teach language I do not only think of grammar, I think of history, stories, experiences, culture, which content would support students to their learning and unlearning of the Spanish language-culture. This will be illustrated later in the section of tasks. So, I pause and ask the reader how do you understand and practice *sentipensar* pedagogy?

Pedagogies of liberation: Re-learning, re-existing, re-connecting

Tamachtiani Clelia's co-teaching and co-learning ways of being and un/learning are powerful. I respectfully attend her co-learning and co-teaching space (SEEDS for Change)[9], which I asked to join. She brings together personal and social-political examples and testimonies about pedagogy of liberation, with layers of humour, which connect to the land, the spirit, the senses, radical hopes, and radical un/learnings. Her teachings and offerings are engaging, sensing/thinking, and remind us of the pedagogical responsibility we have as educators. From her teachings, I do not learn specifically how to teach Spanish but how to radically teach, which I am continuously learning by putting it into practice in my classroom. Through this journey I had the opportunity to be part of a sacred and intellectually stimulating group led by Tamachtiani Clelia. In this space I shared my thoughts and I started *entretejiendo*—interweaving with other scholars, students, storytellers, and healers. Her words on the how, the where, the what, the when, and the why, have first needed to flow through my body before I could let them flow onto my teaching, and experienced that helped me to ground my reflections.

I am in daily conversation with her across the oceans, spiritually, and she has indirectly helped to rescue and to put into practice my memories, struggles, hurdles, and learnings from my

9 "SEEDS for Change is a collaborative initiative of Black, Indigenous and People of Color with no borders from all walks of life founded by Dr. Clelia O. Rodríguez. The collaborations in this space are based on Indigenous ancestral knowledge through notions of reciprocity and not in relation to Western notions of networking. Our way of conducting work ensures that those who choose to join understand this is space is not for the likes or to fulfill agendas based on neoliberal and colonialist extractivism. This political pedagogical work is in alignment with decolonising approaches to share transformative learning and teaching lessons beyond the binary."

childhood, my adolescence, my people, my body, my life and to un/re/learn those lessons from respectful and honest teaching practices. These are also practices that I encourage my students to use in their un/learning. Tamachtiani Clelia has made a profound impact on my capacity to reflect on my own de/colonialisation as a facilitator in a classroom, an educator who teaches a colonial language.

Creating space is a radical teaching approach not just for teaching Spanish—the aim being student-centred, meaning I meet the student in their respective world of Spanish. As I am continuously un/learning, it is important to remember that language is constantly changing, like Spanish, especially regarding many diasporas. Since I read and continue to read Decolonising Academia by Tamachtiani Clelia and going to her teaching space, I am practicing my active listening more and more—to my inner thoughts and to everything around me, to learn to read every single text[10] in my daily life, which orients me to find my voice when I teach. So, I reflect, and I think that when we move places, our language moves with us, and our language shifts in-betweenness, as Anzaldúa reminds me. We not only encounter the English with Australian peculiarities but other varieties of Spanish from different Spanish-speaking diasporas, which at times are welcomed, and other times are shamed. With this in mind, I encourage myself to use a pedagogy that fosters a critical revision of the preconceived cultural and historical contents that I teach and un/re/learnt all these contents in an open and a dynamic form of interactions within my classes.

Old and new practices that I am finding again, practices that challenge me, but heal me by seeing Spanish in a different way, in its de-colonial shapes. Practices, radical ones, sometimes allow me refuge and distance from some dynamics within the university that I struggle to reconcile with, such as the obsession of grading and evaluating. Through my reflections I have learnt that I am able to create a space of equality, equity, inclusion, diversity, critical thinking, and blah-blah that the university expects me to label. Most importantly, I have created a space in which we student-teacher, teacher-student and simply human-human relationships are able to cooperate, create, and find together. Spaces which are devoid of collective creativity afford no room for a constructive exchange of opinions, connectedness, emotions, and grammar and pronunciation "mistakes", and the use of other vocabularies, accents and *verdades*. My practices encourage students to bring innovative ideas and experiences that will ultimately enrich their experience as linguistic and cultural learners. Mine is a space that can be dynamically transformed and engages students in understanding the *pluriversality* of the

10 In here I refer to tangible and intangible beings, everything around me, conventional and non-conventional, "everything is a text" (Rodríguez, 2021, p. 294).

Spanish language, highlights their stories, and the stories from ISTHMUS and Abya Yala. A space in which as educators, we could address in depth themes of colonialism, race, and gender in our Spanish lessons.

Re-creating tasks: Relevant activities

> *There are no new ideas, just new ways of giving those ideas we cherish breath and power in our living. (Audre Lorde, 2017, p. 36)*

As many scholars working towards a decolonising pedagogy, it is hard, confronting, and sometimes lonely to share different ways of teachings, particularly when using an honest decolonial lens. To combat this feeling, I have anchored myself in readings, sessions, and presentations of Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and lately Tamachtiani Clelia Rodríguez (via personal communication in her space *Seeds for change*). I have found that any text from these women that reaches my hands helps me to traverse teaching Spanish in an Australian university. In this space, I embarked on a journey during which both students and I—as an educator and unlearner, *una profe*—exchange views, knowledges, opinions, fears, and cultures. After a journey of un/learning through decolonial insights afforded to me by these authors, working to renew the established teaching forms and practices has assisted my process of relearning. Like fresh paint over old. With this in mind, I have created three tasks in which students can be curious to re/learn and un/learn the histories of migration and displacement from Central America, and women histories from ISTHMUS and Abaya Yala, women invisible in this part of this world, and many times also invisible from ours. Such lives and experiences include: irregular/undocumented migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; Indigenous activist such as Berta Cacéres from Honduras; and a singer, poet, Afro-Latina and fighter such as Victoria Santa Cruz from Perú. It is hard to talk to beginner level students about colonialism, history, racism, activism, and injustice, particularly in Latin America without using English. My main seed to *sembrar* with these activities is not just to learn the language through those topics, as it will only be using it as a token, but for students to learn about topics that they need to reflect on and engage with (such as Indigenous activism, Afro Latinxs, displacement, non-binary, and feminism). I bring these topics up in different media forms: readings, videos, or music. Some students choose to learn further about themes and have taught me about them in reciprocity. Hence, un/learning can be a process of co-learning, side by side with the students. My own stories and those of my students motivate me to develop theories as bell hooks has taught me, and to create tasks from which I can communicate beyond the language. Yes, grammar matters but so does history.

I now share how continuous critical-sensing reflections have encouraged and guided me towards practices that deconstruct and co-create relevant cultural and historical contexts. To foster transformations *cuando* I am teaching with the aim to collectively inspire other educators to find their ways to eradicate linguistic colonialism. Now, I will honour a Central and a South American women and displaced people through the following practices/tasks.

The course and activities which I share in this article have been presented to first, second and third-year students (mainly first-year and Master students, and a few in their last year of their degree between 2020 and 2022). Most students are those enrolled to complete an International Studies degree, meaning the course is both an elective and a prerequisite. However, I have students from other programs, such as psychology, design, architecture, international business, planning, and criminology. These students range from different places and ways of life, and lands including: First Nations peoples, Ethiopians, British, Anglo-Australians, Germans, Chinese, intergenerational Latinx from Colombia, El Salvador, Argentina and Chile, Syrians, Indians, Indonesians, Filipinos/as- as well as those from diverse gender and sexual identities (cisgender, LBGTQI+). These students are aged 17 to 28 years old and from different socio-economic status that intersect with other categories such as language, religion, gender, and race.

Practice #1: ¿Quién es Berta Cacéres?

Berta Cacéres came to me without planning to include it in my curriculum at the beginning of the second semester of 2022. One of the teachers I worked with told me she was going to Spain during Summer in the same year, so I asked her to take photos, or videos of anything relating to the Spanish language for another project that I had planned to do. On her return to Melbourne, she shared a photo of Berta Cacéres that she took from one of the walls on the streets of Madrid, without knowing who she was, as she expressed to me. With the photo in mind as I was preparing my class on *pretérito indefinido/autobiografía* for Spanish 2 (A1-A2) in the second semester of 2022, I felt a call and I thought, "no more Dalí!! Students need to learn and know about Berta Cacéres, a woman from Central America". I always complain that *Centro* America is invisible in this part of the world, so I saw this as an opportunity and started crafting an activity. While students were learning how to write a biography in *indefinido* in Spanish, they were also learning about Berta Cacéres, engagement I delivered in English. I sowed a seed and students were searching for more answers as to who this woman was, and why they had never heard of her. We connected her story to land, activism, colonialism, capitalism, and Indigenous women here in Australia as well. The following week I went to an ISTHMUS exhibition. I was reflecting on Regina José Galindo's video performance "Guatemala Femenicidia", a Guatemalan artist, when my eyes caught the name of Berta Cacéres written on the wall of one

of the streets that Galindo was walking. Then, the last week of the semester, as I always write and reflect my thoughts about my teaching to improve upon later, the words of Tamachtiani Clelia come to my mind: "*cuánta tela por cortar debe tener*!" and imagination is liberation. Weeks after my teaching semester for 2022 had finished, in one of Tamachtiani Clelia's sessions (October 2022) she talked about Berta Cacéres, and I smiled then on how important it was to have invited Berta Cacéres to my lesson.

Practice #2: The wall: Borders or boundaries?

With the same Spanish class, I showed a picture of a group of people crossing the Mexico-USA border. I created this activity based on the question that Felicia Rose Chavez (2021) asks the reader/educators in her book: Does your curriculum reflect its geographic location, including subjugated histories, cultures, and languages? So, I reflected on this question, and I created this activity by using *gerundio*. In the previous class, students have learnt for the first-time the grammatical use of *gerundio* or present *continuo* with a typical exercise aided by pictures of actions (e.g., *están corriendo, está comiendo, estoy escuchando*). In the following lesson, I needed students to practice this within a real scenario in order to challenge their thinking. I then showed a photo to them and asked for sentences to be written on the board answering "*¿Qué están haciendo estas personas? Y ¿Por qué?*". At this point, we have created a space in which students feel comfortable to go in front of the class and write their sentences. Chavez (2021) remind us to "empower participants to do it 'wrong' before they do it 'right'. Such an approach to the writing workshop teaches the twin goals of creativity and courage" (p. 33).

We learnt new expression and new verbs, and therefore new ways to express deeper thinking in Spanish. Mainly I shared with them the history of the borders between Central America-México and México-USA, how *los mexicanos* lost their land, how the *braceros* crossed the border, the word Chicanxs (which is also another great example of how language adapts and changes to reflect lived experiences and new realities), the ISTHMUS children caravans, and how the main people crossing the border are from *Centro América* and the reasons and choices of why they do and how is still happening, and how our ripples contribute to it and how accountable we are for it. I also play an animated short film (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMfUdb9QUpM) to explain to them what *La Bestia* means. This lesson triggers conversations in students about other types of histories, and different instances of displacements, and migrations in the world- some cited from media and others from the lived experiences of themselves or their ancestors. I juxtaposed this example to the history of Australia and the lived experiences of displaced Indigenous on unceded lands. That is why it is important for me to acknowledge Country in different languages.

Practice #3: ¿Quién es Victoria Santa Cruz?

The first time I heard of Victoria Santa Cruz was from one of my Master students doing Spanish 1 (A1) in Semester 2, 2020 via an assessment. The student had shared a video of a poem by Victoria Santa Cruz https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZBHvMaTiuU. Teaching and learning are reciprocal in my classes, and I make sure to acknowledge such engagement.

In RMIT University, Master and doctoral students can take Spanish as an elective course without doing Spanish as their degree. This task required students to select an artistic piece (e.g., a movie, song, novel, poem, painting, sculpture, graffiti, etc.) connected to **inequity, discrimination, or racism** in a Spanish-speaking country. Then they need to deliver a minimum of 5-minute or so presentation in English, explaining **who/*quién*** produced the piece, **dónde/where** and ***cuándo*/when** it was produced, **qué/what** it is about, and ***cómo*/how** the piece engages with ideas of **inequity, discrimination, or racism**. They are also required to explain the reason/s ***por qué*/why** they have chosen that piece of art and what we as the audience can learn from it. Creativity is a main ingredient for reflection and un/re/learning. I explained to the students that the objective of this task is to create awareness and to find new *saberes* on inequity, discrimination, and racism in these countries.

The student who presented about Victoria Santa Cruz not only became the teacher-student but also deeply reflected on her choice and connected to her own experiences during the time when George Floyd was killed, and the Black Lives Matter movement was raising. I contacted her to see how she was doing and to thank her for her offering and teachings. This was an intergenerational learning for me as an educator where the younger/the student teaches the older/educator. I asked the student if I could use her presentation as an example for other students, which she granted me.

In the first semester of 2022, I used the same task but with undergraduate students Spanish 3 (A2-B1). Instead of an individual presentation, since there were 16 students enrolled, I asked them to work and present in pairs. This time classes were in person instead of over a video call like in COVID times. I explained to them why they needed it to present in English and not in Spanish. I told them that to critically understand the content of the presentations they would have to have a much higher level than what they are learning, and that the objective of this activity is not language but cultural content and the realities of the society of Spain and Latin American countries. However, I gave the option to present in Spanish too. It was very important to explain this as in previous years, I have been questioned by some students as to why they need to learn culture and history if all they want to learn is to speak the Spanish language. However, this group's response and understanding was reflected in the quality, care, reflection,

and commitment they presented by crafting and presenting their work, which they all choose to do it in English (translanguaging at times). The lesson was so engaging, questions were asked with respect and the learning was rich, not only for them but for me as well. One of the students at the end said "I do understand now why this presentation was not in Spanish. Even though it was in English, I felt the presentation helped me to engage critically with the Hispanic-speaking sphere".

Still sowing

Whenever I create a space, I connect other threads and other experiences to share them as *saberes*. Nevertheless, as educators we need to be prepared when those threads take different patterns/paths when teaching does not always go our way or follow the western tradition. My seeds are my seeds, and I can only share the stories I possess. I cannot dictate what or how others may or may not teach as an unlearner. Teaching and learning are personal processes, and so is creating. As an educator, you need to dig in and create those lessons from your own experiences, preparing yourself as they may fail. It is only by feeling uncomfortable that we grow and learn.

Through my teaching I have learnt that no matter how many times I teach the same topic, one must adapt the material based on the moment, your personal reflections, your sensing/thinking, your own background, your own positionality, your own responsibilities, and the students in the class. I am not only an educator that delivers and shares but also an unlearner who continues a process of growing as teacher-student, student-teacher, human-human, I am still processing, and still sowing. I start from *cero* in each of my classes- not in terms of *carencia, ausencia,* or *vacío*, but in terms of the beginning of everything; embracing *espiritualidad, y arte* according to the Mayan meaning of *cero* as Tamachtiani Clelia has taught me.

In applying sensing/thinking and pedagogies of liberation in my lessons, students and I engage in a deconstructive and decolonising process of interpreting history and culture. Relevant and important topics of today's society, culture and geopolitics, topics particularly from ISTHMUS and Abya Yala. Tamachtiani Clelia's teaching and pedagogies have forged new pathways for me as a Spanish language educator. However, something that still scuffles inside of me, and it remains in *desarmonía* is grading students' learning process, reflections, and transformations. I, then, ask myself how such a pedagogy of *sentipensante* and liberation can *congeniar* with Eurocentric structures of grading, good or bad, excellent, or poor, pass or fail? How?

I tell students in the first class of the semester and remind them at the end, that the learning process is more important than the end product. I am aware that at the end of the semester, I

must give them a grade as per university regulations, but, to my mind, many of the students have already achieved a High Distinction (HD)[11] by measure of their efforts in my class. I remind them that tests are just tools to see where they are up to, to show me what extra material I need to add or change or adapt the course to their needs. I do not believe grading indicates how much they have embodied in their learning, only how much grammar they know. As one student reminded me on the day of her oral test, "*Gracias*, I learnt so much in this class, so much. I now understand what you mean, it is not the grade that matters but what I have learnt, how and why" (Spanish 2, 2022). If we want to teach radically, *sentipensando*, we need then to challenge and scrutinise the entrenched normativism that creates *espacios desabridos* in the universities, "cultural interface": spaces that Nakata encourage to re-think and re-create, spaces between different knowledges and histories connected to the past and present. We need to challenge our language and culture classroom, our teaching, our activities and 'evaluations' and create spaces *con otras voces*; as Bettina Love (2019) reminds us, we want to do more than just survive. We need to thrive. With these words in mind, I then circle back to my question: How do you teach Spanish in a non-colonial way?

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[11] Mark range between 80-10, a grade point value of 4. Indicates that the student has produced outstanding work and has demonstrated a high level of understanding across the entire content of the course.

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