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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultivating Resistance: A Trioethnographic Exploration of Language Teacher Educators' Experiences in Brazil and the United States

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Abstract

With the ascendance of anti-DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility) discourse and legislation, educators face increasing challenges in addressing diversity-related topics in restrictive contexts (Woo et al., 2023). In Brazil and the Southeastern U.S., such policies have surfaced to restrict discussions related to gender, race, and sexuality (Butturi Junior et al., 2022; Chronicle Staff, 2024; Silva Oliveira et al., 2021). In these contexts, decolonial pedagogies can offer a productive framework for language educators, as an active process of resistance to systemic oppression, but also of re-existence—underscoring the responsibility of teachers engaging in the production of knowledge that is imbued with anti-racist and anti-colonial advocacy and reimagining new ways to be in the world (Walsh, 2013). This trioethnographic study draws on our experiences as language teachers and language teacher educators in Brazil and the Southeastern U.S., employing decoloniality as a theoretical approach to examine how these pedagogies influence the perceived responsibilities of language teachers in restrictive contexts. This polyvocalic, polyocular, and polygeographic (Norris & Sawyer, 2016) trioethnographic study is shaped not only by our personal reflections and interactions as educators but specifically by our individual understandings of and collective juxtapositions around decolonial pedagogies and the responsibilities of language teachers. We underscore that trioethnographic methodologies demand dialogical engagement in recalling our stories, resulting in critical reconceptualizations of social phenomena (Norris & Sawyer, 2016). Our findings reveal how decolonial pedagogies can help educators navigate restrictive constraints, challenge colonial legacies and cultivate critical and equitable teaching practices.

Keywords

decolonial pedagogies; language teacher education; restrictive contexts; teacher responsibility; trioethnography

INTRODUCTION

In both K-12 and higher education contexts globally, practitioners' diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts have received increased scrutiny, especially in what have been deemed restrictive contexts. Drawing from Woo et al. (2023), we characterize restrictive contexts as the educational environments shaped by formal and informal policies, pressures, and discourses that actively limit what teachers can say or do in the classroom, particularly regarding themes related to equity, social justice, and identity. These restrictions can manifest through formal policies (e.g., state laws, district directives), curricular mandates, or arise from

community and parental influence. They constrain educators' autonomy by controlling curriculum choices, prohibiting certain classroom discussions, and increasing the risk of professional or legal consequences for teachers.

In Brazil and the Southeastern U.S., specifically,[1] policies and discourses have surfaced to restrict what educators can discuss in the classroom related to gender, race, sexuality, and beyond (Butturi Junior et al., 2022; Chronicle Staff, 2024; Diadorim, 2024; Silva Oliveira et al., 2021). While attention to critical issues has been paid in language education (Kubota, 2024), the role of context and its intersections with ethnicity, gender, race, and sexuality in relation to what is permissible in classroom discourse has also been the locus of inquiry (Coda, 2023; Coda & Moser, 2023). Although the educational landscape grapples with questions related to DEIA efforts, in the field of applied linguistics, Pennycook (2022) reminds us how different "social, cultural, political, economic and environmental conditions pose new questions for applied linguists" (p. 1).

Concomitant with the increased ascendance and emphasis on anti-diversity legislation and Pennycook's (2022) call for us to think differently in the 2020s regarding concerns related to gender, race, sexuality, and beyond, a decolonial orientation invites us to interrogate how "our most pressing human struggles—over indigeneity, race, migration and diasporas, gender and sexuality, disability, and the very survival of the Earth—can be traced back to the harmful history of European colonization and its persistent aftermaths" (De Fina et al., 2023, p. 819). As such, decolonial thinking and pedagogies, like queer theories and pedagogies, encourage us to consider our assumptions that have been (re)produced through colonialist discourse that serve to uphold the status quo.

As language teacher educators and language educators in Brazil and the Southeastern U.S., where policies and discourses restrict classroom discussion related to diversity (Brito et al. 2023; Butturi Junior et al., 2022; Chronicle Staff, 2024; Melo, 2020; Silva Oliveira et al., 2021), decolonial pedagogies assist us in fostering a critical language education that problematizes normativity in the classroom related to the colonial legacies of racism, sexism, and beyond (Kubota, 2024). Thus, we have a responsibility as language teacher educators and language educators to ensure that our classrooms encourage a welcoming and collaborative atmosphere

[1] The geographic scope of this study reflects the different patterns through which anti-diversity movements in education have manifested. In the United States, these movements tend to emerge at the state level, whereas in Brazil, while also present at the state level, they are predominantly driven at the federal level, particularly under the influence of former president Jair Bolsonaro's administration. This dynamic will be explored in the following section.

in which student success is paramount. In this article, we employ decoloniality and trioethnographic methods to understand our experiences as language educators and language teacher educators in relation to the constraints posed by colonial power relations to our practices, our engagement with decolonial thinking and pedagogies, as well as our responsibility in these roles within restrictive contexts.

ANTI-DIVERSITY LEGISLATION AND ITS IMPACT ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BRAZIL AND THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

In Brazil, the first decade of the twenty-first century marked a progressive shift toward diversity legislation in education, which was later undermined by the rise of anti-diversity discourse and conservative backlash. Moehlecke (2009) highlights significant marks during this period, which include efforts from the Ministry of Education to expand access and improve the well-being of Black, Indigenous, female, and disabled students. Important achievements include Law 10.639 of 2003, which made the teaching of Black history and culture mandatory in Brazilian public schools, and its expansion through Law 11.645 of 2008, which incorporated Indigenous cultures into curricula. The creation of the Secretary of Continued Education, Literacy, and Diversity[2] within the Ministry of Education further demonstrated the government's commitment to fostering diversity in Brazilian education. However, as Hilgemberg and Andrade (2023) described, the early 2010s saw a shift, especially in the form of backlash from conservative segments of Brazilian society towards the *School without Homophobia Project*[3]. The project became a target for anti-diversity discourse, culminating in its veto under the administration of President Dilma Rousseff. This period saw the emergence of legislative efforts, such as Bill 3235 of 2015, which aimed to "criminalize behavior that promotes gender ideology" (Bill No. 3235/2015).

The election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018 marked an expansion and reinforcement of anti-diversity in Brazilian educational policies. As Miguel (2021) noted, Bolsonaro heavily capitalized on anti-diversity rhetoric, with a special emphasis on policies related to queer communities. His administration amplified the discourse around gender ideology, a strawman argument with no basis outside right-wing ideologies, to oppose initiatives with a focus on diversity (Miguel, 2021). This ideological stance permeated educational regulation at both state and federal levels, resulting in conservative, anti-diversity,

[2] Our translation to: Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização e Diversidade - SECAD.
[3] Our translation to: Projeto Escola sem Homofobia.

and anti-gender bills (Brito et al. 2023; Butturi Junior et al., 2022; Melo, 2020; Silva Oliveira et al., 2021). Recent data from the *Observatória* report (Diadorim, 2024) indicate that over 400 anti-queer legislative proposals are currently under review across Brazil. A significant majority of these bills focus on banning gender-neutral language, restricting anti-discrimination education, and limiting transgender individuals' rights to access restrooms aligned with their gender identity. Those three themes alone account for more than 56% of all such proposed legislation.[4]

At the same time, neoliberal reforms in Brazilian education gained momentum, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, de Deus (2024) analyzed the underlying market-driven and neoliberal interests of the *English Paraná* platform, which is mandatory in English Language classrooms of public schools in the state of Paraná, Brazil. This platform is managed by a Swedish corporation that implements a heavily scripted curriculum, limits teacher agency, and reinforces standardized educational models (de Deus, 2024). This reflects broader commodifying and controlling trends in education that pose challenges to teachers and teacher educators committed to equity and social justice.

In the United States, recent anti-DEIA legislation has questioned what can be taught in K-12 schools (Green, 2024). In the Southeastern U.S. in particular, this discourse has had a chilling effect on what can be taught in classrooms in states such as Florida related to race (Russell-Brown, 2024) and other contexts of the Southeastern U.S. related to "racism, homophobia, or gender" (Movement Advancement Project, 2024, p. 8). In the state of Tennessee, the Department of Education (DOE) (2025) has issued legal codes prohibiting the inclusion or promotion of divisive concepts (race, sex, social class, political affiliation). Any of these controversial historical concepts must be presented impartially. If the instruction is viewed as anything but impartial by parents, guardians, or community members, the Tennessee DOE provides a link where they can submit a "Prohibited Concepts Complaint Form." While the state law provides room for curriculum to include historical facts, the restrictions around how to present it, coupled with parent access to complaint forms, are likely to position teachers as reticent to teach historical realities at all. Similar legal restrictions on what can be

[4] The Brazilian educational landscape has long been shaped by a dynamic tension between progressive initiatives aimed at promoting equity and social justice, and reactionary movements seeking to diminish them. While landmark legislation has sought to institutionalize diversity and inclusion, these advances have consistently faced opposition from conservative sectors. This push and pull remains evident in the legislative sphere, where both pro-equity and anti-LGBTQIA+ proposals continue to be hotly debated (Diadorim, 2024), reflecting an ongoing legal, ideological and discursive battle over the role of education in fostering social justice, equity and transformation.

permissibly taught in educational settings are happening across the country but are particularly active in the Southeastern States surrounding Florida and Tennessee. This ongoing legal control of curricular priorities, at the state, district, and school policy level, is evidenced in an interactive map maintained by UCLA's School of Law (UCLA, 2025).

While language teaching and learning should invoke criticality (Kubota, 2024), language educators may center their efforts on proficiency while eschewing attention to critical issues (Coda, 2018). For those, however, who are apt to engage in critical issues, they confront legislative practices that are restrictive of critical issues in the classroom. While practice and identity are entangled (Fogle & Moser, 2017), language teachers whose very identities are at stake may be reluctant to introduce critical issues in the language classroom as they fear reprisal but also have found creative ways to introduce such issues in practice (Coda, 2023; Coda & Moser, 2023). While queer, critical, and other pedagogies have been illuminated for their ability to challenge the status quo, decolonial pedagogies in language education offer a way to destabilize the legacy of coloniality that is omnipresent within our curricular and pedagogical endeavors.

TOWARDS DESTABILIZING THE NORM THROUGH DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGIES

We employ decolonial theory as a framework to examine our perceptions of the responsibilities of language teacher educators in restrictive contexts. Rooted in the work of Quijano (2005), decolonial theory posits that many of the foundational systems of social classification in the Western modern world stem from colonial domination. The concept of coloniality describes these enduring patterns of power that are central to Western modernity and sustain hierarchical structures across political, economic, cultural, and educational domains. Decolonial theory challenges colonial legacies not only in economic and political systems but also in cultural practices, normative frameworks, and epistemological assumptions that define what is considered legitimate knowledge and who holds authority to produce it. In doing so, it calls for a reimagining of knowledge, identity, and social relations beyond Eurocentric logics.

Still, decoloniality must be approached critically. As Muller (2023) cautions, the growing popularity of decolonial discourse risks turning it into a hollow buzzword that reinscribes the very colonial logics it seeks to dismantle. Thus, our commitment is not only to theory but to a decolonial praxis that is reflexive, disruptive, and situated in our lived experiences in teaching and research. In our roles as language teacher educators in Brazil and the Southeastern U.S.,

we confront the entanglement of institutional standards with colonial systems of power. By moving beyond shallow rhetoric, decolonial pedagogies can help educators and learners to collectively reimagine their classrooms, curricula, textbooks, and practices and explore new ways of existing in this world. As argued by Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonization should not be treated as another item on a checklist of social justice practices; rather, it should demand fundamental changes in societal structures. In the authors' words: "Decolonization is not an 'and'. It is an elsewhere" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36). Such structural changes will then entail a transformation of the responsibilities of teacher educators when preparing teacher candidates to start their professional journeys in education.

While some challenges faced by educators—such as scripted curriculum, surveillance, and limitations in discussing sociopolitical issues—may appear to be global or present in countries that have never experienced formal colonial rule, we argue that these can also be expressions of coloniality.[5] As Quijano (2005) conceptualized, coloniality is the enduring underside of Western modernity, a structure of systemic power that outlives colonial rule and continues to shape global hierarchies of knowledge, race, gender, and sexuality. Decolonial theory, then, invites us to view these challenges as manifestations of deeper and historical structures that continue to shape subjectivities, institutions, and pedagogical practices in different parts of the globe.

In this context, navigating a commitment to challenging systems of prejudice and attending to institutional standards and social expectations can prove to be a complex balancing act, as many of those very standards and expectations may be rooted in colonial thinking. In their trioethnographic study, Wheeler et al. (2023) challenge the practices of what they call *colonial language departments*, which include characteristics and practices such as predominantly white faculty, White-Eurocentric and Europhilic study-abroad programs (often to the detriment of engagement with local grassroots communities), and prescriptive language instruction (which tends to exclude non-standard varieties and cultural backgrounds of heritage speakers). In this context, both students and teachers are positioned within a framework that subtly endorses monolithic, Western-centric values, thus limiting the potential for truly diverse educational environments. They argue that linguists must reckon with our own privileges and challenge our complacency towards the hegemonies within academia.

[5] This phenomenon has been referred to as *colonialism without colonies*, particularly in post-colonial studies.

Decoloniality, as Mignolo (2007) argues, involves a process of de-linking (*desprenderse*) from Eurocentric rationality, which demands a reimagination of knowledge production and a shift towards decolonizing epistemologies. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) studies are an example of how we can move towards a decolonization of language education. ELF challenges the monolithic and universalizing tendencies of traditional English language teaching, rejecting the assumption that learners should perform like native speakers. Instead, language education becomes a site for producing new, locally rooted ways of knowing and languaging that challenge colonial legacies. Moreover, according to Gimenez (2024):

> Pedagogically, it proposes liberation for teachers and learners as they can do away with the myths associated with 'native' speakers and other processes of standardization that assumes the universality of language teaching principles and draws on the 'native/ non-native' cline, a perspective that reinforces the coloniality of language teaching methodologies. Decoloniality would imply challenging the basis of this process of differentiation. (p. 31-32)

Decolonial pedagogies empower educators and learners alike to rethink and transform their practices by addressing the entanglements of knowledge, authority, and identity. They foster spaces for critical reflection and democratic dialogue, thereby positioning language classrooms as sites of resistance and re-existence where the colonial matrix of power can be actively dismantled.

THE DECOLONIAL OPTION: RESISTANCE AND RE-EXISTENCE

When discussing how our comprehension of modernity remained unquestioned, marginalizing and devaluing non-European cultures, Mignolo (2011) put forward a call for the decolonial option. The author underscores the importance of critically examining our realities and how they are rooted in Eurocentric rationality. He pointed out that decoloniality is an option, a conscious and constant choice, that enables individuals to challenge many of the systemic prejudices that pervade our current social organization. Hence, through decolonial thinking, we can challenge the coloniality of power that pervades our respective social systems. Coloniality of power—conceptualized by Quijano (2005) as the *colonial matrix of power*, and later represented in Mignolo's (2011) visual model—consists of four key pillars: knowledge and subjectivity; racism, gender, and sexuality; economy; and authority.

Language education has a strategic place in decoloniality because knowledge and subjectivity are constructed through language. Language practices can maintain and reinforce colonial power. Considering how these pillars manifest in education, we can understand how DEIA-restricting policies reinforce coloniality in education. The pillars of economy and

authority highlight how capitalist logics of productivity and institutional power influence teachers' work conditions. These structures often prioritize compliance and efficiency over critical engagement, further reinforcing colonial practices. Decolonial pedagogies aim to dismantle these interconnected pillars by promoting equity, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering critical, locally relevant teaching practices that challenge colonial legacies in education.

Walsh (2017) argued that decoloniality is not only a sociopolitical and epistemological positioning against the coloniality of power and its reverberations (i.e., an act of *resistance*) but also a positioning for new systems of knowledge, new ways of existing in the world, and establishing relationships with others (i.e., practices of *re-existence*). It follows that decolonial pedagogies are: "insurgent practices that fracture the system and the anthropocentric and heteropatriarchal matrix of capitalist/modern/colonial power; pedagogies that enable and construct radically different ways of being, thinking, knowing, feeling, existing and living-with"[6] (Walsh, 2017, p. 14).

Drawing upon our personal experiences as language teacher educators and language teachers in Brazil and the Southeastern U.S., we employ decoloniality as a theoretical orientation in the following research question: *How can decolonial pedagogies impact the perceived responsibilities of language teachers in restrictive contexts?* Through a trioethnographic methodology, we take on the challenge of actively recognizing the pervasion of colonial power in our practices and enact practices of re-existence to imagine the reverberations of decoloniality in language teacher education.

METHODOLOGY

Trioethnography

Duo- or trioethnography is a methodology in which multiple researchers dialogue on a particular topic, juxtaposing their experiences and perspectives to reveal new meanings "transformed through the research act" (Norris & Sawyer, 2016, p. 9). A duo(trio)ethnography invites reader participation by juxtaposing their own experiences and perspectives in response to our printed text. Through this work, "readers are encouraged to recall and both legitimize and question their own stories" (p. 10) and, in this way, enter the conversation of our collective

[6] Our translation to: "prácticas insurgentes que agrietan el sistema y la matriz antropocéntrica y heteropatriarcal del poder capitalista/moderno/colonial; pedagogías que posibilitan y construyen maneras muy otras de ser, estar, pensar, saber, sentir, existir y vivir-con". (Walsh, 2017, p. 14)

responsibilities towards decolonized perspectives in language education. Uddin Ahmed et al. (2022) refer to this as a "readerly partnership" (p. 540). It is through this collective researcher-reader "reflection and reconceptualization that [we] promote rigor in the study" (Norris & Sawyer, 2016, p. 11).

Within the past five years, trioethnographies have emerged in the field of applied linguistics and language education as a powerful way to examine complex topics such as critical affective literacy (Uddin Ahmed et al., 2022); language, identity, and race (Banegas et al., 2023; Lozano et al., 2023; Wheeler et al., 2023; Yazan et al., 2023); and privilege, marginalization, trans-speakerism, and DEI-efforts (Gagné et al., 2018; Hiratsuka et al., 2023). For example, Uddin Ahmed et al. (2022) utilize a trioethnographic approach and a conceptual framework of critical affective literacies to examine "how affect and emotion intersect with language pedagogies" (p. 550). The authors view affect, emotion, and feeling as increasingly implicated in how today's society amplifies, challenges, or resolves local and global issues. These views align with duo/trioethnographic methodology, which requires participants to engage dialogically with each other, necessitating trust, vulnerability, and risk-taking through "a willingness to suspend cherished beliefs/biases" (p. 540). The authors conclude by offering three examples of critical affective literacy for language teaching and/or language teacher education, drawing specific attention to how affect and emotion impact the way we engage with texts and each other, and "thus give shape to collectives" (p. 539) and social change.

In a similar vein, Hiratsuka et al. (2023) utilized trioethnography to trouble the dominant ideology of native-speakerism in the field of English language education. Similar to our positionings in the present research as one doctoral supervisor and two doctoral students, Hiratsuka et al. (2023) examine their own lived experiences in the academy, and how understandings of Global Englishes, intercultural awareness, and professionalism have affected their professional relationships and performances over time. Their findings support that dialogic interactions, as promoted by duo/trioethnographic research, encourage shared understandings of critical terms like Global English and trans-speakerism, which can contribute to positive power-shifts and repositionings that enhance team mentorship rather than inequitable positionings determined by post-colonial native-speaker ideals.

As the trioethnographic dialogue is intended to push the participating researchers toward new levels of consciousness (Norris & Sawyer, 2016) through mutual engagement and examining relevant artifacts, we utilized a practitioner article (Edwards, 2024) promoting decolonial perspectives for the world language classroom as the impetus for our first Zoom

recorded conversation about our responsibilities as teacher educators supporting decolonial perspectives for language education. In the subsequent recorded Zoom meeting, we used the previous meetings' transcripts to continue to examine and extend our thinking. Our collective engagement on this project was conducted via Zoom in two unrecorded sessions and two recorded sessions. Each session lasted between one and one and a half hours. Additionally, due to the distance between locations, we worked collaboratively in Google Docs to reflect on transcripts, adjust and generate new discussion questions, and identify "hot points" (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009, p. 2555). Considering our insights from decolonial and poststructuralist orientations, we also engaged with Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) notion of writing as thinking and data analysis to disrupt the western Descartian subject/object dualism (see Descartes, 1993) inherent within conventional qualitative inquiry in which the researcher is separate from that which they are studying.

Multiple and Contradictory Subjectivities: Troubling the "I"

The three authors of this manuscript operate within orientations that include decoloniality, poststructuralism, posthumanism, and new materialism. In our initial draft of this manuscript, we named our subjectivities in tandem with the notion of subjectivity in conventional qualitative inquiry. As Peshkin (1988) described, "we bring all of ourselves-our full complement of subjective I's-to each new research site, a site and its particular conditions will elicit only a subset of our I's." (p. 18) Therefore, the researcher is always already imbricated within all facets of the research process. Moreover, by naming one's subjectivities, one can potentially eschew biases. Considering our diverse ethico-onto-epistemological assumptions rooted in our theoretical orientations, we illuminate how our subjectivities, rooted in colonialism as well as other discourses, are omnipresent and being (re)produced in and through our thinking, writing, and other aspects of this scholastic endeavor.

Connecting this to our analytical practice of writing as thinking and data analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), destabilizing the Descartian, humanistic, rational subject (see Descartes, 1993) at the center of conventional qualitative inquiry aligns with not only decoloniality, but rather, our other orientations influenced by those which would be labeled the "posts." In sum, we may not be able to contain our "untamed subjectivities" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 21), but we acknowledge how our multiple "I's" are present in the co-construction of knowledge within this manuscript as well as what constitutes knowledge. Through the notion

of reflexivity, we consistently interrogated the "I" that has been omnipresent in this scholastic endeavor.

A DECOLONIAL APPROACH TO OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS LANGUAGE EDUCATORS IN RESTRICTIVE CONTEXTS

In considering the aims of our scholastic endeavor, our trioethnographic approach underscored the perceived responsibilities and complexities of engaging with decolonial pedagogies as language teachers in restrictive contexts and as teacher educators preparing teacher candidates to attend to critical issues in such contexts. In the following section, we discuss intersections such as teacher engagement with theory, nativism and the 'native speaker' ideal, scripted curricula and teacher autonomy, and the balance between standards and community building. We illuminate challenges and reflections regarding the application and development of a decolonial praxis in educational contexts marked by colonial legacies and restrictive policies, and how these challenges intersect with the responsibilities of language teachers.

Accessibility vs. Depth: The Theory and Practice Dualism

The tension between accessibility and theoretical depth was recurring throughout our first conversation as we reflected on Edwards' (2024) practitioner article on decolonial pedagogy. At the beginning of our collective reflections on this article, Felipe shared that he perceived it to be a "watered down" interpretation of decolonial theory, raising questions concerning its capacity to engage with the complexity of decolonial thought. In contrast, Liv responded to this argument by illuminating the necessity of relevance for practicing educators in relation to practitioner-oriented scholastic endeavors. Teachers, and in particular, language educators, are constrained by schooling practices (Coda & Moser, 2023), and teachers may not, as James affirmed, have time for engaging with more conceptually-oriented work.

> James: Thinking about the research that we do, it informs everything that we are doing, whether we are thinking about comprehensible input from Krashen. Or if we're talking about decolonial pedagogies, queer theory and pedagogies, etc., and beyond, or critical pedagogies, as you mentioned, Liv… Theory is always already embedded but we're not always necessarily calling it that. We need to get teachers to do that deep reading, too... We talk about creating critically reflective practitioners…We need to ensure that our teachers are engaging with the theory, but also at the same time Liv, you made a great comment, which is for the busy practicing educator who can't sit and read the theoretical or philosophical book… They can obtain an understanding of decolonial pedagogies through the practitioner article that Liv provided for us.

> Felipe: I agree with you that the teachers are usually very busy, and it's hard for us to ask teachers to engage in complex reading of theory. And also, I was thinking that the very reason that teachers are busy might stem from colonialism or colonial power.

As Felipe noted, such constraints are rooted in coloniality, which is related to how our current labor structures prioritize productivity over deep intellectual engagement and development (Mignolo, 2011). In the conversation, Felipe and James emphasized the necessity and responsibility of language teachers to engage with theory because of the entanglement between theory and practice. Nevertheless, while the demands of teaching can present challenges for profound engagement with decoloniality and other critical pedagogies, it is the responsibility of language educators and language teacher educators to read deeply, as it can produce thinking that will trouble coloniality in all aspects of the language classroom.

Expanding this reflection in our second meeting, Liv recalled an argument that such practitioner articles could serve as "entry points" into more complex theoretical work for teachers. As such, the utility of practitioner-centered articles such as Edwards' (2024) can be paramount for more substantial engagement with decolonial pedagogies for those in restrictive contexts.

> Liv: I've been thinking about the notion of entry points in connection with what you said about theory and practice. Remember, we talked about 'watered down,' like that piece feels watered down. No, it's an entry point for practitioners to be able to engage in some of this decolonial thinking in a meaningful way in their classroom. It's an entry point for them. But also, what I haven't thought about is entry points for student perspectives in the classroom, right? How do we establish those communities?

This reflection offers an alternative framework for educators navigating the tension between engaging with theory and meeting work responsibilities. Viewing accessible articles as initial steps toward deeper theoretical exploration can prompt teachers to engage with theory over time and progressively integrate it into practice. This raises a critical question: As language teacher educators, what is our responsibility in supporting teachers to reflect theory in their practice? Liv emphasized that it is our responsibility to provide entry points in the curriculum so that pre-service teachers can engage with theoretical reading in a way that makes it possible to mobilize it in the classroom. This is relevant for educators across various disciplines, but it is especially important for language educators due to the centrality of colonial power in and through language. In sum, failing to integrate decoloniality in language teaching might inadvertently reinforce coloniality, as Felipe stated: "Language is such an interesting place of power dynamics, a lot of coloniality happens in language or through language. So, this is something we should be thinking about." Felipe's reflection on the potential of language

education in reifying colonial power aligns with myriad scholastic endeavors that have examined the colonial underpinnings of language education (cf., Guilherme, 2008; Núñez-Pardo, 2020; Pennycook, 1998). As language educators and language teacher educators in restrictive contexts, colonial discourse dictates what is permissible and thinkable in the language classroom in relation to the curriculum, materials, and pedagogy, as is also reflected in the legacy of standardization (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). Our reflections, based on such scholarly works, illuminate the necessity of decolonial praxis in teacher education and its role in dismantling inequitable practices.

The tension between accessibility and depth regarding theory also presents an opportunity for us to reflect on our roles as teacher educators in fostering transformative practices. As educators, we are responsible for creating spaces (in our classrooms and curricula) that support engagement with theory, thereby offering teacher practitioners the opportunity to consider decolonial and other critical perspectives and their impact on their practice. By framing these entry points as groundwork for initial engagement with theory, we can empower teachers to engage with insurgent systems of knowledge by incorporating indigenous and non-Western philosophies into our discussions and exploring real and contextualized language and educational practices of these communities. This process can create space for transformative shifts, both in practice and identity, as teachers progressively deepen their theoretical knowledge and integrate decolonial practices into their pedagogy.

At the same time, we are cautious not to reduce decolonial praxis to a set of pre-defined strategies or transferable best practices. Doing so would risk slipping into the very representational logic that decolonial theory critiques—one that assumes knowledge can be easily packaged, transmitted, and applied across contexts. Instead, a decolonial approach seeks to provoke reflections, unsettle assumptions, and cultivate spaces where theoretical engagement can emerge relationally and dialogically over time. Practitioner-oriented articles and curricular entry points, therefore, are not ends in themselves but starting points for engagement with decolonial thought in localized and situated ways.

Nativism: A Chimera

Another focal point of our trioethnographic assemblage was the presence of the ‘native speaker’ ideal in language education. As native speakerism has been called into question (cf., Rampton, 1990), Felipe critiqued how English language textbooks position the ‘native speaker’ as an aspirational model to be mirrored, typically a North American or British ‘native’ speaker.

James expanded this discussion by offering a critical perspective, describing the nativist ideal as a mythical, unattainable figure—*a chimera*. This discussion underscores the importance of challenging hegemonic norms that reinforce the idea of a single, monolithic, universal standard: the 'native speaker'. By framing the 'native speaker' ideal as an artificial construct, we acknowledge the need to overcome this limitation and focus our efforts on promoting effective communicative competence as the goal of language education, both within and beyond classroom settings. In the excerpts below, the chimeric 'native speaker' became a locus of consideration in relation to the responsibilities of language educators:

> Felipe: I feel there is also something about the textbooks that we use in our classes. Sometimes, especially in Brazil, they reinforce the idea of the 'native speaker' from the United States or the United Kingdom as the model, as the goal… And I think that research on English as a Lingua Franca helped us shift this perspective and understand that communication is the goal, not sounding like a 'native speaker'.
>
> James: I see this as another discourse that is still present within the field, even though researchers like Rampton and beyond, problematized that native/non-native binary. But who is this native? I would always ask my international students when I taught various classes, and when they would say things like, "I want to speak like an American". And we'd problematize what America is, too. Because when I would hear that, I would have to say: "Well, do you mean like a US person, or like a Canadian, or a Mexican, etc?". And we would get into South America, and all of this, too. But again, I would say, who do you want to speak like? Do you mean the construction worker outside? Do you want to speak like a university professor? Do you want to speak like both of them?

In referencing Rampton's (1990) scholarly work on the native/non-native dichotomy, James argues that this socially constructed dualism continues to be omnipresent within the field. Moreover, in this discussion, James's reflection on how he destabilized the notion of 'American' with his international students encouraged students to interrogate their assumptions and not rely on the native/non-native dualism as it can create ambivalence (Wooten, 2022). Relatedly, Gimenez (2024) described the legacy of colonialism inherent within the native/non-native dualism as the concept of native reflects the "Eurocentric episteme" (p. 31) and standards to which one must be held. However, initiatives such as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF, mentioned by Felipe) and *ELF feito no Brasil*[7] (ELF made in Brazil) are paths forward to decolonize language teaching as they illuminate how language education can trouble assumptions, ideologies, and hierarchies rooted in colonial practices. Our conversation emphasized that resisting this binary is not merely theoretical but a necessary pedagogical commitment to decolonial practices essential to language teaching and learning. Untethering

[7] For more on ELF feito no Brasil, read: Duboc & Siqueira, 2020 and Jordão, 2023

oneself from the unattainable ideal of the chimeric 'native speaker' frees the learner to engage in ways that might be less pressure-filled and resists colonialism. In sum, troubling the native/non-native binary represents a de-linking from Eurocentric reasonings and is central to our responsibility as language teachers and language teacher educators engaged in decolonial practices.

Related to our discussion around the native/non-native dualism rooted in colonialism was our shared reflection on the emphasis of study abroad in language education. In language education, Wheeler et al. (2023) problematized how colonial language departments utilize study abroad programs to develop students' proficiency in the target language. In considering decoloniality and the native-as-chimera, our reflection stood in contrast to the typical understanding of study abroad as paramount to increasing students' proficiency. In particular, the intersection of class rooted in colonialist discourse surfaced within our conversation as it pertains to the responsibility of language educators:

> Liv: A lot of my [language] students don't have the possibility to study abroad. And so, how do I make my curriculum meaningful and just as valid for them in an accessible way? That's my responsibility.
>
> Felipe: Many times, study abroad programs are chosen to the detriment of engagement with local communities.

As Liv noted, considering how to make language curricula accessible and meaningful for students without privileging colonial practices, such as costly study abroad programs, reflects our accountability as educators to foster equity and access. Felipe's response further underscores the importance of engaging with local communities as essential to resisting colonial legacies. Therefore, this conversation highlighted the necessity for our practices to be contextually grounded in language education. While there are myriad ways to engage with local communities, an emphasis on the global and the local or *glocal* community can encourage critical reflections on representation, multimodality, and linguistic ideologies.

Scripted Curriculum and Autonomy in Teacher Education: A Game of Strategy

The impact of scripted curricula was another focal area of our discussions of the responsibilities of language teachers and language teacher educators in restrictive contexts. In particular, we described the notions of teacher education and teacher autonomy. Liv shared her perspective that in U.S. world language education, scripted curricula have not been as impactful as in other disciplines in the K-12 context, thereby providing world language educators more freedom in designing their own materials and, in turn, greater autonomy in approaching critical issues in

the classroom. Collectively, we reflected that even though this autonomy might mean that world language education is considered "secondary" in the U.S. K-12 context, often suffering from budget cuts and lack of prioritization, it might have positive reverberations in teacher autonomy. In our discussion, Liv illuminated the impact of the textbook and its intersection with scripted curricula and autonomy in the language classroom:

> Liv: I want to pick up on the textbook factor. I really would be curious to see some statistics around textbook use because I think they're falling out of favor. I just think that people are not using textbooks nearly like they used to because people, and world languages in the U.S. in particular, are interestingly positioned, because I would argue that scripted curriculum hasn't quite gotten to us yet. I don't think there's anybody caring about what we do as much as the main core content areas. So, any scripted curriculum that we claim is scripted is created by us. The benefit of creating our own curriculum is that we can do whatever we want. We have so much more wiggle room because we are less affected, we are less watched. And our standards support some flexibility around those critical issues.

Following Liv's reflection, Felipe contrasted this with the situation in Brazil, where English language teaching has been progressively constrained to greater extents due to a scripted curriculum (Barbosa & Alves, 2023). He emphasized that this might reveal a difference in the social capital attached to learning world languages in the U.S. and learning English in Brazil, which ultimately impacts language education and teacher autonomy. As such, there is less social capital associated with world language education in the U.S., where educators are less surveilled and therefore have greater autonomy in designing their own material.

> Felipe: We have a situation back home in Brazil with a scripted curriculum in English classes. We have student-teachers going to their practicum and then not having room or space to do anything, just enacting what is prescribed by the curriculum. And we have these discussions: How does one learn to be a teacher in this context?

Felipe's reflection highlights a critical aspect of the broader dynamics of coloniality in language education. In Brazil, the colonial power of English, amplified by globalization, positions it not only as a language but also as a lucrative commodity (Oliveira, 2020). This commodification often drives language teachers to adopt materials and methods originating primarily from Global North countries, shaped by neoliberal and market-oriented ideals. These ideals can be prioritized at the expense of teacher autonomy and locally contextualized practices (de Deus, 2024). While English language teaching has become a global industry, in contrast, as noted by Liv, U.S. world language education presents relatively lower social capital, affording language teachers greater freedom to design their own curricula, though often at the cost of being deprioritized within the education system.

In related discussions of the intersections of teacher autonomy and scripted curricula in language education, the responsibility of language teacher educators to prepare pre-service teachers for heavily constrained contexts surfaced. Felipe described his experiences in Brazil and the U.S. and utilized them to interrogate how teachers can learn to be effective educators in such restrictive environments. However, James and Liv's retorts illuminated how exposure to scripted teaching environments could assist pre-service teachers in developing strategies for navigating constraints.

> Liv: I remember last year, at some of our meetings, there was some disagreement amongst the professors and the graduate students. Some of us argued that student-teachers should not be put in those contexts where there is a heavily scripted curriculum because it doesn't reflect our values. But then others of us said, "No, it's really important that they're in those contexts, so we can help them learn how to subvert, manage, you know, play the game. But also modify the game."
>
> James: In tandem with what you just said, Liv, you can't protect them from it. My thinking is also just to put them in the thick of it and let them understand what the boundaries are. If you don't know what the boundaries are, then you can't go beyond or think differently regarding those invented boundaries. And so, when they understand the rules of the system, as you just said, then they know how to play the game better. They know what they can't do, what they can do, and what the gray areas are, too.
>
> Liv: It's kind of like a chess game. They can't learn strategy if they're not in the game, right?
>
> James: Our responsibility, then, as language teacher educators and language teachers, is to ensure that our students can problematize these norms and assumptions. Various discourses have assembled to enable them to even speak that way, right? That is really the way I see our responsibility in tandem with decolonial pedagogies and thinking, to really upend and to trouble those assumptions.

Learning strategies to effectively navigate through a scripted curriculum are representative of teacher autonomy. Moreover, preparing teachers for such contexts requires balancing institutional demands with a commitment to equity and social justice. Importantly, learning to navigate constraints does not mean reinforcing them but developing strategies to challenge and transform them. As James noted, teacher educators have a responsibility to ensure that students can critically examine the norms and assumptions embedded in restrictive systems. Our reflection underscores how teacher candidates often navigate broader institutional frameworks that reinforce colonial logic. However, these same contexts can also serve as sites of resistance and possibility. Because decolonial thinking challenges institutional norms that are rooted in colonial power, our approach does not always align with institutional guidelines; rather, we view this as a productive tension that open spaces for reimagining curriculum, teacher education, and professional practice in ways that center equity and epistemic plurality that are rooted in decolonial pedagogy.

In related conversations, we discussed the importance of fostering community in the classroom as a means of supporting critical conversations, even in proficiency-focused environments. Building community not only facilitates dialogue but also positions classrooms as spaces for resistance and re-existence. James noted this tendency to restrict "critical conversations" to higher proficiency classes only, which could limit opportunities for addressing meaningful content and fostering critical thinking in all levels of proficiency. However, Felipe provided a reflection that is in tandem with Coda's (2018) critique of the emphasis on proficiency in language education that eschews critical conversations and is connected to colonialist discourse:

> Felipe: I feel that sometimes we think about critical topics as only a pretext to practice the language, because the focus is on proficiency most of the time. We don't see the potential of the discussion of the topics themselves. When attending to those ideals of placing proficiency over community, I feel that we reinforce coloniality. What kind of speakers will our students be, right? What kind of interactions will they have in the language? I think we don't ask these questions enough, and I feel this is our responsibility as language educators.

Felipe's reflection underscores that language educators have a great responsibility in considering how their teaching shapes the way learners (inter)act in the world through language. Language is not merely a tool for communication, but a means for social participation. As Trevisan Ferreira and Cristovão (2021) remind us, it is indispensable to reflect on the types of linguistic and praxiological actions we foster in our educational practices. To contribute to a more just, equitable, and socially engaged society, language education must not only enable learners to act through language but also ensure that these actions are reflected responsibly and respectfully. By centering these principles and not solely centering efforts on proficiency, as Felipe states, language classrooms have the potential to become spaces where criticality is omnipresent.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we sought to examine our responsibilities as language educators and language teacher educators in restrictive contexts of Brazil and the Southeastern U.S. through a decolonial approach. As Walsh (2017) argued, decolonial pedagogies are insurgent practices that challenge and fracture systems of oppression rooted in colonial power. Our trioethnographic exploration highlighted that the influence of coloniality has manifested in myriad ways throughout our experiences as language teachers and language teacher educators navigating restrictive contexts. Our experiences reflected how colonial power is omnipresent

in aspects such as anti-diversity policies, scripted curricula, native-speaker ideologies in language education, and capitalist structures of labor.

Acknowledging colonial systems of oppression in our teaching practices calls us to reimagine our responsibilities as teacher educators. In our trioethnographic exploration of the responsibility of language educators in restrictive contexts, we illuminate Mignolo's (2011) call for the decolonial option, which demands an active and conscious process of identifying and upending Eurocentric rationality in our practices. In turn, it raises the question of the responsibilities of language educators in navigating restrictive contexts.

Our findings suggest that a key responsibility of language teacher educators committed to decolonial pedagogies is to help teachers engage more deeply with theory (Orchard & Winch, 2015), even in restrictive contexts or under work conditions that limit their possibilities for scholastic exploration. The tension between accessibility and depth related to the theory/practice dualism often prevents pre-service and early-service teachers from engaging with critical concepts and integrating them into their practice. To address this, teacher educators must seek to create entry points that scaffold engagement with complex theory over time (Glynn et al., 2018). Practitioner articles, collaborative commentary tools, and structured discussions around the practices and principles highlighted by Siqueira (2020) can provide accessible pathways for the teachers to progressively deepen their theoretical knowledge.

Another critical responsibility of language teachers and language teacher educators involves modeling and fostering dispositions that support effective civil discourse in language classrooms. With the ascendance of anti-diversity policies in both Brazil and the Southeastern U.S. (Brito et al., 2023; Butturi Junior et al., 2022; Chronicle Staff, 2024; Melo, 2020; Silva Oliveira et al., 2021), language teacher educators must demonstrate ways in which to facilitate respectful, meaningful conversations on race, gender, sexuality, and other critical topics, even in proficiency-focused environments (Coda, 2018). By incorporating these approaches, we can provide pre-service and early-service teachers with the skills and confidence to replicate it in their own classrooms, creating spaces for resistance and re-existence, which is aligned with decoloniality. One way to balance proficiency-oriented goals with community building is to commit to developing student dispositions that support engaging in civil discourse in the target language. Collaborative conversation-based instruction (Mellom et al., 2019) and conversational placemats (Wooten, 2024) are two approaches that assist students in setting personal goals and tracking their progress toward using the target language to collaborate effectively with others. As students develop their abilities to effectively engage with their peers

on various topics within a safe classroom environment, they will likely draw on these experiences when communicating with others on sensitive or critical topics outside of class and school.

Our conversations also identified the responsibility to prioritize local community engagement and collaborative projects in teacher preparation programs. These include projects such as linguistic landscape analyses (Gorter, 2018; Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and life-story interviews with local community members (Pentón Herrera & Trinh, 2020) to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to connect their pedagogy to authentic, localized contexts. These initiatives challenge Eurocentric and universalizing teaching practices and curricula, encouraging teachers to integrate diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives into their practices. Decoloniality, hence, invites teachers and teacher educators to advocate for linguistic ideologies that prioritize local epistemologies and challenge the perpetuation of inequitable and hierarchizing systems (Gimenez, 2024).

Teacher educators are also responsible for preparing pre-service teachers to navigate and resist the constraints of scripted curricula. The interplay between scripted curricula and teacher autonomy highlights a crucial responsibility for teacher educators: preparing pre-service teachers to develop resilience and adaptability in balancing institutional demands with a commitment towards equity and social justice. As de Deus (2024) discussed, the imposition of a scripted curriculum affects teachers' identity and autonomy, thereby shifting the role of the teacher within the classroom. This indicates a responsibility for teacher educators to equip pre-service teachers with the tools to navigate constraints strategically. For example, Glynn et al. (2018) offer guidance on adapting existing curricula for social justice. This includes scouring scope and sequence, cultural blurbs, and vocabulary lists to find entry points to support social justice topics. They offer examples and encourage finding space to "articulate jointly" social justice goals with the already-established language and proficiency goals (p. 54). For instance, a teacher candidate using a scripted reading passage might invite students to compare it with community-authored texts that present alternative viewpoints. This would not replace the mandated material but would complicate its perspective by adding locally relevant voices. In doing so, the candidate illustrates how even scripted lessons can become entry points for decolonial engagement. In another example, a candidate working with a mandated vocabulary list could encourage students to contribute additional words connected to their home and community practices. The co-construction of these lists would expand on the scripted material without discarding it, thereby creating space for knowledge that is often excluded. Thus, by

embracing a dual commitment to resistance and re-existence, teacher educators can foster a sense of community and enable pre-service teachers to challenge restrictive norms while advancing equity and inclusivity in their practices.

Finally, we understand fostering community in the classroom as a central responsibility for language teacher educators. Critical conversations should not be restricted to advanced proficiency levels (Coda, 2018); rather, inclusive classroom communities provide a foundation for students of all proficiency levels to engage with meaningful content. As our findings illuminate, prioritizing proficiency over critical engagement can reinforce colonialist discourses by narrowing language education to prescriptive practices rather than meaningful interaction. This tendency risks shaping learners into passive language users rather than socially responsible actors. By fostering critical engagement, educators can help students reflect on the types of actions they take through language (Trevisan Ferreira & Cristovão, 2021). Building classroom communities rooted in meaningful dialogue positions language education as a site for resistance and re-existence (Walsh, 2017). Through these responsibilities, language teacher educators play a vital role in shaping transformative practices that empower teachers to resist colonial legacies in educational contexts. By integrating decolonial frameworks into our teaching, we can model to pre-service and early-service language teachers how to use language education as a tool for acting in the world in equitable, responsible, and respectful ways.

CONCLUSION

This trioethnographic exploration sought to understand how decolonial pedagogies impact the perceived responsibilities of language teachers in restrictive contexts. We examined our entangled experiences as language teacher educators in Brazil and the Southeastern U.S., addressing critical issues such as scripted curricula, the ‘native speaker’ ideal, and the balance between accessibility and deep engagement with theoretical frameworks. In considering our subjectivities as language educators and language teacher educators in restrictive contexts, we found decoloniality to be productive in navigating these contexts and destabilizing colonial legacies inherent in education. For language educators working in restrictive contexts, employing strategies of resistance and re-existence, and elevating community-based, locally relevant practices, can help navigate such contexts strategically without reinforcing such discourse.

We understand that educators may face reprisal for their identities and their discussions in the classroom due to restrictive policies (e.g., Geller, 2020); however, the aforementioned strategies may provide alternatives to destabilizing the legacy of colonial and other discourses inherent in educational spaces. By employing strategies that seek to trouble colonial and other discourses through the insights of decolonial theory, educators can balance institutional demands with a commitment to equity, thereby reframing their roles and classrooms as spaces for transformative learning. In considering our myriad responsibilities as language educators and language teacher educators, we are tasked with preparing future language educators to navigate constraints strategically while challenging and reshaping the norms that uphold coloniality as well as all normative discourses that restrict what is feasible in the classroom and beyond. In sum, engagement with decoloniality empowers educators to advance diversity and equity and invite criticality into their practice (Kubota, 2024), even in restrictive contexts where increasing demands can potentially limit what language educators and students can do in educational spaces.

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