

Introducing linguistics to high schoolers as a healing practice

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Abstract. In this paper, we offer a curriculum and two lesson plans to teach linguistics to high school students in a TRIO program. We propose that teaching linguistics to high schoolers can be done by centering their identities and their communities. We offer some examples of the content that we used in our own teaching, and we discuss how linguistics can give the tools needed to the students to talk about their experiences, and to understand the needs of their community. Finally, we demonstrate the use of social justice as a way for the student to engage more deeply with the subject of linguistics, process lived experiences and work towards healing.

Keywords. introductory linguistics; culturally sustaining pedagogy; social justice; high school; inclusive education; K-12 curriculum; local community

1. Introduction. In this paper, we advocate for the relevance of teaching linguistics to high school students by centering their identities, their communities and their lived experiences. We believe that linguistics should be introduced earlier in students' careers, not only to increase awareness of linguistics, but most importantly because it provides a framework to understand and contextualize the students' lived experiences, thereby serving their interests and the ones of their communities. We propose that linguistics can facilitate learning, healing and personal growth through the integration of social justice. These goals guide the development of the learning objectives of the curriculum that we propose as an introductory linguistic course for high schoolers, thus shifting the focus away from more traditional objectives of an introductory linguistics course, which are still present, but deprioritized. Inspired by Calhoon et al. (2021) our curriculum provides the students with the scientific foundations and tools to discuss their linguistics experiences, which leads us to prioritize topics such as sociolinguistics and bilingualism, which are easily relatable to the students' lived experience.

Finally, we incorporate social activism as a tangible outcome of students' learning. We propose that one of the ways students start the process of healing is through social activism. Social activism is viewed as a way to advocate for language change and development within one's community. By helping students voice their concerns and teaching them about possible forms of action they can take, then they can begin the process of reflection and healing.

We created an introduction to linguistics curriculum that we implemented in a summer program for the Upward Bound Program in a minority-serving, Hispanic-serving institution funded by a Federal TRIO grant, which is a "federal outreach and student services program designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds" such as low-income individuals and first-generation college students. We delivered the program during a 6-week period, twice a week, each lesson being 1h15 long. The curriculum creators and

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instructors are members of the community themselves and senior linguistics B.A. students with an interest in linguistics as a form of social activism (Charity Hudley 2013).

Our curriculum (see also Casillas et al. in progress) is inspired by work written by Lidz & Kronrod (2014), Loosen (2014), Bucholtz et al. (2015), McKee et al. (2015), Larson et al. (2019) and Plackowski (2020; in press), who introduced linguistics to high school students. Differently from Larson et al. (2019) who propose that we should include linguistics as Advanced Placement (AP) courses, we advocate offering linguistics in a partnership with programs supporting minoritized students in our field. Moreover, we want to demonstrate what social justice looks like in a high school linguistics classroom with the incorporation of students' involvement within their communities. We agree with Plackowski (in press) about “investigating social issues, problems, and questions related to social justice and media literacy” (p. 1); however, we recognize that the rationale on social justice is different depending on the local community. We provide and define what social justice looks like by identifying the social issues from our local community and providing our students with various examples of social activism, which they can use to advocate for change. Similarly to Thomas (in press), our curriculum is grounded in principles of social justice, and centering students' identities, their communities and their lived experiences; by doing so students use linguistics as a tool and their cultural knowledge as an asset to enact change.

Our introduction to a linguistics course is inspired by the work of Bucholtz et al. (2015), Calhoun et al. 2021, Casillas (2022), Plackowski (in press). We structure the curriculum by alternating more traditionally included topics (e.g. morphology, phonetics), with topics that allow students to relate their lived experience to linguistics (e.g. bilingualism, sociolinguistics, raciolinguistics).

We also used linguistics as a way to train students for the North American Computational Linguistics Open (NACLO) competition and to careers in our field, which we expand on in Casillas et al. (in progress). We include NACLO to help high school students develop STEM related skills such as pattern recognition and logic, that will prepare them to apply for college - one of the objectives of the Upward-Bound program. Our curriculum is centered on three main ideas: (i) healing: the possibility for students to use linguistics as a way to understand and express themselves, their own lived experiences, and their ideas, and (ii) real world application: the introduction of ideas and methods that would help the students to learn about how to apply the concepts we learned in a practical manner. (iii) Awareness: the breaking of misleading and/or problematic ideologies both within the communities and outside of them.

This paper is structured as follows, in section 2 we present the curriculum we have created and its content; in section 3 we expand on two examples of lesson plans centering social activism; in section 4 we discuss how sociolinguistics can be used as a way to relate for students and as a link to social activism. Section 5 concludes.

2. Curriculum description. In this section, we present the description and rationale of the curriculum by elaborating its content. This curriculum uses a combination of subjects and themes. The subjects of the curriculum are: first language acquisition, bilingualism, morphology, sociolinguistics, sociophonetics, raciolinguistics; the themes are what is linguistics, social activism, prescriptive vs descriptive grammar, stages of first language acquisition, code-switching, translanguaging, meaning of words, language and society, social categories, language attitudes, language variation, language influence, language discrimination, appreciation vs appropriation, real-world application, and careers in linguistics. The curriculum highlights these subjects and themes because we propose that by focusing on students' identities, communities,

and lived experiences, we are using their linguistic and cultural capital as a foundation for their learning. Yosso (2005) among others, and Mantenido (2021) specifically in linguistics, emphasize the importance of using community cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts in the classroom and education. Furthermore, because language surrounds us, we want students to have a place to reflect on it, its connection to our cultures and identities, and the possible career paths involving its study. The rationale for this curriculum is grounded in principles of social justice, where students focus on the importance of language and its relevance to the community. By using their language, historical, and cultural knowledge students will critique biased language systems and analyze the dynamics of power and privilege and how they influence on interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional levels. For further elaboration, we will take a closer look at two topics from the curriculum-bilingualism and language and society, which are connected by an emphasis on social activism.

Weeks	Thematic Unit	Subjects	Objectives <i>Students will be able to...</i>
Week 1	Introduction to the field of linguistics and to NACLO Uses of linguistics Prescriptive vs. Descriptive grammar	Linguistics	Share their own experiences with language Express their viewpoints and society's assumptions of language
Week 2	Stages of first language acquisition	First language acquisition	Recognize how babies unconsciously learn language
	Code-switching Translanguaging Interlanguage grammar	Bilingualism	Formulate understanding of L2 acquisition Illustrate the importance and features of bilingualism Offer examples of code-switching using their language (own unique speech style)
Week 3	Meaning of words (morphemes)	Morphology	Identify morphemes, analyze and recognize word parts Create a morphologically complex word

Week 4	Language and society Social categories Language attitudes	Sociolinguistics	Share language experiences & define sociolinguistics Define the relationship between language, culture, and identity
	Articulatory Phonetics Language variation Language influence	Sociophonetics	Practice producing and recognizing sounds Relate the intersection between sociolinguistics and phonetics
Week 5	Language discrimination	Raciolinguistics	Illustrate the relationship between language and race Discuss experiences of language and race
	Appreciation vs Appropriation	Raciolinguistics and Sociolinguistics	Examine and reflect on the difference between appreciation vs. appropriation through mainstream culture Discuss the case of appropriation and appreciation of Black English & Chicane English
Week 6	Real-world application	Careers in linguistics	Hear career experiences of guest speakers Share their career project

Table 1. Design of the curriculum (map)

3. Lesson plans. The goal for students during week two is to advocate for bilingualism and to highlight the criticality of a multilingual society. Fromkin et al (2018) demonstrate how there are numerous bilingual and multilingual communities and how bilingualism must be recognized and accepted as beneficial, transitioning away from a deficit language lens. During this lesson, students watch a Youtube video where they learn about the benefits of a bilingual brain, then watch a TikTok video about code switching, a speech style unique to bilinguals, where speakers switch languages between or within sentences. Lastly, in the main activity, students with a partner create a tweet where they can creatively and freely advocate for bilingualism. They then play a Trivia game in teams.

Lesson Plan: Bilingualism: Understanding and Advocacy	
Target audience and context: 9th-12th grade	
Learner levels: Beginner	
Class size: 18-21	
Class length: 9:15-10:10 class (55 min)	
Terminal objectives: <i>Students will be able to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formulate an understanding of L2 learners (interlanguage grammar) ● Illustrate the importance and features of bilingualism ● Offer examples of code-switching using their language (own unique speech style) ● Review NACLO problem sets and solve quiz problem set on morphology 	
Enabling objectives: <i>Students will be able to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognize key terms and characteristics of interlanguage grammar in second language acquisition ● Reflect on their own experience and advocate for bilingualism ● Analyze examples of code-switching and translanguaging ● Practice code-switching using their language ● Review answers and solve morphology worksheet (quiz) for NACLO 	
Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Computer, Adapter, Projector, PP ● Whiteboard ● Expo markers ● Internet (Youtube) (TikTok) ● Paper (poster) ● Worksheet (quiz) 	
Time and materials 7 min	Procedures: Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Greet Ss and take attendance ● Have Ss take out name tag ● Morning Yoga (3 min) ● What did we learn last time? (2-3 min)

<p>15 min</p> <p>Youtube Video</p>	<p>Pre-Task: introduction/schemata activation (1-2 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What to expect/preview of class ● Show objectives on PP ● Ask Ss to take notes (individually) from the video <p>Stimulus material: Youtube video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Show video (5 min) ● Have Ss share & write 1 fact on board in groups (5 min) ● Circulate the classroom for support ● Call on groups to share (2 min)
<p>20-22 min</p> <p>TikTok Video Social Activism: Tweet</p>	<p>Main Task (10-12 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Briefly introduce second language acquisition and interlanguage grammar ● Bridge to Bilingualism on PP – discussion on bilingualisms, bilingual societies, bilingualism in the U.S., bilingual education ● Discussion on code-switching and translanguaging ● Show TikTok video on code switching ● Ask Ss if any questions <p>Stimulus activity (10 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have Ss form partners ● With partners, Ss will create a tweet on poster to advocate for/educate on bilingualism ● Posters will be collected (Next class: we’ll go over posters & post them up in classroom)
<p>10-11 min</p> <p>Trivia Game</p>	<p>Post-Task Review of the main-task answers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have Ss form two teams ● Play Trivia Game to assess understanding of the content presented/discussed ● Write down team scores on other white board ● Have Ss take 1 piece of candy
<p>15 min</p>	<p>NACLO section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review worksheet answers from Monday ● Ask Ss if any questions ● Handout NACLO quiz “The Tortoise and the Rabbit”
<p>1 min</p>	<p>Closure: Application/Extra-class work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tell students they did a great job ● Remind Ss what to expect/look forward to

Table 2. Bilingualism lesson plan (week 2)

During week four, students learn about the social and cultural aspects of language, precisely language ideologies/attitudes. This topic emphasizes recognizing the relationships between language, culture, and identity, where students apply their language experiences by analyzing

their identities and social influences. Students critique biased language ideologies, language influences, and question norms. Thus, students first participate in a sociolinguistics language interview with a partner where they respect and actively listen to their language experience. Students then watch a TikTok and Youtube video in class, learning about dialects, linguistic varieties, and linguistic features. Students are expected to write down two interesting points, and as a class, create a note tree. The culminating activity is one where students participate in social activism by creating a poster: advocating for a change in language attitudes to highlight the power in social language influences.

Lesson Plan: Sociolinguistics: Social influences with Social Activism	
Target audience and context: 9th-12th grade	
Learner levels: Beginner	
Class size: 18-20	
Class length: 9:15-10:10 class (55 min)	
Terminal objectives: <i>Students will be able to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share language experiences through sociolinguistics ● Review the relationship between language, culture, and identity ● Start a new NACLO worksheet on Number Problems 	
Enabling objectives: <i>Students will be able to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gain an understanding of the relevance of sociolinguistics ● Explain how social categories are intertwined with language ● Elaborate on personal language experiences with social activism ● Practice problem set NACLO worksheet 	
Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Computer, Adapter, Projector, PP ● Whiteboard ● Expo markers ● Internet (Youtube) ● Sticky notes (post-its) ● Paper ● NACLO worksheet 	
Time and materials 5 min	Procedures: Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Greet Ss & take attendance ● Have Ss take out name tag ● Play hangman with class (word: Sociolinguistics) ● Pass back posters

10-11 min	<p>Pre-Task: introduction/schemata activation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have Ss get in partners ● In partners, Ss will interview each other (10 min) ● Ss will write responses on their interview guide ● Circulate through the classroom for support
25 min Youtube video Tree	<p>Main Task (10 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What to expect/preview of class on PP ● Show objectives on PP ● Define sociolinguistics ● Discuss key terms from sociolinguistics, social categories, language variation, the role of languages in communities, etc. on PP ● Ask Ss if any questions <p>Stimulus material: Youtube video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Show video (10 min) ● Ask Ss if any questions <p>Stimulus activity: (5 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have Ss write down 2 points/facts from video on stickynote ● Ss will post their sticky notes on the Sociolinguistics Tree (whiteboard) ● Read sticky notes together as a class
15-20 min TikTok Social activism poster	<p>Post-Task Review of the main-task answers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Present language attitudes through media representation (5 min) ● Have Ss advocate for a change in language attitudes (10 min) ● Ss will have the freedom to create a poster/or tweet ● Circulate classroom for support ● Ss will present their poster/tweet (5 min)
15-20 min	<p>NACLO section</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pass out new NACLO worksheet ● Have Ss try groups after explanation, give hints throughout ● Circulate classroom for support
1-2 min	<p>Closure: Application/Extra-class work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tell students they did a great job ● Remind Ss what to expect/look forward to

Table 3. Sociolinguistics lesson plan (week 4)

4. Sociolinguistics as social activism for high schoolers. Charity Hudley (2013) focuses on sociolinguistics as a necessity for social activism and change. She supports the idea that linguistic social activism promotes social justice by/within the community. We view social justice not as something that is defined by one single definition, but by different definitions depending on the social issue at hand. These social issues need different approaches depending on the students' local communities. We are not implying that social justice is a factor that can be fixed in one single setting and that it can fix all social issues; instead, we see it as various forms of continuous

actions with the intention of change that is helping and providing sustainability, resources, changes, and opportunity to genuine community demands. Therefore, we want to learn the demands of the community, thus stepping away from the savior complex.

In our curriculum, we implement activities and discussions that allow the students to look at smaller interactions within their communities, as well as larger-scale social processes that might affect them. We asked the students to look critically at social norms, and to discuss the biased systems that affect their community and society at large. In one activity, we incorporate an exercise that allows students to express ideas on bilingualism. This helps them analyze their local communities' experiences of linguistic discrimination, which affects bilingual speakers and is perpetrated by monolingual speakers. After the reflection activity, we asked the students to create tweets to advocate for bilingualism and to express how they feel about the subject. By having the students create these tweets we show them that they can make changes to alter negative ideas presented by society. We also encourage them to bring their voices to social media, so many can hear their words and see the influence and change that they are willing to make towards their community.

As students continue to learn about topics such as sociolinguistics and sociophonetics, they are further prompted to make changes geared towards social justice. Through the linguistic knowledge learned during the course, the students feel encouraged to make community changes as they now know how to do so in their own words. By guiding them towards the process of viewing social issues, we help them understand what they are experiencing and seeing in their communities, which in turn starts the process of healing. For example, by having a student acknowledge that being yelled at to speak English while speaking in Spanish in a store is not only extremely rude but is a form of language discrimination, the student can now put into words exactly what was done to them. This process is helpful as it can lead students to understand how to process the incident and possibly heal from it. It is important to make these topics relevant and easy to implement for students to understand so that they are able to take on the challenge of large scale social issues (Charity Hudley 2013). Since language is a personal factor, students feel more inclined to create change for themselves and as well as for other students. These activities are not only seen as a means of self-identification, but as a sense of establishment in their belonging to their idiolect.

In order to take the sociolinguistics approach to social activism, it was necessary to understand the student demographic, which appeared to be mostly low income, minoritized students and children of immigrants. Knowing who the curriculum was for, and who it affected, helped with introducing social activism to the students, as it showed them both the negatives and positives associated with language. In a negative context, students were introduced to the idea that the US is recognized as an English speaking monolingual society, even though there are various bilingual and multilingual communities that reside here, and English is not the official language of the country. However, from a more positive perspective, students were shown and reminded that language takes on many forms and that there is no language that is superior to another, thus validating their lived experience. There is an importance to seeing sociolinguistics as social activism, which is why the curriculum was altered in a way that students would feel comfortable expressing themselves. One form of expression that has proven effective in this teaching method, has been social media. The goal of introducing social media was to make linguistics become more approachable to the students. Since this is their main means of communication, the curriculum was catered to allow them to use this method to speak to others about linguistic topics. Students use social media as it provides them with multiple ways to

connect with other people whether it be friends, family, or even scholars. They use social media through their phones, laptops, and tablets which allows them to have easy access to the world no matter where they are. As emphasized by Charity Hudley (2013), it is important to not only assert the language that the speaker speaks but also to guarantee their right to do so. This curriculum allows for students to speak however they please and offers alternate ways in the form of verbal, written, and digital expression.

In particular, students were more excited about lessons when activities such as TikTok videos or creating Twitter posts were introduced. Due to media encouragement students were also able to approach and critique negativities associated with language superiority, discrimination, and language appropriation discussed in the course. As social media is easily accessible, decipherable, and within familiar usage, students were more willing to learn about factors of which they were unaware, but which affect their everyday lives. These real-life experiences were constantly shared by students throughout the course and were instances where they faced or witnessed language discrimination, language appropriation, or language biases. Social activism allowed them to express their disdain for these occurrences as well as their feelings on the matter. It also showed them that there were positive events they could create in support as social activists, as stated by Charity Hudley (2013), ideas of multiple language use, community knowledge, and language variation. Our goal was to show them that there are positive ways to express change to address negative views towards languages. Simply by communicating in a way they feel comfortable, students have expressed that linguistics is a topic where they feel the most comfortable being who they are, and advocating for what they believe is right.

We share a few students' tweets alongside the used lesson plan below.



Figure 1. Sample tweet

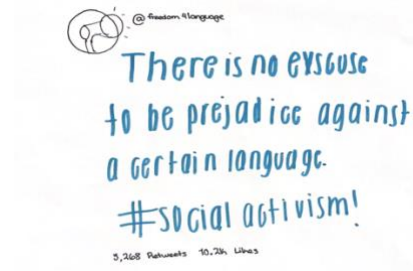


Figure 2. Sample tweet



Figure 3. Sample tweet

5. Conclusion. Our curriculum shows that through the study of linguistics in relation to social justice, students related to the subject matter and found ways grounded in science to express themselves about their language experiences. Thanks to in class and hands-on activities, most of which were geared towards the acquisition of linguistics concepts and their relation to local communities' experiences and needs, students are more confident in advocating for themselves and within/for their communities.

In this paper, we reported the curriculum, and the example of two lesson plans which were mostly focused on social justice. We reported the content of the lesson plans as examples that could be followed by others who intend to engage with communities like the one we are part of. We also offered a brief summary of how social activism can be implemented in an introduction to linguistics course, and why it matters. We concluded by suggesting the importance of integrating social media as a tool of social activism. We recommend reading Casillas et al. (in progress) for more details on this curriculum and its characteristics, as in this article we only focus on two topics, and on more information of how this kind of pedagogical approach can be implemented in any introductory linguistics course.

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