

Social media in the linguistic classroom: Discussing appreciation vs. appropriation

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Abstract. In our paper, we focus on integrating topics directly relevant to students' lives, a principle we consistently strive to embody in our pedagogical approach. Specifically, we explore the dynamics of appreciation and appropriation within the music industry, inspired by Garza's (2021) work, as a leading topic for a module of a linguistic course. Through the implementation of in-class discussion activities, we utilized platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Twitter (currently X), to center the modality and the topics that are of high importance for students and their lived experiences. Our paper highlights the benefits of effectively engaging students with topics that are related to their experiences and through the use of technology. By adapting and refining the curriculum based on student interests, we aim to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within linguistics classrooms.

Keywords. introductory linguistics; culturally sustaining pedagogy; social justice; high school; inclusive education; cultural appreciation; cultural appropriation

1. Introduction. In this paper, we advocate for the inclusion of the topic of appropriation vs. appreciation in a linguistic introductory course, through the use of social media. The topic of appropriation vs. appreciation was included following work by Yosso (2005) among others, and Mantenuto (2021) and Casillas et al. (2023) specifically in linguistics, which emphasize the importance of using community cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts in the classroom and in education. Moreover, the integration of social media tools was inspired by Calhoun et al.'s (2021) proposal of integrating social media to center sociocultural influences on language practice. We wanted an introduction to linguistics course that the students in our class could be engaged with. We wanted to integrate in it their linguistic experiences, which involve multilingualism, often of more than one language and/or English variety, contrary to the most common introductory courses that center Standard English and talk about multilingualism only in specific lessons and their communities, which are often referred to only in sociolinguistics sections, but that are often (mis)represented on social media or pop culture, and never truly celebrated and/or appreciated in the culture. So the goal of this lesson, for us with our student population, was to relate and integrate the content to their lived and linguistic experiences, while offering them the tools to talk about them. Any group of students would benefit from this lesson by learning ways to identify stereotypes, speak about them, and stop others from perpetrating them. This paper focuses uniquely on the lesson on appreciation vs. appropriation, and although

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we mention this lesson within the context of a widely reshaped introductory linguistics course, it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the whole course in detail, we rather recommend the reader to look up Casillas et al. (2023) or to connect directly with us about our paper in progress for more details. This paper is structured as follows: in section 2 we present background information, in section 3 we explain our teaching strategy and examples of what we implemented, in section 4 we review major issues in the music industry that we implemented in our module, in section 5 we discuss the music industry further, along with appreciation, and lastly in section 6 we conclude.

2. Background. Our institution, which is a minority-serving and Hispanic-serving institution, has a [TRIO program](#) that takes place over the school year. The TRIO program is a federal outreach and student services program, designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, low income, and First Generation students. The students attending from the TRIO program are in the majority from South LA and the South Bay area. Furthermore, a vast amount of the students are from the Global Majority and are children of immigrants. We decided to design the course the way we did, integrating the students' lived experience, research in their community and reflections on sociocultural language practices, to obtain a higher level of engagement. Critical and student-centered pedagogy beneficial to engagement has been supported extensively (Chávez & Longerbeam 2016; Paris & Alim 2017, a.o.). Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of two main elements when working with students, especially students in K-12 and who hold a strong connection to their community of origin and who are from the communities that our institution and the TRIO program at our institution serve. First, Bucholtz's (2015) School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society (SKILLS) program at the University of California-Santa Barbara provided academic outreach for high school students who conducted original research in their local communities, while doing teaching training for undergraduate and graduate students. Second, Calhoun et al. (2021) showed the benefits of integrating social media into the classroom to center sociocultural influences on language practice. Our class was designed by Lauren Casillas, following previous experiences like the one by Bucholtz (2015) and Calhoun et al. (2021). Our course, similar to theirs, aimed to reach out to high school students from local communities and develop their knowledge of language and society, while training undergraduate students in teaching. The two main differences were that our program partnered with TRIO and the course was created by an undergraduate student through a mentorship program and that because of its length it did not have a research component. This class was taught at California State University Dominguez Hills by Monique Mangum and Lauren Casillas during summer 2022 to the students in the TRIO program. It came after we already had lessons on these linguistic varieties and their communities, as well as lessons on sociolinguistics and raciolinguistics.

In our lesson, and in the course as a whole, we decided to implement social media in order to engage students and meet them on the platforms that they use daily. Understanding the technologies that many students have grown up with and meeting them where they are technologically is a good teaching practice that we wanted to emphasize. Moreover, Calhoun et al. (2021) had already shown the benefits of integrating social media to center sociocultural influences on language practice. We decided to do the same, and use Tiktok, YouTube, and Twitter (currently known as X). We also chose to take language examples from social media platforms whenever possible, this was done for two reasons, to have the linguistic examples stated in real context often by people from the community of language practice, and to obtain

data that was more relevant and realistic. Consequently, our first focus for this student audience became social media and social topics.

3. Teaching strategy – introduction. In terms of our teaching strategies, we wanted to foster students' connection to linguistics, by simply introducing topics that we found the students were more vocal about learning, following an interest-based instruction approach (Robertson & Padesky 2020), we made sure to change our lesson plans and curriculum consistently in order to accommodate the students' preferences in formatting and content (e.g. include more social media). We narrowed down these topics based on our own experience as members of the same communities the students were from, but also through having once-a-month meetings with students from the TRIO program, though not the same exact students, during the academic year preceding the summer. We did not do a formal survey, but rather we presented during the year a variety of topics to them (e.g. language and society, careers in linguistics, language documentation, morphology) and we observed what was more interesting and engaging to the students. We then centered those topics in the curriculum. Moreover, this course helped us to reach our greater goal of contributing to the scholarship of teaching in linguistics by sharing with others our teaching practices that we implemented and other related observations. In particular, our implementation centered the idea and theory of attracting students to topics that affect their own lives, a point already proven effective in Calhoun et al. (2021).

This lesson came after students had learned, in previous lessons, about language, culture and society. We used a Powerpoint with embedded videos and Google forms to teach this lesson. Students were first introduced to the topic of the day, appreciation vs. appropriation, by being offered definitions. Appreciation consists of being aware and respectful towards the origins of a culture, whereas appropriation does not acknowledge or appreciate the origins of a culture. Culture here is intended as the set of signifiers that belong to a community. We want students to critically discuss these signifiers and place their and others' interpretation within this appreciation/appropriation framework (see also Garza 2021).

We employed a multimodal learning approach (Gilakjani et al. 2011, a.o.) by offering multiple modes to teach concepts. After we showed a quick [TikTok video](#) on the topic of cultural appropriation, students then discussed what they learned and afterwards filled out a questionnaire. The questions presented consisted of asking the students where they had seen appreciation and appropriation being used and also tested their participation in the discussion. This [online questionnaire](#) was given to students during class with a QR code to help them identify ideas they had learned. The answers to the question were then discussed as a class together. Some students noted in their answers that they had seen appreciation mostly in weddings, where guests would respectfully wear ceremonial outfits, as for appropriation students focused on movies such as Peter Pan, which dressed children in Native American clothing and used stereotyped Native American chants.

4. Major issues within the music industry: Appropriation – lesson topic 1. We included the conversations on appropriation to help students find a clear connection between elements in their own lives and linguistics. We structure the discussion around this topic to start with sharing what they noticed based on what they had studied before, we analyzed the video in terms of verbal and nonverbal content, and we concluded by discussing how the experience of watching the music video affected them or others personally, and what were their thoughts or feelings about what they observed. One may argue that it can be challenging to relate formal theoretical approaches to personal experiences, this reflection allows students to foster a deeper understanding and connection to linguistics. The content of this case study could be changed based on the local

student population (e.g. text chosen to identify the type of appropriation in music industry) and the structure could stay the same and still be applicable.

We first introduced students to the social and contextual information necessary to place the content of the course, this is to not teach in isolation the content, but rather situate it within an interdisciplinary conversation, which also facilitates the students ability to relate to the content - not only text analyzed linguistically, but also a text they encounter in their community and a topic of discussion within it, both virtual and in person.

Students were offered socio-historical background information within the US music industry. Then, we introduced them to verbal and iconic linguistic information to further discuss the music industry; it was important to review a few of the major issues found within it. We have done so by looking at a case study presented in Garza's (2021) work. To start, we took a look at a few examples of appropriation of Black English and Chicanx culture within music. Specifically, Black English makes up the majority of lyrics in Rap and Hip-Hop when we take into consideration the linguistic features that are present in most songs. In the discussion we also connected the ideas that Chicanx culture and Black English are constantly profited off of in the music industry. This leads to non-native speakers participating in appropriation, whether occurring consciously or unconsciously. This has detrimental effects on the community as there is no room for understanding or true appreciation of cultures to occur. The music industry is worth \$28.6 billion, and the community undoubtedly does not benefit from that earning.

Taking a look at the K-pop artist CL, we used her music video to guide the discussion about three main issues: cultural appropriation, verbal and non verbal features associated with specific cultures, how sociolinguistic features associated with race and gender can be used to manipulate content. We showed CL's music video "[The Baddest Female](#)" and discussed with the class the appropriation that occurs within it. Garza (2021) mentions that the appropriation issue occurs in the K-pop industry when artists use embodied forms of Blackness that are historically tied to Black culture. The K-pop industry does profit from appropriation of other cultures; however, this is done by focusing on a "style" from an earlier time period, appropriating it, and making it their own. CL's appropriation in her music video was primarily taken from Black and Chicanx culture. She takes on Black English and Hip-hop styles, such as call-and-response and braggadocio. Her "style" also indicates street life; however, she uses them to strengthen her femininity rather than as a representation of where she is from. These representations are emphasized to represent street life within the Black and Chicanx culture, which CL is not a member of. To further prove her personality, CL brings in Chicanx culture and Cholo/a aesthetics and bits of California gang culture, out of a physical context, alienating from the real communities in the locations these communities live in, which further exemplifies her appropriation.

After we showed the clip and reviewed some linguistic appropriation examples, another video was presented to discuss appropriation in Iggy Azalea's music video "[Bounce](#)," this time offering the students the opportunity to practice more on their own the identification of linguistic features of appropriation. After the video was shown, we asked the students to write down any physical or linguistic features that they noticed were being appropriated within the video. The students then mentioned the clothes that Iggy wore along with the Bollywood style, and Black English she used. Some other features found within the lyrics were zero copula "we spinnin'", a nasalization of the vowel at the end of a word "pullin' up", drop of the interdental fricative "gettin' 'em tipsy", and the use of present to indicate future "tomorrow we kick it." Many more physical features and lyrics were depicted in the video as a sign of appropriation that the students

were also able to take time to discuss and point out. In the next exercise, to review the material and assess informally students' understanding, we had the students look up examples, and find appropriation on social media platforms, such as TikTok, Twitter and/or YouTube and share with the class.

5. Music industry: Appreciation – lesson topic 2. We included the conversations on appreciation to help students recognize that it does exist and can be done meaningfully through the use of language. Due to a vast amount of appropriation that occurs in the music industry, we wanted to make sure the students also saw examples of appreciation, as we realized that opening conversations on how we can appreciate cultures was equally important. In this activity, we decided to review the well-known rapper Eminem and discuss how he acknowledged his white privilege and recognized the roots of Black English as he used it in his music. Eminem understood and paid tribute to Black people and their community, while also being aware of the history and meaning of the language and culture he used. We were aware that Eminem was not a perfect representation of appreciation as he had made music in the past that has depicted Black women in a negative light. We made sure to acknowledge that fact with our students and went forth in showing them videos in which he does appreciate Black culture. Parallel to what we had done with the topic of appropriation in CL's work, also with Eminem's work we discuss the same three main issues: cultural appropriation, verbal and nonverbal features associated with specific cultures, and how sociolinguistic features associated with race and gender can be used to manipulate content.

An example shown to the students were a few lyrics from his song "[White America](#)", where he stated "let's do the math if I was Black I would of sold half" for context, he showed that he has white privilege because he recognized that if he were Black, he may have only sold half of the albums he's made. In two other lyrics, he mentioned "I ain't have to graduate from Lincoln High School" and "we just swapped, sittin' back lookin'...". These linguistic features that were used here were not as forceful of a representation as done in Iggy Azalea's video. This is due to him acknowledging his place as a white man and also one that has profited off the music industry, which has continued to appropriate Black English and culture. Eminem also dedicated an album to Black Lives Matters, titled "Revival", where he discusses police brutality, further bringing awareness to the Black community and the struggles they face.

After students read a few of the lyrics from his songs, looking at some of the linguistics features and lexical items chosen, to discuss how he has appreciated a part of Black culture, he uses the feature of Black English, such as "ain't have" or "sittin'", respectively, negation and a nasalization of the final vowel. However, these features are preceded or followed by lyrics that discuss openly white privileges, as in "Let's do the math: If I was black, I would've sold half". We checked their understanding on the topic of appreciation by asking the students to tweet about it, answering the question "what does appreciation look like?" We gave them a template to fill out, we did not ask for an actual tweet, because not everyone in class had a Twitter account but also because of age limitation.

To conclude, we used formal and informal assessments, to check how the acquisition and retention of the content taught was going. One informal assessment was done through dialogue learning approach (Alexander 2008) by asking the students to answer the following questions: "What do you think are the next steps to help this issue?" and "How can we stop others from appropriating different languages and cultures?". The students took time to answer these questions in groups, and we discussed them later as a class. In the formal assessment we asked the students to put in practice what they had learned, by reflecting on what concrete actions one

could accomplish and tweet about it. Being able to ask students to develop next steps requires them to have understood the content.

In our classroom, we saw that introducing social topics such as raciolinguistics and sociolinguistics before introducing more standard topics were effective in keeping students engaged with discussions and with their interests in linguistics. Students also learn about the dynamics of power and privilege at the personal and societal level and enjoy discussions that cater towards issues that affect their communities and society as a whole. To further elevate the use of evidence-based teaching, it would be beneficial to continue to choose topics and discussions that students are personally connected with. Not only does it have a positive learning outcome, students also find connections amongst one another in issues and complications they face in society. We believe students will be more likely to continue working on these topics as it ties into their areas of interest, including social media, societal complications, and issues within their communities and outside of them.

6. Conclusion. Our paper aims to enhance the understanding of what it means to engage with students through technology, while also implementing evidence-based teaching in linguistics by choosing curriculum's content based on students' interest. Students spent time discussing what they learned from the lesson and how they can take time to appreciate one another's cultures by staying aware of what is and is not respectful. They also mentioned being taken aback by how much their own cultures were profited on by mainstream media. For example, they discussed feeling uncomfortable knowing that much of the appropriation that occurred never came back to their own communities in the form of a thanks or payment to local programs. The topic of appreciation versus appropriation is never included in an introduction to linguistics curriculum; however, we were aware that students coming from the communities and speaking the languages represented in music videos like the ones described in Garza's paper (2021) would appreciate this kind of content. We also were aware that including students' experiences, in this case the languages and neighborhoods, in the course, and giving students the tools to talk about how they felt about these (mis)representations, would make this topic of great interest.

Finally, the inclusion of technology was a way to help students feel more engaged with the content and to feel more comfortable sharing some of their thoughts. It is our job as linguists to continue to add equity, diversity and inclusion in our classrooms, so that students learn to engage with topics that appear on platforms that they frequent. Using social media increases engagement and condenses complex ideas so students can relate, understand, and also appreciate other perspectives and ideas. In our opinion, using social media is impactful because we are meeting the students where they currently are (their form of communication is through social media and technology) and by doing so, we are able to expand their thinking as it has a real-world application. By making their learning relevant, we are creating more meaningful learning opportunities and giving them more freedom to express themselves due to the collaborative nature of the activity, for example tweeting. With the tweet activity, students share, comment, and engage with each other's tweets which opens a gateway for discussion, as we witness in the room. When students created their tweets, we posted them on the walls and they walked around (gallery walk) which led to comments and open conversations. We believe that it is vital for students to not only share their own thoughts through their tweets, but to actively listen and read others' perspectives and formulate their opinions and have the tools to transfer that into a classroom conversation.

Although our curriculum was geared towards high schoolers, this is applicable beyond secondary education. Additionally, this would benefit higher education, as social issues should be introduced into linguistics in order to encourage inclusivity and diversity within the field.

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