

Article

Teaching Critical Vocabulary to Filipino Heritage Language Learners

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Abstract: Engaging in critical dialogues in language classrooms that draw on critical pedagogical perspectives can be challenging for learners because of gaps in communicative resources in their L1 and L2. Since critically oriented classrooms involve discussing social issues, students are expected to deploy “literate talk” to engage in critiquing society and a wide range of texts. Although recent studies have explored teachers’ and students’ engagement with critical materials and critical dialogues, research that explores language development in critical language teaching remains a concern for language teachers. In this paper, I share my experience of fostering language development, specifically the overt teaching of critical vocabulary to students of (Tagalog-based) Filipino language at a university in Hawai'i. Through a discussion of racist stereotypes targeting Filipinos and the impacts of these discourses on students’ lived experiences, the notion of “critical vocabulary” emerges as an important tool for students to articulate the presence of and to dismantle oppressive structures of power, including everyday discourses supporting the status quo. This paper defines critical vocabulary and advances its theoretical and practical contribution to critical language teaching. It also includes students’ perspectives of their language development and ends with pedagogical implications for heritage/world language teachers around the world.



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1. Introduction

One of the facets of critical language pedagogy (CLP) is the active engagement of the students in critical dialogue among themselves, and between the teacher and the students. Instead of simply presenting facts and information to students, teachers engage the former in dialogue through problem-posing and dialogic education [1,2], which allow for the emergence of a flexible curriculum drawn from the immediate experiences of the students. Critical scholars [3–5] underscore the value of focusing on the lived realities of students as the primary source of curricular contents and advance the notion that critical dialogue should form the locus of student learning. The focus on learners’ experience is a move away from the conventional view or banking model of education [6] where teachers and schools view students as empty vessels who are passive and unreflective consumers of information.

In exploring critical dialogue in my own context, I draw on the empirical work of second language teachers and critical educators [7,8] whose works focus on raising critical consciousness in their classroom praxis. In their work, Jennings et al. [8] use critical dialogue to refer to the occasion in which individuals “draw on and share their own lived narratives and perspectives to reveal and *deconstruct* status quo discourses, *reconstruct* their understandings to account for sociopolitical inequities that were previously invisible or unrecognized, and *construct* actions that reflect these new understandings” (p. 3). My research aligns with the aforementioned scholars, as it strives to help alleviate human suffering through consciousness-raising or conscientization [6], which is the “learning process to perceive systematic contradictions and to take transforming action against oppressive elements of reality” [3] (p. 258). Shor [2] believes that critical consciousness

“allows people to make broad connections between individual experience and social issues. A class for critical consciousness explores historical contexts out of which knowledge has emerged and its relation to the current social context” (pp. 127–178).

Shin and Crookes [9] explored how creating spaces for dialogue is possible even in the test-driven educational culture of South Korea. Considering the constraints of Korean EFL curriculum, the primary author Shin came up with a small-scale intervention within an existing top-down curriculum and institutional structure in order to foster critical dialogue between her and her high school students by using critical lessons. Shin and Crookes found that when the curricular contents and the classroom environment provide safe spaces for dialogic thinking and criticality, students actually engage in critical dialogue. They also reported that contrary to common essentialist perspectives, which have stereotyped East Asian students as passive, given the right environment, their Korean adolescent participants actively engaged in the dialogic process dealing with critical issues. This suggests that given the right mindset and theoretical background, teachers might be able to successfully implement and should not be afraid to explore critical pedagogy in their own teaching practices in spite of the perceived contextual constraints (see also [10,11]). In the same manner, Benesch [1] promoted dialogic thinking in her own class in order to address homophobia. During the dialogue, she served as facilitator and sometimes intervener in order to have “a balance between student contributions and gentle challenges by the teacher” (p. 578). Benesch concluded that although her effort to promote critical dialogue may not completely eradicate homophobia or negative attitudes towards members of the LGBTQ community, her students, especially those who held contempt towards homosexuals and international students from other cultures who never heard of them before coming to the U.S., were able to examine their values and “consider alternatives to intolerance and violence as reactions to difference” (p. 578; see also [12], this issue). For Merriam et al. [13], we can start by establishing a classroom that makes students ask questions and critique normative worldviews. Specifically, they posit that, “Questioning and critiquing taken-for-granted worldviews, structures, and institutions of society are the first steps in changing oppressive and non-emancipatory practices” (p. 241). Drawing on the work of Brookfield [14], Merriam et al. [15] state that students should work on seven learning tasks: challenging ideology, contesting hegemony, unmasking power, overcoming alienation, learning liberation, reclaiming reason, and practicing democracy. Through a critically oriented curriculum, I have engaged my students in questioning hegemonic ideologies and practices that promote and legitimize the status quo, hoping that the critical awareness they gained from the classroom dialogues and discussions will result in some form of concrete action in the future when they leave the academy.

Although CLP has gained more attention in recent years through the publication of several studies that explored teachers’ and students’ engagement with critical contents and critical dialogues (e.g., [1,9,16,17]), and opportunities for scholars to share their work in major conferences that have recently added strands for critical approaches in language teaching (i.e., AAAL and TESOL), more work in this area remains wanting in the field, especially in languages other than English (LOTE) contexts. The same could be argued in the area of heritage language education, which has picked up on critical pedagogy only recently and where studies in this context have come mostly from US-based Spanish language scholars only (e.g., [18–21]). Thus, critically oriented studies in this area are much needed, because as several scholars [22–25] found, many HL teachers insist on framing their curriculum and classroom practices from a nationalist and unitary perspective to make learners embrace their heritage identity even though students often challenge this. Moreover, HL students often experience linguistic insecurity because of the idealization and privileging of native speakers in many HL learning environments. In fact, HL students are often labeled as “deficient” language users because of monolingualizing ideologies pervasive in HL classrooms [26,27].

As an applied linguist committed to social justice in HL education, I took the task of responding to calls for more practical examples of implementing CLP seriously. In this

article, I underscore the value of the explicit teaching of critical vocabulary in order to give students a voice in questioning social injustices and everyday discourses that marginalized certain groups of people. This discussion is especially relevant in the context of HL teaching, where students are known to demonstrate a weakness in speaking and writing [19] or show only partial knowledge of certain grammar properties [28]. Additionally, this work is significant because two questions that often get asked of scholars working in CLP are: *Is there still room for grammar instruction in courses that foster critical dialogue? How do we address the issue of language development?* Macken-Horarik [29], while examining the role of language proficiency in a critical approach to texts, also asked a somewhat similar question not too long ago, “Is the critical literacy territory open to all students whatever their diverse starting point—their social and linguistic formation?” (p. 74). Perhaps for us working in this area the answer is obvious, as we would often echo Morgan [30], who stated that adopting a critical perspective of language teaching “doesn’t mean neglecting language” (p. 19). However, a quick survey in the existing literature shows that teachers have repeatedly asked the same questions and constantly looked for case studies that address this concern on language. Thus, in this paper I hope to address this scholarly vacuum in the hope of engaging teachers to reflect on possible directions that a critical heritage language teaching may take and ways to address their questions on language development. Lastly, as pointed out earlier, CLP studies in the HL contexts have come mostly from US-based Spanish language scholars only, and additional studies, like this one, are needed to promote critically oriented teaching practices and research in less commonly taught languages (LOTE) in the US.

2. Critical Teacher Research

Like many of the studies cited earlier, my work is situated in and aligns with critically oriented teacher research perspectives such as Action Research (AR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) (see [31]). Like critically oriented teacher research (CTR) studies working under the framework of AR and PAR, my work goes beyond contributing knowledge. More than providing a description and interpretation of a classroom reality, it aims to provide an alternative perspective that empowers both students and teachers (see [32]). Although I took the lead role in data collection and analysis, my students actively participated in reframing the curriculum and examining the pedagogical approaches of the two Filipino language classes described here. Sometimes, they consciously welcomed and adopted the critical perspectives I introduced in class. At other times, however, they also resisted my efforts to orient the courses to critical views of schooling, language and language use, and multilingualism, which in turn provided me the opportunities to critically reflect on my research and praxis (see [33]).

Consistent with studies in the critical tradition, I regard my work as an initial step towards mitigating the effects of unequal power relations on my students and as a “form of political action that can redress the injustices” [34] (p. 166) that a nationalist, unitary, and Filipino-centric curriculum might impinge on them. It is a form of “self-conscious criticism” (ibid.) in the sense that, as a language teacher doing research into my classroom praxis, I investigated my own pedagogical decisions and theoretical and epistemological assumptions vis-à-vis my students’ experiences in the learning space we shared for at least over a semester (for some of my students, two semesters). To a large extent, during the conduct of this research, I constantly practiced reflexivity. Guba and Lincoln [35] state that reflexivity is “a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (p. 210). I was aware that I was both a researcher and participant in the research process, and my students, through their interactions with me and engagement with the critical perspectives I introduced in the classroom, were to some extent also researchers, as their actions and reactions shaped the research process. My work is also a social, cultural, and institutional criticism, as it attempts to question and change the status quo discourses and dominant paradigms of language education.

3. Contextualizing the Research: The Filipino Upper Intermediate Class

This study took place over two semesters and was specifically designed for (Tagalog-based) Filipino 301 and 302 (Upper Intermediate) classes, each with 13 and 10 students, respectively, at a university in Hawai'i. I taught the said courses and was fortunate to have been given the leeway by my program coordinator to revisit the old curricula and redesign them based on my teaching experiences and academic training. Filipino 300 level courses aim to enhance students' proficiency in the four language skills but have broadly focused on speaking and writing in order to comply with institutional expectations for classes that have an oral and writing focus. These skills, however, are not taught in isolation and are often taught in tandem with and to support other skills. For instance, some reading activities are used for enhancing speaking, writing, and comprehension skills. Listening activities are likewise used for building students' comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing skills.

Another important context worth mentioning is the active use of translanguaging in the classes described here. Given that all my students have varying proficiency levels (i.e., intermediate low, mid, and high) in Filipino because of unique family histories and language backgrounds, as for instance some students came from households in which both Tagalog and Ilokano (and the most likelihood that other Philippine languages like Cebuano and Pangasinan, among others) are used simultaneously with English, I have advocated for the dynamic use of linguistic resources, also known as translanguaging [36]. A translanguaging perspective is consistent with CLP's view of students as social agents, who are capable of attaining and mobilizing their social agency (see [37]). In Mendoza and Parba [38] and Parba and Crookes [25], for instance, a translanguaging language policy in my classes allows students to leverage their full linguistic repertoires, encouraging student participation and engagement in critical discourse without worrying about getting penalized for not speaking only in Filipino. This is contrary to my personal experience of growing up and studying in the Philippines as a Cebuano speaker in the 90s and early 2000s, in which the use of mother tongue in Philippine classrooms was punished because the old (and now defunct) Bilingual Education Policy only promoted English and Tagalog in education [39,40].

Moreover, the Filipino program and the courses it offers at the university where this study was conducted exist against the backdrop of Filipino migration to the U.S., particularly in Hawai'i, where the majority of Filipinos initially worked in pineapple plantations and experienced harsh treatment from their employers. In fact, various scholars have documented the systemic racialization of Filipinos in Hawai'i, which can be observed in denigrating portrayals of Filipinos in ethnic jokes, the media, and even in literature [41]. The *othering* of Filipinos in Hawai'i is so pervasive that some scholars argued that a generation of Filipinos in Hawai'i grew up hating their Filipino identity, and consequently led to many children disavowing their own language and culture [42]. In fact, many children of Filipino immigrants have refused to embrace their own language, as in the case of many parents who do not want to teach their children the language of their heritage, fearing that the latter will have less opportunities to succeed in the U.S. [43,44]. Knowing this educational and social context, engaging students in critical dialogue on racism against Filipinos is therefore an opportunity for students to uncover hidden ideologies and everyday discourses that have become commonplace in Hawai'i. This curricular and pedagogical decision is also consistent with Pennycook's [45] call for a critical view of language teaching. I strongly believe that HL and WL curriculum and instruction would greatly benefit from engaging with critical topics of race and racism and their connection to gender, class, and ethnicity (see also [46,47]).

4. Methods and Analysis

The data reported and examined here are part of a larger research project (see [33]) that explored the potentials of a critically oriented heritage language classroom. The collected data included student's language background surveys, audio-recorded classroom

discussions and interactions, students' written assignments and requirements, teacher reflections, and student interviews. Following Braun and Clarke [48], analysis involved transcribing, reading the data repeatedly, and taking notes in order to familiarize myself with the collected information, after which I generated initial codes "in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code" (p. 87). This was followed by a targeted search for themes from the various codes that were collated and a review of each theme. Finally, I carefully reviewed the codes and themes to the data and extracted compelling excerpts to support my findings and to produce this scholarly report (see [48] for a thorough discussion of doing a thematic analysis).

In the sections that follow, I discuss the processes through which critical vocabulary emerged from the implementation of CLP in the Filipino heritage language classrooms described earlier. As this paper is both theoretical and practical in nature, its structure may not strictly adhere to the way conventional research papers are organized. It can be said, however, that the following are the findings and discussion sections of this paper.

5. The Emergence of Critical Vocabulary

5.1. Using Codes in Dialoguing about Racism

In implementing CLP in my own classes, I have followed Wallerstein's [49] approach in engaging with her students critically. Working within the area of critical language pedagogy, she suggested that after listening to students' stories and life experiences about their problematic situations that need attention, teachers and students could work together on "codes", or "a projective device which allows learners to articulate their own, somewhat unpredictable interpretation of a potentially problematic situation relevant to their life" [50] (pp. 60–61). Codes may come in various forms such as photos, short video clips, and reading materials among others, and are intended to allow students to articulate their critical understanding and interpretation of the situations facing them. Despite the conceptual and practical importance of codes, in Freirean L2 materials and curriculum development, they have not been the focus of much discussion in the CLP literature (but see [50]), which also has been overly focused on ESL and EFL, without developing much in heritage language contexts, let alone less commonly taught languages.

The theme of racial stereotypes and racism emerged from students' negotiation of curricular content in my own classrooms. This prompted me to look for materials that could be used as codes for such a topic. Wallerstein [49] articulated some of important guidelines in the selection of codes: (1) must be about a daily problematic situation; (2) the situation is presented as a problem with contradictions; (3) should focus on one problem at a time; (4) must not overwhelm students (pp. 19–20). Although these guidelines are useful, in my context of teaching Filipino as a heritage/world language, another important aspect for me in selecting codes relating to the theme of racist stereotypes against Filipinos is "language and contexts." I often look for materials that are written in Filipino and likewise written from the Filipino American or Filipinos in the diaspora perspectives. I give priority to teaching materials written in Filipino in order to not ignore the aspirations of my students to develop higher academic proficiency levels in Filipino. However, I have found that works critically examining racial stereotypes against Filipinos in Hawai'i and more broadly their experiences of social strangulation in the U.S. are written in English. This is of course not surprising, because English is the "official" language in American academia, and most scholars [42,44,51–53] writing from their own research on Filipino American experiences do not write in Filipino. Therefore, I had to make a pedagogical decision emerging from the situation. This led to a short conversation in class about reading materials that critically discussed racist stereotypes against Filipinos. I asked my students if they knew or had encountered any materials that we could use in class. Some students said that their exposure to readings written in Filipino was still limited, so they did not know how to help me or the class. Several other students who took courses in Ethnic Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, and American Studies said that there are readings that critically examined racial stereotypes against Filipinos, but they are all written in English. I

told them that I was aware of some of the readings they mentioned. This conversation led to two important pedagogical and pragmatic questions: Should I use teaching materials written in English that critically examined the topic the students wanted to include in the curriculum? How do I provide opportunities for my students to develop higher proficiency in the Filipino language while using such material? The answer to the first question was 'yes'. After all, I knew that my students are bilinguals who aspire to use their language resources for various reasons (see [25,38]). The second question involved planning and various processes that the whole class had to go through in order to be able to use the code, in the form of a book chapter *Filipino-Americans: Model Minority or Dog Eaters* [53], while at the same time build vocabulary and phrases to help them articulate their understanding in Filipino. This is important because as Morgan, speaking from the ESL context, states, doing critical language pedagogy "doesn't mean neglecting language. It means organizing language around experiences that are immediate to students" [30] (p. 19, in [45] (p. 15).

In order to discuss the code therefore in Filipino, I gave my students the task of reading the material in English as a take-home assignment and told them that we would tackle the main points presented in the book chapter. The following meeting, the whole class did the following activities:

- (1) Gumawa ng listahan ng mga salita na bago niyo lang natutunan mula sa bahaging nakatakda sa inyo. Pwede rin mga parirala o mga pahayag. (Make a list of words or phrases that you just learned from the assigned section of the reading. You may also include phrases or statements.)
- (2) Anu-ano ang mga pangunahing punto (main points) ng mga bahaging ito sa artikulong nabasa? (What are the main points of this section of the reading?)

While trying to accomplish the task, I noticed that my students were very engaged in finding out the Filipino word equivalent to more advanced words/low frequency English terms and also Filipino words expressing criticality. I observed that this is common among students who come to my class, since these complex words are not taught at the lower levels. As these classes, both beginning and intermediate, have focused mainly on teaching grammar and vocabulary that revolve around the family, daily routine, and everyday interactions. Therefore, the majority of the students who come to my upper intermediate classes really need to build higher level vocabulary that will allow them to talk about topics outside their family and themselves. During this particular instance, however, I reminded them that some words in English do not have direct translations in Filipino and they therefore needed to find a way to capture the nuances of these words. This was not the first time, as they would also do the same during activities (e.g., writing and speaking) that required them to articulate their complex understanding of issues. Additionally, my past experiences with dialogic pedagogy addressing critical topics helped me realize that my students needed more time to be able to (1) learn new more advanced items and critical vocabulary to articulate in Filipino their understanding of the code presented and (2) express their understanding of how power relations strongly link to social issues discussed in class. In her examination of critical dialogue, Wilson [54] talks about "language tools" (e.g., asking questions, theorizing, giving evidence) that her students used to engage in critical dialogue. Other scholars like Luk and Lin [55] underscore the important roles of teachers in helping students accumulate stocks of expressions to be able to express their critical ideas or "critical literate talk" (p. 22). However, the existing literature on critical dialogue and CLP has not reported a discussion on the need to acquire what I am calling "critical vocabulary". This is a scholarly vacuum that this paper hopes to fill up.

5.2. Critical Vocabulary in the Filipino Language Classroom

As mentioned earlier, my students explicitly expressed their desire to learn the Filipino vocabulary for words and concepts that were used to dehumanize the Filipinos in Hawai'i's political process of *Othering*. Some of the words pointed out by my students include adjectives such as *temperamental*, *murderer*, *egocentric*, *jealous*, *primitive*, *ignorant*, *gamblers*, and *drunk*. In addition to these words, my students also needed the vocabulary to critique

the process of dehumanization. They listed words like *representation, stereotype, demean, degrading, prevalent, portrayed, race, and suffered* in order to equip themselves with vocabulary that could articulate their stance on the issue raised in the reading material. In Table 1 below, I present my students' own list of words they thought they needed in order to articulate their critical understanding of the topic of racism. This is important because these words came from the students themselves and speak of their proficiency levels in Filipino and their desire to be critical. The subtopics assigned to each of the groups were taken from Okamura [53] as mentioned earlier.

Table 1. (Critical) Words/phrases needed to articulate criticality.

Group 1: Racializing Filipinos	Group 3: Demonizing Filipinos
1. Temperamental— <i>barumbado, madaling magagalit</i>	1. murderer— <i>mamamatay tao</i>
2. crime— <i>krimen</i>	2. demonization— <i>makasalanan</i>
3. egocentric— <i>mayabang</i>	3. reinforced— <i>palakasin</i>
4. bad habit— <i>bisyo</i>	4. conviction— <i>hatol</i>
5. adolescent— <i>nagbibinata</i>	5. describing— <i>naglalarawan</i>
6. jealousy— <i>pagseselos</i>	6. cruel— <i>walang awa</i>
7. primitive— <i>kauna-unahan</i>	7. publicize— <i>ilathala</i>
8. ignorant— <i>ignorante</i>	8. hyperbole— <i>eksaherasyon</i>
9. gambling— <i>pagsusugal</i>	9. punishment— <i>parusa</i>
10. drunkenness— <i>paglalasing</i>	10. innocent— <i>inosente</i>
Group 2: Executing Filipinos	Group 4: Ethnic Humor and Racist Stereotyping
1. lynching— <i>pagbitay</i>	1. representation— <i>paglalarawan, pagpapakita, pagpipinta</i>
2. manslaughter/murder— <i>pagpatay ng tao</i>	2. stereotype— <i>istiryutayp</i>
3. penalty/punishment— <i>parusa</i>	3. unity— <i>pagkakaisa</i>
4. humanity— <i>sangkatauhan</i>	4. assimilation— <i>asimilasyon, tumulad</i>
5. racism— <i>kapootan sa ibang lahi</i>	5. egalitarian— <i>magkakapantay</i>
6. stigma/stigmatized— <i>dungis sa karanglan</i>	6. demean— <i>pasamain</i>
7. abolished— <i>binuwag</i>	7. belittle/look down- <i>maliitin -</i>
8. race— <i>lahi</i>	8. intermarriage— <i>pag-aasawa sa ibang lahi</i>
9. acquitted— <i>absuweltado</i>	9. prestige— <i>karangalan</i>
10. suffered— <i>nagdusa</i>	10. degrading— <i>pasamain</i>
Group 5: Representations by the News Media and Local Literature	11. assertions— <i>pahayag</i>
1. sacrifice— <i>sakripisiyo, paghahain sa dios, kalugihan, alay, handog</i>	12. prevalent— <i>laganap</i>
2. consequence— <i>kinahinatnan, kalalabasan, kapinsalaan</i>	
3. American Dream— <i>'American Dream'</i>	
4. earn a living— <i>hanapbuhay, paghahanapbuhay</i>	
5. minor minority— <i>modelong minoritya</i>	
6. strong work ethic— <i>masipag/matiyaga</i>	
7. amok— <i>huramentado</i>	
8. portrayed— <i>ilarawan</i>	
9. shame— <i>hiya/mahiya/kahilayan</i>	
10. disavow— <i>ayaw umamin, ayaw tanggapin, tumatawa, tumanggi, tanggihan</i>	

After completing their list, each group went up to the front of the classroom to teach their classmates the new vocabulary words they learned from working together as a group and through my help as well. This was done by reading the English words and their equivalent Filipino words or definition to their classmates. This was an opportunity for the students to practice pronunciation and to develop metalinguistic awareness. However, more than that, it was an opportunity for language development, as they would need critical vocabulary, or words and concepts that relate to social processes, to engage in critical dialogue and to express their criticality. During this class session, my students and I focused on meaning, so I tried my best to keep myself from correcting their grammar. There were moments when the students asked about certain words and their meaning, especially when it was triggered by Filipino phrases or statements that were not familiar to them. Below are some of the main points students expressed during the class presentation. The first group of students was assigned to the subsection which tackled *Racializing Filipinos* [53], and the

following is their own restatement of the main points of said section. Note that the group wrote this in Google Docs, and they read these texts in front of the class.

1. Masama ang representasyon ng mga Pilipino sa media; halimbawa, mayabang, barumbado, ignorante, at masamang mga tao. (The Filipinos were painted negatively in the media; for example, they were labeled as arrogant, temperamental, ignorant, and criminals).
2. Sa 1934 ito ay iniulat, mga Pilipino magkaroon kakulangan ng pagtitimpi gaya ng pagsusugal at paglalasing. Itong ideya nagdagdag sa istiryutayp. (Reported in 1934, the Filipinos lacked sobriety because they resorted to gambling and drinking. This added to the stereotypes.)
3. Sa pagitan ng 1910 at 1924, sinabi ng awtor ang mga datos tungkol sa mga Pilipino na gumawa ng krimen sa panahong nito. Malaki ang bilang ng mga Pilipino na sangkot sa krimen ayon sa datos. (Between 1910 and 1924, the author shared the data about crimes committed by Filipinos. The number showed that many Filipinos were involved in crimes.)
4. Sinasabing gumawa ang mga Pilipino ng 52 percent tungkol sa pagpapatay ng tao, at 43 percent tungkol sa sekswal na krimen, at 36 percent tungkol sa pagsusugal, at 28 percent tungkol sa pagnanakaw habang sa panahon noon, ang mga Pilipino ay 9 percent lang sa populasyon. (As stated, Filipinos committed 52 percent crimes related to murder, and 43 percent related to sexual assault, and 36 percent related to gambling, and 28 percent on stealing, while during those years Filipinos comprised only 9% of the total population.)
5. Pumunta dito ang mga kalalakihan noong sila ay 18 hanggang 35, pero walang silang asawa o nobya. Dahil wala silang mga kasama, mukhang kanilang pag-uugali ay masama at tumaas ang krimen. (The Filipino men came here when they were 18 and 35, but they did not have wives or girlfriends. Because they did not have any companion, this affected their behavior so that they acted badly and so the crimes went up.)

This activity provided opportunities for students to learn a stock of words, concepts, and expressions so that they could participate in critical dialogues using Filipino and then write a critical essay that relates to the topic of racist stereotypes against Filipinos and their connection to students' own sense of identity. In addition, the activity also provided them the opportunity to learn that racist stereotypes and other forms of discrimination targeting Filipinos and other minority groups in the U.S. such as those commonly experienced by African Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and Micronesians involved various social, institutional, political, and discursive processes (see for instance [56–58]). My goal was for my students to realize that these denigrating racist stereotypes did not just happen instantly but have been shaped discursively, historically, socially, and politically through the processes of *Othering* and racialization [42,53].

5.3. Language Development from Students' Perspectives

Part of critical language teaching, besides doing reflections regularly on the goings-on inside and outside the classroom and taking reflection notes that become part of teacher-knowledge when shared with other teachers in our community, is listening to students' perspectives. Because critical pedagogues, especially in applied linguistics, often get criticized for veering away from teaching language (i.e., explicit grammar instruction and other specific language forms), I decided to do a quick survey on students' language development where I asked my students at the end of the semester if they were making any progress in the target language. When I conducted the anonymous survey, I reminded my students to give their honest assessment and informed them that their responses may be done in English or Filipino. Additionally, I made it explicit that I welcome, with no penalty on their part, any constructive criticisms that would help me to improve the curricular contents, my teaching approaches, and the course itself.

The majority of students' responses to the short survey, in fact, support Morgan [30] and other scholars [11,45,58] who believe that language learning *still* does take place and should be given attention in language classrooms that orient towards critical pedagogical perspectives. When language lessons are built around critical learning materials, students make significant progress in the target language and do not merely learn grammar points incidentally. Following are some of my students' statements regarding the course and how it helps them to expand their vocabulary and improve their skills in other areas such as writing, reading comprehension, spelling, and other language skills in general. For instance, students A and B below highlight how the course has helped them to expand their vocabulary, which they both see as an essential part of their language learning experiences.

I found this course very helpful when it comes to expanding my Filipino vocabulary. I have also improved with structuring Filipino sentences. Prior to taking this course, I thought that I knew a decent amount of Tagalog to "pass" as fluent. However, this class has shown me that I needed to work on a lot of things, all of which I was able to do through my time in this course . . . This class pushed me to use Tagalog more, including reading. Not only has that made me improve my reading comprehension, I was also introduced to a variety of new words. Reading Filipino texts/stories/essays has also helped me improve my writing. Writing in Filipino was another thing I struggled with, but this course pushed me to get better at it—Student A.

I believe that I have learned new vocabulary from this course. By reading news articles in class, I have learned words such as pamahalaan, magpatupad, and pakikipagkalakalan . . . Learning new vocabulary words helps me to explain a topic much more specifically rather than broadly. By having vocabulary quizzes, it has helped me to memorize the meaning but as well as the spelling which I have had difficulty in the past year. I believe my vocabulary progress has improved this past semester and will continue to expand in this final month we have left of class—Student B.

It is worth noting that student B above also mentioned that by learning new vocabulary words, she is able "to explain a topic much more specifically rather than broadly", as the course, through learning materials that deal with social issues, exposes them to language used in specific discourses and social contexts (e.g., pamahalaan (government), magpatupad (implement), pakikipagkalakalan (engaging in trade)). This is also corroborated by student C below, who shares that it is easier to learn new vocabulary words in relation to particular themes and whose list of words includes karanasan (experience), paghihirap (struggles), ipagtanggol (defend), and karapatan (rights), among others.

I am picking up new vocab mostly from using them again and again in other assignments. The more we write and discuss, the more I can practice using the new vocab in context and in my own sentences. It is helpful to learn vocabulary in sets according to a theme. For example, I picked up a lot of vocabulary about OFW culture and struggles from watching the OFW (Overseas Filipino Workers, added by author) documentary and then from discussing the film Anak (e.g., karanasan, paghihirap, ipagtanggol, karapatan, pag-unawa, nagdurusa etc)—Student C.

In the same manner, students D and E below point to the need to help students acquire language that allows them to participate in discourses outside of themselves or language that is limited to describing their daily routine.

I believe that this helps me because the course is focused on talking about the community and other people rather than talking about ourselves. I can definitely use more room for improvement in my literacy since I am not at an advanced level yet, and since I am coming from FIL202. Overall, this class has helped me a lot and I am seeing a small improvement from when I first entered the classroom—Student D.

I am learning more and more vocabulary words . . . each day we meet up, I learn about 3–5 new words. This helps me a lot because I work in a law office that has clients both here in Hawaii, and the Philippines. I can now understand more of what the clients tell me when they are facing issues with the government after our lesson on reading news articles and new vocabulary words from the articles—Student E.

The responses of Students D and E above sheds light on the potential contribution of discussing social issues in language classrooms and exposing students to critical vocabulary. Student D, for instance, who works as a part time at a law firm, says that he is now able to understand his clients more when the latter would talk about certain issues facing the government. These statements confirm that critical course contents do not only expose students to social issues that will hopefully foster critical awareness but also enrich their learning experiences and support their linguistic development.

5.4. Defining and Expanding Critical Vocabulary

In this article, I hope to highlight the value of the explicit instruction of critical vocabulary to enable students to participate in critical dialogues in the HL/L2 classroom. A discussion on teaching critical vocabulary in the Filipino classrooms becomes highly relevant, especially when we direct our attention to studies in the HL context, in which it has been shown that many HLLs demonstrate receptive skills (i.e., listening and comprehension) quite well, but their productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing) remain underdeveloped [19,59,60]. Hence, HL students' speaking and writing skills are areas in which both research and pedagogical attention remain wanting. In my teaching context, providing students the necessary critical vocabulary and concepts are much needed (i.e., linguistic gap) so that they can articulate their ideas and questioning stance on issues that matter to them. *Critical vocabulary* is a term used in literary and critical theory, and it implies the use of words (e.g., realism, emotional appeal, and deconstructionism) in order to produce criticism of a literary work (see [61] for a discussion of literary theory). However, I will use it here in a somewhat different (though related) way to develop a position that has hardly been articulated in the critical language pedagogy literature.

In classrooms where criticality is a priority, acquiring critical vocabulary does not mean learning highly specialized words or area-specific jargon but rather refers to acquiring more complex and infrequent lexical items that refer to concepts that are rarely introduced in conventional language classes or materials. These include words and concepts that relate to social and political processes rather than words that merely refer to activities taking place inside the home or in daily activities (e.g., making requests, ordering in Filipino restaurants, talking about the weather, and expressing illness). My idea of critical vocabulary also extends both to phrases and concepts that refer to mechanisms through which oppression and social injustices become normalized and to vocabulary/lexical items through which one gains the voice to articulate the existence of oppressive practices and the ways to overturn them. In other words, critical vocabulary refers to words, phrases, and concepts that are employed in order to produce criticism of discourses, ideologies, and enduring societal structures (cf. [62–64]). Perhaps this can be considered somewhat similar to the work of the Marxist and socialist scholar Raymond Williams, whose work titled *Keywords* [65] provides a list of critical vocabulary that is crucial to cultural and social literacy.

As an example, recently the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) has drawn much attention and become a topic of debate in the United States. After the murder of Trayvon Martin and the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and many other members of the Black community at the hands of the police, the movement has gained more support but has also remained a contentious topic for many Americans. For its supporters, BLM highlights the existence of systemic racism and racial discrimination in the U.S. where Blacks and people of color continue to suffer from police brutality and subjugation. However, many conservatives and ordinary citizens have continued to challenge this by suggesting that “all

lives matter” [66]. This counternarrative is problematic because as the philosopher Judith Butler stated in an interview, “If we jump too quickly to the universal formulation, ‘all lives matter,’ then we miss the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of ‘all lives’” [67] (p. 6). The division on this topic also extends to the Filipino community, as some individuals tend not to support the movement because of a lack of understanding of the issue. Many members of the Filipino community believe that the social injustices and killings experienced by Black people do not affect them. However, this lack of awareness and empathy has inspired other members of the Filipino community to spread awareness about BLM by creating an information drive on social media in which the movement is defined, historicized, and contextualized in both English and Filipino and other Philippine languages. Additionally, explanations are provided on why supporting the movement matters, especially to the younger generation of Filipinos. This information drive, which draws attention to a vocabulary or concept with the purpose of raising consciousness, is exactly what I mean by and hope for critical vocabulary in this work.

6. Pedagogical Implications

Aside from learning the definition of critical and complex vocabulary items and concepts, students also need to be able to use these words in their own sentences. This implies that the teacher needs to spend time on explicitly teaching these lexical items. Graves [68] suggests that students greatly benefit from direct and explicit teaching of content-specific lexical items in order to expand students’ vocabulary and to facilitate comprehension while reading. In my teaching practice, aside from providing students with sentence samples that used more complex lexical units, I also prepared short writing activities for students to practice. This may take in the form of a two-paragraph essay containing the critical vocabulary, which then asks the students to examine if the words and concepts were used correctly in context. At other times, the tasks would ask the students to use the critical words in their own sentences, which is then followed by another activity in which the class examines if the sentences they have written are correct.

This need to build a stock of critical vocabulary among students has implications with regard to curriculum and learning materials development for Filipino and other HL students, as acquiring critical vocabulary and concepts takes time. As various scholars in SLA [69–72] found, the length of time and amount of instruction are key variables in foreign language learning. The same variables are key determinants in students’ speaking abilities [71]. In my teaching experience, students need more than a semester to fully learn critical vocabulary items and to be able to automatically access them as the need arises. I have noticed, for instance, that sometimes students forget some of the complex lexical units already taught to them in class, but through various reading, writing, and oral activities that demand the use of those lexical units, they are able to recall them albeit with my assistance again. Therefore, HL and foreign language programs need to reexamine to what extent their curricula, particularly at the lower levels, are helping students acquire a stock of complex, critical vocabulary. As I have pointed out earlier, the lower-level Filipino curricula focus mainly on developing students’ functional or communicative use of the language through the use of daily activities and on enriching students’ cultural awareness. A sample lesson on *Expressing Likes and Dislikes* [73] (p. 119) at the lower level, for instance, might look like this:

Gusto ko ng adobo. I like adobo.

Ayaw ko ng bagoong. I don’t like bagoong.

Anong pagkain ang gusto at ayaw mo? What food do you like and not like?

Gusto mo ba ng tsaa o kape? Do you want tea or coffee?

Ano ang gusto mo, regalo o pera? What do you want, gift or money?

Wala akong gusto. I don’t want anything.

In order to expand the lesson and for students to practice, the same book provides the following list of vocabulary words to choose from (see [73] (p. 125) for the complete list):

- kendi candy
- serbesa beer
- balut fermented duck egg
- sorbetes ice cream
- dyus juice
- pakwan watermelon

This kind of learning material, while not completely useless, misses the point that the students in the Filipino Program are adults. Rothman, Tsimpli, and Pablo y Cabo [28], for instance, have underscored that HL teaching must “be . . . geared at age and context appropriate levels of maturity, metalinguistic and meta-cognitive knowledge” (p. 22). This suggests that Filipino HL students could greatly benefit from expanding their vocabulary by introducing and using complex Filipino lexical items, specifically critical vocabulary. For instance, the lesson on expressing likes and dislikes could be an opportunity to make students learn more by introducing critical vocabulary, just like the new examples provided below:

Gusto ko ng kapayapaan. I want peace.

Gusto ko ang feminismo. I like feminism.

Gusto ko ang pagkakapantay-pantay. I like equality.

Ayaw ko ng digmaan. I don’t want war.

Ayaw ko ng pang-aapi. I don’t like oppression.

Ayaw ko ang kolonisasyon. I don’t like colonization.

Words like *kapayapaan*, *feminismo*, *pang-aabuso*, *pagkakapantay-pantay*, and *digmaan* may relate to abstract concepts only if we do not take into account the fact that our students are adult learners and have literacy in their dominant language. Research on cross-linguistic transfer (e.g., [74]) has shown the potential of increasing students’ language and literacy skills in the target language when they have access to their L1 or dominant language. Cummins and Danesi [75], for instance, found that development of language and literacy skills in one language is transferable across languages (see also [76]). It would therefore be good for HL students to be introduced to other critical vocabulary instead of simply providing them with a list of food items as options for practicing their communicative ability. Filipino language teachers should recognize that HL students are not empty vessels and generally already have personally and socially meaningful ideas they want to express; therefore, introducing more critical vocabulary should not be delayed until they reach the upper intermediate level. Stahl [77] suggests that teachers can explicitly teach around 500 words a year or at least 10 words a week. Moreover, studies in second language acquisition have shown that writing and speaking abilities correlate substantially with vocabulary and grammatical knowledge [70,71,78] and general language proficiency [79]. If Filipino HL students were already introduced to more critical vocabulary and concepts at the lower levels, we would not only build their communicative and productive ability but also give them a better chance at being able to participate at a higher level of discourse interaction not only in the classroom but also in their community. This aligns with the idea forwarded by critical HL scholars like Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza [23], who state that, “rather than socializing students as unquestioning recipients of dominant social and linguistic hierarchies, critical educators seek to identify and challenge educational practices that reify those hierarchies and power relations” (p. 482). Therefore, it is incumbent upon heritage and world language teachers to move beyond grammar and culture lessons and to make their lessons more relevant to society by making the language learning experiences of their students more socially engaged. Through building students’ critical vocabulary, we not only challenge students mentally, but also hopefully motivate them to engage in important conversations that matter to them and their community [19]. These important conversations

include “topics that concentrate on problems such as racism, sexuality, opportunities for students with special necessities, gender relations, class, and age” [80] in [17] (p. 757).

To facilitate learning critical words, it is important for teachers to allow their students to identify the words and concepts they would need in order to critically engage in dialogue. After identifying these target words and phrases or concepts, the teacher needs to teach them explicitly to the students. Unlocking the meaning of these words and concepts could be done in various ways (e.g., translation, word definition, sentence inference activity, exposition, etc.). In my own class, aside from unlocking the meaning of critical vocabulary, I also engage the students in sentence construction and writing activities in order to check if uptake or learning is happening. The goal is not to rush students to learn critical vocabulary and concepts but for them to become gradually comfortable in using those words during critical dialogue, which they might also do using their other language resources. I noticed that it took some time for a number of my students to fully acquire the critical vocabulary they learned in class, but through explicit teaching and repeated use in the classroom, some of them showed successful critical language development, as they became more and more comfortable in using them in their writing assignments and during classroom discussions. For instance, critical words (e.g., *lahi* (race), *istiriyutayp* (stereotypes), *representasyon o paglalarawan* (representation), *pagkakakilanlan* (identity), and *maliitin* (to belittle)) were successfully taken up by some students during the critical dialogue on racist stereotypes and in the required succeeding writing assignments, which required them to express their standpoint on the issue.

7. Concluding Remarks

As a conclusion, my experiences of teaching Filipino as a heritage language and doing research in this context have informed me that the majority of our students need to build their vocabulary, among other things, to be more confident in demonstrating their productive skills. As pointed out earlier, improving students’ vocabulary is even more important in critically oriented classrooms in which students’ ability to engage in critical dialogues is greatly encouraged [19,23,24]. Therefore, heritage/world language teachers need to help students to accumulate a stock of critical vocabulary and concepts, which will be very useful for students to articulate the presence of and to dismantle oppressive structures of power, including everyday discourses supporting the status quo. In my classes, I have made spaces for the explicit teaching of critical vocabulary, which is then reinforced through various tasks (e.g., writing and speaking) until students become comfortable using them. It is very important to note that while I encourage translanguaging in enabling critical dialogue in my Filipino language classes, I also take the task of developing HL students’ language proficiency seriously in order to address some weakness in their communicative skills [59,60]. After all, my students also aspire to becoming more proficient in Filipino, especially in speaking and writing. Because of this, my critically oriented classes still spend a good amount of time focusing on form (e.g., learning critical vocabulary and specific grammar lessons on verb aspects, etc.). Heritage language teachers who are open to critical perspectives need to remember that in order for students to participate in discussions on topics that matter to them and at the same time develop their productive skills in the target language, teaching and learning critical vocabulary and concepts must have a space in their classrooms.

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