Language Learning Materials Counteracting Rural Racializations: A Practical Attempt in ELT

Materiales para el aprendizaje de lenguas que contrarrestan racializaciones rurales: un intento práctico en la enseñanza de inglés

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Colombia is one of the most socioeconomically unequal countries worldwide, with rural regions facing severe poverty, under-resourced schools, precarious economic opportunities, and an unresolved armed conflict. These inequalities are often overlooked in ELT policies and social practices, as rural institutions and educational actors are expected to adhere to English teaching goals that are more aligned with an urban ideal. This misrecognition of the rural socioeconomic and cultural conditions, along with historical racial intersections from colonization, contribute to emerging forms of racialization. Drawing on our research to explore the linkages between L2 education and race, this article examines the racialization of rurality from an ELT angle and introduces a didactic proposal to foster critical consciousness and enact deracialization.

Keywords: didactic proposal, English language teaching, racialization, rural Colombia

Colombia es uno de los países más desiguales socioeconómicamente, con regiones rurales que enfrentan pobreza extrema, escuelas con pocos recursos, oportunidades económicas limitadas y un conflicto armado no resuelto. Estas desigualdades suelen pasarse por alto en las políticas de enseñanza del inglés, ya que se espera que las instituciones rurales se alineen con metas diseñadas para contextos urbanos. Este desconocimiento de las condiciones socioeconómicas y culturales de las áreas rurales, junto con las intersecciones raciales históricas de la colonización, contribuyen a nuevas formas de racialización. Basándonos en nuestra investigación sobre las relaciones entre la enseñanza de una segunda lengua y la raza, este artículo examina la racialización de la ruralidad en la enseñanza del inglés y presenta una propuesta didáctica para fomentar la conciencia crítica y la desracialización.

Palabras clave: Colombia rural, enseñanza del inglés, propuesta didáctica, racialización

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Introduction

Colombia is one of the most socioeconomically unequal countries worldwide and the second most unequal in Latin America after Honduras (World Bank Group, 2021). According to DANE (2021, the Colombian Department of Statistics), there are enormous social gaps, especially in terms of economic income and access to opportunities. Currently, 39.3% of Colombians are monetarily poor, 12% are extremely poor, and 16% are multidimensionally poor. Furthermore, despite having signed a peace agreement in 2016 with the guerrilla group called FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revoluciona-rias de Colombia – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) that has kept the country at war for over half a century, Colombia has not advanced satisfactorily in the peacebuilding process. In the country, it is no secret that these issues of extreme poverty and lack of both economic and academic opportunities, as well as the armed conflict, have affected the rural dwellers more dramatically (Martínez-Restrepo et al., 2016; Satizábal et al., 2021), which, in turn, has resulted in cultural marginalization against rurality, largely regarded as "undesirable" (Pérez, 2004).

In light of anthropological theories such as critical race theory (CRT) and decoloniality, it could be said that the above is also fueled by a social organization that has formed Colombian society since colonialization, intersecting race, rurality, and class in hidden asymmetric relationships (Wade, 1995). Such organization separates rurality from urbanity and naturalizes those asymmetries as part of the normalized social practice; in this sense, rurality is usually associated with ideas of backwardness and poverty, while urbanity is supposed to represent progress and civilization. As argued here, this issue can be seen as an emerging form of racialization since that separation nurtures a segregating dynamic, framed within the historical legitimacy of the rule of law, in which the city concentrates and symbolizes institutionality and the State, while rurality is seen as lacking institutional presence and guarantees of the rule of law (Palacios, 2003; Robinson, 2014; Solano-Cohen, 2020)

One way in which the lopsided urban–rural relationships pervade has to do with how ELT education policies are thought to be equally beneficial and, thus, possible to be implemented in all regions, regardless of their situated particularities and difficulties. Bilingualism initiatives promoting English in the country have been criticized for being aligned with dominant discourses that position English as *the* language of opportunity and development (Coleman, 2010; Mohanty, 2017) and have, thus, imposed quite ambitious goals in English language proficiency to the national curriculum, under the false assumption that learning English is equally accessible and beneficial for everyone (Mackenzie, 2022; Quintero Polo & Guerrero Nieto, 2013), without considering the social disparities and diversity of the country (Cruz-Arcila, 2017). This can be seen clearly in the document launching the National Program of English (2015–2025), where the National Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014) highlights that this program promotes social equity and inclusion by making English accessible to all. However, several local researchers have concluded that the sole fact of enforcing English through educational policies does not make it beneficial or relevant to all Colombian citizens (Quintero Polo & Guerrero Nieto, 2013; Usma Wilches, 2015), at least not in the absence of other public policies that ensure other basic social conditions to make learning English worthwhile (Hurie, 2018).

Ignoring the challenging sociocultural realities of the rural sector, the objectives and architecture of the ELT policy represent a heavy load for rural English language teachers and learners who do not have the ideal conditions (material, e.g., connectivity, or cultural, e.g., social relevance of English) to deliver on the mandates of the MEN (Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2014). On the contrary, in addition to the already challenging educational context, the rural sector suffers from a lack of support and invisibility that derives from the

salient social debt to the rural sector (Hoffmann, 2016; Martínez-Restrepo et al., 2016). Therefore, policy planning and implementation in Colombia and the social practices derived from this process reproduce social, cultural, and economic hierarchies. In other words, as we further discuss below, ELT policies have contributed to reinforcing rural racialization.

Drawing on the historical analysis by CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023) in the context of Colombia, particularly in language education, this paper discusses how the lack of sensitivity to the social problems of rural areas in the architecture of ELT initiatives has contributed to the reproduction of discrimination that has shaped educational actors' practice unwittingly. The article highlights how the socioeconomic and cultural injustices (Fraser, 1997) instill forms of racialization, influencing teachers' identities and practices. Beyond raising awareness of these issues, the paper shares a pedagogical innovation of socially sensitive teaching material to address dominant racist, discriminatory practices and combat rural racializations in the ELT classroom. From this view, it is relevant to start by discussing the links between race and ELT.

Race, Racialization, and ELT

Talking about race involves much more than simply referring to skin color or phenotype (Zamudio et al., 2011). It has to do with dismantling the whole idea that races are valid biological categories to differentiate and hierarchize human beings so that it is possible to bring to the fore and problematize the institutional and structural inequalities that emerge from such hierarchization (Kubota & Lin, 2009). Following Kubota and Lin (2009), the notion of race also involves examining issues of power and social (in)justice that have been constructed historically and have been invisibilized in social practice behind the construction of new categories. Therefore, social diversity in language classrooms is a site of convergence of the racialized practices involved in interacting with languages and cultures. Then, race should not be removed from the dynamics of language education.

In this fashion, race implicates discussions on social structures that have rendered some social groups, linguistic capitals, forms of knowledge, and being in hierarchies of superiority/inferiority. Here is where CRT could contribute significantly to studying how these phenomena manifest themselves and how they can be tackled in the field of language pedagogy. As Delgado and Stefancic (2023) argue, CRT stems from the premise that the notion of race is socially constructed. That is, races do not exist but "are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (p. 9) to justify, hide, maintain, or even resist power inequalities. Thus, CRT invites us to consider "race as a central construct for analyzing inequality" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 2). This means that issues of race as socially constructed (not limited to skin color or phenotype) could embrace multiple categories (including rurality) as necessary elements for understanding how inequalities manifest themselves.

Following CRT, race is not simply a matter of skin color but a key concept we can extrapolate to analyze different types of discrimination; thus, the idea of racialization takes heightened importance. As Delgado and Stefancic (2023) explain, race and racism are intersectional constructs. Social hierarchies and subjugations (i.e., racializations) emerge in intersection with social phenomena, including sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, place of origin, nationality, linguacultural background, and other phenomena that facilitate social hierarchizations.

As we have shown in previous research in L2 education, key factors of racialization are the status of specific languages or varieties spoken, the place of origin, and the power awarded to native speakers (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2022). García et al. (2021) argue that these manifestations of racialization result from colonization processes that have subjugated non-Western forms of knowledge and linguistic capital, which have generated and normalized

social stratifications. For the specific case of ELT in Colombia, as discussed below, these stratifications, or what we call "emerging forms of racialization," can be identified in different dimensions in the ELT field. To understand the links between rurality, English teaching, and the educational context, we offer a more in-depth explanation of these emergent forms of racialization.

Emergent Forms of Racialization

Linking rurality with the issues presented at the beginning of this paper brings out emergent forms of racialization. This is because, as argued, those difficult socioeconomic conditions have configured negative imagery and representations about rurality and its populations, something that has become naturalized and assumed without being questioned (Pérez, 2004). For instance, rural Colombia is racialized because it represents territories where mostly Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities escaped to during colonialization times. Although some of these spaces eventually became refuges under government protection (Ng'weno, 2007), this phenomenon progressively shaped urban and rural cultures differently. Because of the force of colonization, the former was associated more with European/Spanish life models, while the latter was more "primitive" indigenous and Afro-Colombian ways of life (Wade, 1995). This generated a salient higher focus from governmental policies on urbanism and industrialization, which regrettably resembled Eurocentric development models, mainly concerned with economic growth and meeting the market's demands, leaving social needs aside (Cuestas-Caza, 2019; Escobar, 2005). Furthermore, the idea of urban development has been reinforced since the mid-twentieth century thanks to a wave of internal migration of peasants, Indigenous populations, and Afro-Colombians to the main cities of the country as a way to escape from the war experienced in many rural locales (Palacios, 2003; Ruiz Ruiz, 2008). In other words, violence and the armed conflict played a major role in the transforma-

tion from a rural to an urban country, evident in the fact that 75% of the Colombian population lived in urban areas at the turn of the 21st century (Ruiz Ruiz, 2008). This, in turn, establishes a subsidiary role for the rural sector, exacerbates poverty, and, thus, generates negative attitudes toward rural lifestyles, inhabitants, and cultural practices (Meneses, 2012).

Considering ELT from a raceless perspective (Talmy, 2010), this problem of the racialization of rurality would probably be ignored. However, from the view of CRT in education, these racial "invisible" hierarchies embedded in society should be analyzed seriously to understand social injustice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). As explained above, there is a colonial-era sociocultural gap between urban and rural life in Colombia, which national ELT policies have failed to address (Guerrero Nieto, 2009; Usma Wilches, 2009). That is, the urban and the rural appear in binary oppositional and hierarchical perspectives. Rural areas appear culturally more distant from the collective worldviews of English: the so-called language of globalization and opportunity, ideas more conventionally associated with urban life. From a CRT perspective, the policy can be critiqued for widening social gaps and for promoting the stratification of languages by positioning some of them as more prestigious and valuable (e.g., English) while seeing others (e.g., indigenous languages) as uncivilized and backward (de Mejía, 2006; Guerrero Nieto, 2009).

In this context, it is not surprising that social practices, framed within language policies and public discourse, primarily associate the learning of English with progress and development and with recognition and access to globalized spheres (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2022), widening the distance with the reality of rural areas (where ethnic communities or their descendants live or used to live), further alienating them from the urban.

Drawing on CRT, it could be argued that this developmentalist orientation, with its hierarchizing and, consequently, racializing dynamics, shapes L2

education in Colombia. CRT allows us to identify power dynamics permeating the integration of English into the national curriculum at various levels of educational practice: macro, meso, and micro. At the macro level, policy prioritizes English at the expense of the linguistic diversity of the country; meso-level practices on the media and daily interactions reinforce language stratifications based on the sociocultural value assigned to each language, culture, or territory; and micro-level practices in the classroom contribute to the configuration of both teachers' and learners' identities under the influence of hegemonic, developmentalist, and instrumental notions of bilingualism.

Research Background of the Proposal

Under the constructivist perspective of language as a shaper of social reality, the issue of race and its relation to language teaching and learning has not been given sufficient research attention in Colombia (Bonilla-Medina, 2018). For us, language is signified in its social interaction and its capacity to model identities in this interaction. The relationships that emerge from this interaction—when considering race as a social construct beyond biological and colonial notions—are, in turn, of identity and racial type. This premise guides the research we conducted before the design of the material we present. Methodologically, the research conducted consisted of two phases.

In the first phase,[1] we investigated the relationship between race and language from the perspectives of learners and teachers of English and Spanish. Based on interviews with learners of Spanish and English as L2, we problematized the notion of racial identity as a determining factor in language learning. This allowed us to examine how hegemonic discourses shape

the perceptions—strategic identifications, language hierarchies, and possibilities of emancipation—that students have of the language they learn, as well as the level of critical or non-critical positioning in the face of racial structures (see Cruz-Arcila & Bonilla-Medina, 2021). This exploration led us to scrutinize how notions of *otherness* manifest themselves in the pedagogical practices of a group of English and Spanish teachers. Based on the contributions of CRT and methodologically on critical discourse analysis, we analyzed nine interviews in which the permanence of colonial ideologies and discriminatory attitudes in the teachers' configurations of otherness became evident. Such configurations unintentionally perpetuate colonial binarism, the instrumentalist and hegemonic vision of language teaching, and, therefore, discriminatory practices and discourses in the language classroom.

Understanding that racializing also means configuring stigmas of otherness that perpetuate exclusion and social inequality, some findings of this second moment of the first phase, which intersect with rural configurations, are that some rural English teachers discriminate against themselves or their peers when their identifications excessively associate them as belonging to rurality or perceive them as distant from the implications of socioeconomic development that are enunciated and signified in opposition to what is urban.

Identifying those entrenched issues led us to undertake a second research phase, which revolved around a theoretical and methodological reflection of pedagogical possibilities to combat social inequality in the L2 classroom. This attempt culminated in our book *Raza, racialización y educación en segundas lenguas* (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2024). Divided into three sections that start from theoretical reflections on the responsibility of language in the reproduction of racializing pedagogical practices to arrive at discussing pedagogical possibilities oriented toward social change, the book advocates for more emancipatory and empowering pedagogical approaches and practices that rescue the linguistic,

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[1]   The two phases of the research were completed within the framework of an inter-institutional agreement between Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Universidad EAN, and Instituto Caro y Cuervo, which extended from 2019 to 2022.

cultural, and territorial diversity of Colombia, and problematize the interplay of language, culture, and identity. Therefore, this expansion of race into rurality, in a symbolic sense, brings more complex and less visible forms of racialization that need to be addressed from a critical angle and, as CRT theorists would say, a deracializing perspective so that language education could be a space to subvert and combat those masked discriminatory practices.

In this context, the didactic unit presented below, where we focus on rural racialization, is framed in a theoretical and practical attempt to deracialize the language classroom and configure, from this micro level, pedagogical opportunities to promote a transformative social practice. Addressing social injustice in the language classroom and recognizing didactic materials as politicized artifacts (Rico Troncoso, 2010) is crucial. It is now well-known that teaching materials oftentimes reproduce a biased and homogeneous vision of the world (Morales-Vidal & Cassany, 2020) and align with hegemonic discourses that enable racializing pedagogical practices (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2022, 2024; Cruz-Arcila & Bonilla-Medina, 2021). Given that, we propose designing teaching materials that offer a concrete and practical proposal for language teachers to approach language learning with an awareness of social inequality and to advocate for change.

The Didactic Proposal: An Attempt to Address Rural Racialization in ELT Practices

This proposal is framed into the second phase of the research endeavor reviewed above. After identifying pedagogical proposals in the existing literature to combat issues of marginalization, racism, and, in general, social justice problems in educational practices, we sought to develop didactic guides for language teaching with specific tasks that promote critical reflection on social issues, which, as we argue, are inherent to language learning and general language education. This is how

we participated in the design of 10 didactic guides for the teaching of both English and Spanish as L2 in Colombia around five main intertwined themes: (a) the conventional connection between race and skin color, (b) marginalization and migration, (c) racialization experienced by diverse cultural groups, (d) linguistic racism and, as is the emphasis in this paper, (e) *the poor social standing of rural lifestyles as emergent forms or racialization*.

This initiative started from our own wariness of mass-produced textbooks created in Western, Eurocentric, and Anglocentric contexts, which, in line with the discussion of racialization, tend to portray realities and include contents that may be far removed from the learners' experiences (Gray, 2013, Morales-Vidal & Cassany, 2020). In line with this, for instance, Gray (2013), analyzing ELT textbooks produced in the UK, demonstrated that increasing inclusion of celebrities in educational materials reflects neoliberal values, aiming to motivate language learners with aspirational content emphasizing success, cosmopolitanism, and desired lifestyles, which resembled those widely believed to be found in European countries. Likewise, in a similar analysis of textbooks for teaching Spanish, Morales-Vidal and Cassany (2020) concluded that the world portrayed in these materials is usually idealized as modern, *urban*, and affluent, mainly showcasing white young to middle-aged adults in professional settings.

In this problem, we identified an opportunity to combat inequality by proposing locally sensitive material to raise awareness of these social issues, particularly rural realities. When we refer to local realities, we do not restrict the concept to a geographic space; on the contrary, the referent is the embodiment of groups (categorized as rural) experiencing discriminatory practices in a racialized system (Yosso, 2005). Stemming from research findings that are systematized in existing pedagogical proposals to shape language teaching practices from a critical perspective (Phase I of the study) and the theoretical basis of CRT, we also decided

to situate students' social realities and, more concretely, the "social pains" (Pennycook, 2001) learners are likely to experience daily. Therefore, the tasks included in the teaching material position learners as actors of their social realities who understand their social roles through the analysis of critical aspects. In the sample discussed in this paper, we specifically consider the subsidiary role of rurality in Colombia as a pervasive form of racialization that could be addressed through a didactic guide for ELT.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the whole didactic proposal in which this deracializing notion of rurality is stated stems from four intertwined principles. *Race as a social construct*, as pointed out above, emphasizes the skepticism we should all have toward social hierarchizations derived only from biological factors such as phenotype or skin color. Instead, it highlights that race can be questioned and redefined socially (Banton, 2002). *Language and racialization* makes a case for understanding that communication practices are spaces for permanent negotiation, perpetuation, or resistance of racist attitudes manifested in daily interaction with others and where language becomes a key player (Kubota & Lin, 2009). *Social justice* is an all-embracing principle guiding the whole proposal. The didactic material addresses different forms of social inequality in order to raise awareness of them and invite learners to reflect upon their positioning vis-à-vis these issues and propose or imagine possible actions to contribute to ameliorating such problems. In close connection to the previous principles, learners' *empowerment* represents the ultimate goal of the proposal, as learners are considered critical social beings who can analyze and question unequal power relations through interactions in pedagogical practices.

As can be inferred from these principles, in addition to CRT, critical pedagogy, theories of social justice, and the notion of critical interculturality complement the theoretical framework that underpins our didactic proposal. These theories agree that educational practices are not neutral or free from ideology. Education can very

Figure 1. Principles Underlying the Proposal
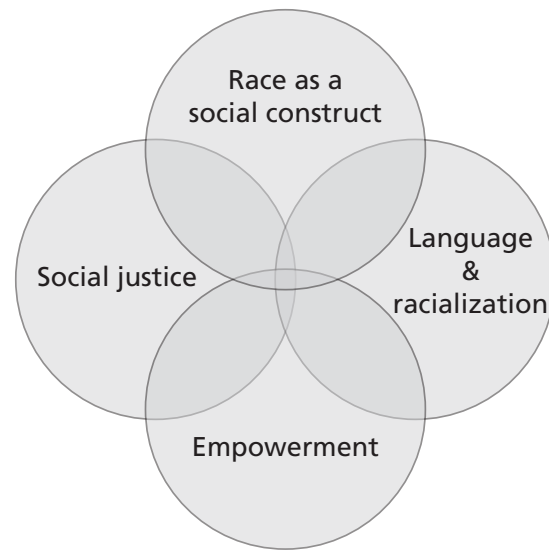
well be a space for the reproduction of social inequality (Luke, 2008; Meneses, 2012), which is sustained in various ways, one of which is through the content of teaching materials, which, as Kang (2005) suggests, could function as a kind of trojan horse that normalizes social inequality. Our interest, then, is to propose teaching materials as an antidote to such normalization.

This interest aligns with the intention of critical pedagogy to question the status quo and create alternative forms of practice under the premise that social transformation is possible (Crookes, 2013). In this regard, Walsh (2010), speaking of critical interculturality, asserts that it is not enough for communication between cultures to occur within the framework of respect and inclusion. We agree with Walsh that reflecting on social structures is necessary to identify the causes of cultural inequalities that can and should be addressed. All of these related theories highlight the need to assume agentive roles.

Relatedly, the proposal benefits from Fraser's (1997) work to outline three social justice dimensions: cultural, socioeconomic, and political. These dimensions provide a framework for understanding the implications of social justice in L2 education, emphasizing the impor-

tance of critical intercultural competence, addressing socioeconomic inequalities, empowering learners to question unequal power relations, and acting toward transformation.

Furthermore, the critical nature of the proposal led us to distance ourselves from widespread Western and Eurocentric models, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which problematically present a unilateral understanding of language.[2] This is why the proposal is not aligned with any sort of descriptors involved in that frame, as it intends to favor critical social awareness while promoting linguistic development. This proposal emphasizes teaching and learning language critically, focusing on how this process shapes realities and intercultural relations. It seeks to empower learners by encouraging analysis of power structures in language, fostering both linguistic enrichment of their repertoires and, more importantly, social transformation.

As for the target population, this material is expected to be used by young/adult English language learners in any context (e.g., language institutes, teacher education programs, university courses). However, its contents and structure can be adapted considering the specific characteristics of the learners, their interests, as well as the features of their educational contexts.

Stages for Material Design

Following the critical focus on rural racialization, this specific didactic guide considered the multiple manifestations of rural racialization as grave social matters that can be addressed in the language classroom. Grounded in the guiding theoretical principles discussed above, we structured the development of the didactic

guide into various stages to ensure a robust final product. As the main objective of the proposal is to trigger critical awareness of social problems and take social action (Walsh, 2010), it is worth mentioning that this proposal is best suited for learners who, regardless of their level of proficiency in the L2, are willing to engage in critical reflections. In this line of thought, the spirit of the material welcomes translanguaging practices for language learning, which implies using students' and teachers' full linguistic repertoires as pedagogical resources (García & Wei, 2014).

Input Selection

Plenty of printed news reports, video content, and pop cultural manifestations touch on Colombian rurality in various ways. Our intention as authors was to use appropriate authentic material[3] as sources of input to immerse learners in the experience through real language practices. This intention represented a significant challenge. Therefore, we devoted ample time to search, explore, and examine a wide array of sources. This selection was enriched after thorough discussion and collaboration among the three researchers presenting their views on the principles of our epistemological perspective as reflected in the material and their adaptability to our pedagogical intention. The initial selection was refined based on suitability, pedagogical adaptability, and potential for triggering critical reflection.

Tasks Design

Once the appropriate input was selected, the three researchers collaborated on proposing tasks. As Figure 2 shows, this process involved drafting, adjusting, reframing, evaluating, and deciding whether the tasks were ready or not. All this process was constantly informed

2   We align with the critiques of the CEFR in Colombian language policies, which highlight the mismatch with the country's sociocultural and educational contexts (Cárdenas, 2006), the impossibility of a one-size-fits-all model (González, 2007), which resonate with other critiques about the framework's inflexibility and disregard for local complexities (McNamara, 2011) as well as the limiting monoglossic communicative practices it underlies (Savski, 2023).

3   For example, this guide invites learners to explore artistic and audiovisual productions, to open a critical reflection mediated by the reading of images. To situate ourselves in the Colombian context, we took up the catalog of the art collection of the Banco de la República (https://colecciones.banrepcultural.org) and academic research on rurality in Latin America.

by the theoretical principles and goals of the proposal. Additionally, this phase considered the different sections of the didactic design that had been previously agreed upon (see the Structure and Contents section below). This iterative and ongoing process continued until a final, coherent, full version of the proposal was consolidated.

Figure 2. Task Design Process
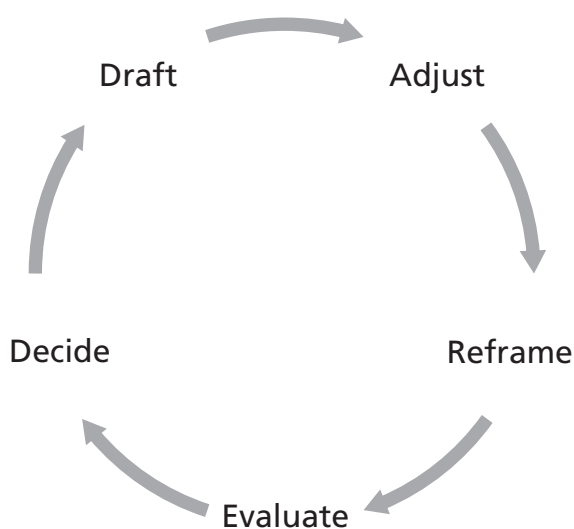
Piloting

The guide on tackling rural racializations was piloted with seven young adult learners. This process allowed for the identification of areas for improvement in both the design and implementation of activities. Observations from the teacher-researcher who implemented the guide and feedback from the learners collected through a questionnaire informed these adjustments. Concretely, the observations focused on the view of the material, practical elements of language use, and the didactic suitability of the guide. Here are some examples of both key positive elements highlighted by learners, as well as some recommendations:[4]

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4   Excerpts have been translated from Spanish.

Positive remarks:

I consider it to be a very important material, with resources and information that help deconstruct certain paradigms present in our daily lives.

I believe the material thoroughly develops the central theme of the work guide. This guide not only contains the questions to be answered and discussed but also provides explanations of related topics using different sources.

The topic was broken down quite well and presented different perspectives. Additionally, it encouraged the practice of the four skills and critical thinking.

Recommendations:

It is an interesting material, but I found it too long.

Replace some difficult words with synonyms and make the texts shorter.

Change some words that are complex to understand.

Add more visual aids.

From this process, it was concluded that the objective of innovatively introducing language learning to facilitate critical reflection was well incorporated. Nonetheless, it was also possible to identify tasks that required adaptation due to their time-consuming nature, excessively long texts, overuse of technical vocabulary, and unclear instructions.

Editing

The whole proposal underwent an editing process in preparation for publication on the website of one of the participating institutions. The editorial team came up with additional recommendations, particularly regarding instructions, task complexity, and ways to interact with potential users of the material, which we had to address.

Structure and Contents

The teaching material is presented as didactic guides that include four general sections that underline the pedagogical approach of the whole proposal. The sections systematically lead learners through a critical

reflection route oriented toward raising awareness of the relationship between language and social reality, eventually stimulating their empowerment for transformative purposes. In tune with our epistemological perspective and following Kumaravadivelu (2003), the sections resonate with the premise that language learning could be explored meaningfully by engaging learners in critically analyzing their social realities. Thus, these sections were assigned names highlighting such intention: *Opening Minds*, *Thinking Outside the Box*, *the Harsh (and Unfair) Reality*, and *Generating Social Change.*

For the guide on rurality and racialization aimed at English language learners, the section *Opening Minds* contextualizes learners and raises awareness about critical elements imbued in language use. In doing so, it includes two discussion activities. The first one presents a few pieces of artwork by van Gogh portraying rurality; this is a way to establish the first point of comparison between how rurality is viewed in other locations compared to Colombia (see Figure 3).[5] The purpose of this comparison was to situate learners in an environment of reflection while they were exposed to basic language use.

Similarly, Activity 2 explores a Colombian artist who also focused his work on rurality. This is followed by a series of reflective questions that carefully examine the various ways rurality has been understood and represented (see Figure 4). These two activities locate learners in the critical issue of rurality and start to offer plural possibilities to view it.

The section *Thinking Outside the Box* explores the cultural configuration of rurality by probing learners' beliefs and invites them to question entrenched social practices related to the rural population. It contains three activities aimed at exploring the contrast between rural and urban beliefs and attitudes. The first two invite

learners to contrast rural and urban lifestyles both in Colombia and in an English-speaking country learners know or would like to know. This is done by evaluating how they see factors such as life quality, access to health, education, economic opportunities, food, and leisure time (see Figure 5). To widen students' repertoires in the additional language, some guidance for these activities is offered through a box containing linguistic tools. In this case, contextualized language encourages students to include their own ideas while also increasing their language knowledge and understanding.

As previously discussed, these activities serve as starting points that provide linguistic and contextual information for thoroughly discussing questions in Activity 3. This activity invites learners to share their views on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside, the similarities and differences of rural lifestyles in Colombia and other countries, and the living conditions of rural dwellers in different locations.

The Harsh (and Unfair) Reality section presents the central input and tasks for critical reflection regarding racializing practices associated with rurality. Inspired by our theoretical perspective, this section presents activities based on two primary sources of authentic language input that provide information on the socioeconomic and cultural problems affecting rurality in Colombia. The first one is a fragment of a research report, where the rural context of Colombia is described in broad terms. Students are invited to read the text not just to practice reading comprehension but, more importantly, to identify and critically reflect upon the main issues of social inequality affecting rural inhabitants. The second input source is a documentary called *Farm Life* (Solan, 2021), which touches on a family's rural ways of life in New Hampshire, USA. The documentary offers another clear point of comparison between different rural realities. The content is worked didactically in a conventional structure, proposing activities for *before*, *while*, and *after* the visualization process.

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5   While writing and editing this article, the book containing the 10 didactic guides was published (see Cruz-Arcila et al., 2024). The samples shared here are all taken from that published version.

Figure 3. Using van Gogh's Work to Reflect Upon Ruralities

Figure 4. Rurality as Portrayed by a Colombian Artist

Figure 5. Thinking of Rural Lifestyles in Colombia and in English-Speaking Countries

As confirmed in the piloting stage, this structure facilitates prediction, engages learners, and stimulates their sensitivity. Thus, *before* watching, learners are prompted to reflect on rural lifestyles and the differences between being a farmer and a peasant. *While* watching the documentary, the learners focus on completing three activities to check their understanding of the content of the video. These activities are the basis for students to reflect critically, *after* watching the video, on some general messages of the documentary about rural life. The third activity serves to contrast a rather romantic view of rurality transmitted in the documentary with the students' own opinions of rurality in Colombia, as well as the ones described in the previous reading. The objective is to raise awareness of different ruralities (see Figure 6). Appreciating the differences is important in order to highlight how marginalization has manifested itself in rural Colombia in various ways.

The section *Generating Social Change* concludes the guide by engaging learners in a creative project that encourages reflection and action. This is the section that more concretely empowers learners to propose alternatives for addressing racialization

Figure 6. Example of Activities Proposed to Trigger Critical Reflection Upon Different Ruralities

2.3 Decide whether the following ideas are true (T) or false (F) for the family described in the documentary. Then, discuss if the same ideas could apply when talking about rurality in Colombia.

Ideas	T/F		Would it apply to the Colombian context? Why?
a. Being or becoming a farmer is a personal decision.			
b. Working on a farm is therapeutic. It is hard work but peaceful.			
c. Raising children on a farm has more benefits than disadvantages.			
d. Farming is a prosperous economic activity.			
e. Farmers are respected and appreciated.			
f. Children are happier in the countryside than in a city.			

while integrating research skills through fieldwork and data analysis. The project proposed for this guide invites learners to imagine and come to terms with possible actions to contribute to ameliorating real-life social problems of rurality. This task also stimulates critical group work to develop a small research exercise. In this specific case, learners are invited to interview Colombian farmers to identify their views on the most prominent social problems they endure and the possible solutions farmers themselves could propose. To situate learners in a position that negotiates farmers' views with their own, they need to analyze the gathered information and come up with their own interpretations, which would be reported using a live or video-recorded presentation (see Figure 7). The goal is that the learning product reflects not only the learners' critical understanding of language and its role in constructing rurality but also that they provide agentive transformative actions toward issues surrounding the racialized configurations of rurality.

As we understand that language learning should be contextualized in order to also be meaningful, in addition to the main sections of the guide, there are additional snapshots that appear throughout the guide: *Did you know that…?* and *To know more.* These are capsules with extra contextual information to further enrich language learning by analyzing possible emerging discussions held in the classroom. The guide includes two *Did you know that…?* snapshots: one on how rural life was a common theme among artists in the nineteenth century and the other on how rurality played a central role in the presidential campaign of Gustavo Petro (see Figure 8). Beyond exposing the topic of rurality in a concrete context, these snapshots allow learners to understand how rurality in its multiple representations intersects many cultural, economic, and political debates. Therefore, these snapshots trigger learners' social sensitivity and unmask power relations that decentralize attention to homogenized Eurocentric views that misrecognize the plurality of rurality.

Figure 7. Proposed Project

Figure 8. Example of *Did you know that…?* Snapshot

The guide also included two *To know more* capsules: one on the history of the subsidiary role of rurality in Colombia; the other, an invitation to watch a local documentary that portrays some of the social challenges of rural life in the Colombian context during the armed conflict (see Figure 9). These two snapshots aim to increase awareness of the challenges that may have contributed to shaping rurality from negative perspectives. Through this, we underscore that language learning is not just about accurately expressing ideas in a vacuum but, more importantly, promoting a critical reading of social reality.

Figure 9. Example of *To know more* Snapshot

To know more

As an interesting point of comparison between the ways in which rurality is represented in the documentary *Farm Life*, it is advisable to watch the documentary *Ciro y yo* (Miguel Salazar, 2018), where the story of what it is like to live the armed conflict in rural contexts in Colombia is told. Through Ciro's dramatic and painful experiences, it would be possible to understand the conflicts and difficulties of forced displacement in the country, which, at the same time, has contributed to the representation of rurality in negative terms.

As additional points of the critical nature of this proposal and inspired by the principles of dialoguing in Freire's (1968/2000) critical pedagogy, the guide aims to open spaces for conversation with teachers and learners. Firstly, interaction with teachers is promoted through a section called *amongst teachers* where answers and recommendations are provided, but, more importantly, suggestions on how to approach the content and proposed tasks are provided. It also includes explanatory information to help teachers better understand the rationale behind the activities. Teachers and learners can also share their views on the material through online questionnaires. In any case, the emerging discussions are not expected to focus only on the pedagogical and didactic nature of the material but also on assessing its suitability for dealing with complex matters of power relationships and racializations in language teaching practices while analyzing the configuration of rural identities. These shared experiences by both learners and teachers will be useful to identify ways in which new and better proposals can be constructed in the future.

All in all, this is a theoretically grounded, systematic, and contextually sensitive didactic proposal to bring into the classroom opportunities to shape language learning from a critical angle. This specific guide connects language teaching with attempts to scrutinize the multiple inequalities that make up what has been called the *social debt* to the Colombian rural sector. The proposal is inspired by the premise that a first but important step toward social transformation and empowerment is critical reflection, or what Freire calls *conscientização*, the possibility of being aware of how social inequalities operate, but also of identifying alternatives for triggering social change while learning a language.

Conclusion

This paper has explored possible ways in which inequality and racializations can be addressed in the language classroom. Specifically, the case of English language teaching is taken up to illustrate how, by means of the design and implementation of socially sensitive and locally grounded didactic proposals, it is

possible to open up opportunities for learners to learn an L2 while thinking and acting critically toward social change. As evident, the critical theories (especially CRT) underlying the whole proposal allow us to see language and language education as crucial players in fostering that social transformation. We aim to produce this change by raising consciousness of unjust realities and reflecting upon their causes and consequences to come up with actions (however big or small they might seem) to contribute to tackling them through learning materials. The sociohistorical debts to the rural sector in Colombia are also a concern of language teachers, and it is our belief that we can enact change in our classrooms. However, true transformation requires grassroots initiatives like the one presented here, where educators actively engage learners in confronting and challenging social inequalities. We firmly believe that teachers can foster meaningful change through collaborative efforts within the language classroom and contribute to building a more just and equitable society. In this view, this sort of initiative highlights the need to view language education far beyond the understanding of language as limited to a system learners need to master. Instead, it requires direct engagement with locally grounded political and cultural matters, adding meaning and relevance to learning other languages. Finally, it is worth mentioning that a proposal like this also makes sense in the Colombian context, considering the country's need for continuous peacebuilding. This is one possible way language education can contribute to that broad goal. This, though, is likely to be improved in a myriad of ways. The main purpose it serves, we believe, is that of a source of inspiration for more and, perhaps, more robust proposals with the same critical orientation.

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