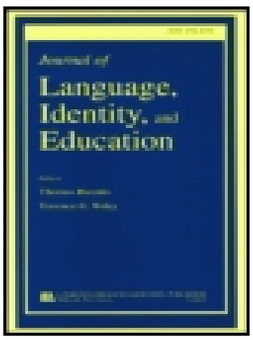

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"It Takes Time for Language to Change": Challenging Classroom Heteronormativity through Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

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ABSTRACT

The foreign language classroom affords conversations related to heteronormativity, language, and power, but instructional approaches often center upon discrete aspects of grammar and vocabulary. Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) disavows such approaches, instead utilizing personalized questions and co-created stories. Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics interrogate the linguistic manifestation of heteronormativity. This paper draws upon both Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics in analysis of participant observation of two adult Mandarin TPRS classes and one adult Spanish class. As such, we seek to understand how language educators and students of TPRS experience and understand normativity related to gender/sexuality and language in the classroom. Findings indicate that TPRS can potentially both reify and challenge heteronormativity, thereby illustrating the potential that unscripted and queer approaches can bring to the classroom.

KEYWORDS

Foreign language education; heteronormativity; Queer Linguistics; Queer Theory; Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

Introduction

Foreign language instruction lends itself to insightful conversations about shifts in identity and power as well as changes in what is perceived both linguistically and socially as normal, acceptable, feasible, and valid. However, the legacies of purification and conventional approaches to instruction in grammar and vocabularies all too often bear the early legacies of silenced differentiation, one which often fortifies standards for correctness and purity, rather than analyzing their shifts and fluctuations. While foreign language education presents an opportunity whereas such aspects can be explored in the students' first language and the target language, it is often predicated upon "the safety of discrete language instruction" (Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2014, p. 180). Thus, while scholars have proposed a critical turn in language education (Austin, 2009; Cahnmann-Taylor & Coda, 2018; Guilherme, 2002; Herman, 2007; Kubota, Austin, & Saito-Abbott, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Osborn, 2006), discrete aspects of vocabulary and grammar acquisition still often take precedence over critical issues related to language and power. Moreover, such approaches eschew questions about the social and the often taboo conversations that could be afforded by foreign language instruction. As such, foreign language educators and teacher educators might ask what conversations are afforded in and through such aspects of language. Whereas languages, like gender and other categories in our social world, are always in flux, what can improvisational methods offer foreign language education to disrupt "normal" teaching and learning practices, crossing boundaries rather than upholding borders?

This paper employs Queer Theory to analyze transcripts from two separate adult Mandarin courses and one adult Spanish course, utilizing an approach referred to as *Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling* (TPRS). TPRS, based on *Comprehensible Input* (CI) strategies, is

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a relatively recent approach to foreign language instruction with a focus on meaning-making and natural methods of language acquisition over instructed linguistic form. Through co-created stories about romance or interpersonal conflicts, TPRS/CI disavows standard "banking approaches" (Freire, 1968/1970) to language teaching that deposit grammar and vocabulary into students' accounts, opting for a dialogic approach engaged in collaboration between instructor and students. Thus, how does TPRS/CI invoke a language education where the linear, scripted classroom is disrupted, thereby allowing for the classroom to be a space of becoming? Moreover, how can TPRS/CI and the insights of Queer Theory function to trouble the "normal" content taught in and through languages?

Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics

The historically derisive term, *queer*, "a term of abuse" (Halperin, 2003, p. 339) attributed to gays and lesbians, has now become an intended academic object (Berlant & Warner, 1995) that seeks to confront heterosexual assumptions implicated in theory production and to attend to "everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure" (Halperin, 2003, p. 340). While scholars have expressed reticence towards the development of Queer Theory as an academic object since such attempts can possibly stabilize its boundaries (Berlant & Warner, 1995; Halperin, 2003), Queer Theory, however, can be approached as a "resistance to normalcy" (Halperin, 1995, p. 66). As such, Queer Theory confronts dichotomies, such as heterosexual/homosexual, as well as heteronormative and homonormative assumptions that uphold heterosexuality's status as the norm (Browne & Nash, 2010; Duggan, 2003). Moreover, normative categories such as gay and lesbian are destabilized as Queer Theory intends "not to adhere to any of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them" (de Lauretis, 1991, p. v). Whereas gender and sexual subjectivities were previously viewed as an innate part of the self (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003), Queer Theory, instead, disavows such claims, thereby emphasizing the role of performativity and discourse in (re)producing specific gendered and sexual subjectivities (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978/1990).

Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity and Foucault's (1978/1990) genealogical analysis of the discursive production of sexual subjectivities have wielded considerable influence in Queer Theory. Butler's (1990) construal of gender performativity posited gender as acts, not facts, thereby asserting that gender is not innate, but rather, produced through the repetition of "prior, subjectivating norms" (Butler, 1993, p. 22). For Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), then, gender performativity is not something that one willfully employs, but rather, is compulsory so that the subject may become recognizable. Gender norms, thus, "operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity" (Butler, 1993, p. 22), which subjects often fail to approximate. Moreover, the heterosexual matrix, which posits that in order for bodies to become recognizable, "there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990, p. 208). While the heterosexual matrix and normative categories of gender can be constraining, Butler (1990) asserted that subversive repetition can be one way of upending such norms; however, "there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion" (Butler, 1993, p. 22). As gender is a linguistic and embodied performance, Foucault traced the ways in which discourses of psychiatry and medicine produced the description of the modern-day homosexual. Whereas Foucault (1978/1990) did not disavow the repressive hypothesis, instead, asserting that his focus was not on such matters, he did, however, claim that there was an "incitement to discourse" (p. 34) surrounding sexuality. For Foucault, 1978/1990, then, discourse and power were entangled in the description of that "homosexual was now a species" (p. 43) as "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). Thus, Foucault's (1969/1972) analysis illustrated the ways in which discourse produces the objects of which it speaks.

Approaching language, gender, and sexuality, Queer Linguistics draws upon the theoretical influences of Butler, Foucault, and Derrida to critically interrogate heteronormativity in the linguistic domain (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Motschenbacher, 2010; Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). As a Queer Linguistic approach eschews essentialist accounts of gender and sexuality, it is not synonymous to a gay and lesbian linguistics (Motschenbacher, 2010). Moreover, Queer Linguistics is not only concerned with the "experiences of LGBT (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans) speakers" (Motschenbacher, 2014, p. 50), but rather, the discursive manifestation of heteronormativity (Leap & Motschenbacher, 2012; Motschenbacher, 2014). For Queer Linguistics, then, heteronormativity is not something that only regulates linguistic and embodied performances of heterosexually or homosexually-identified subjects, but rather, all those who may fail to approximate the heteronormative ideal (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). As Bucholtz and Hall (2004) stated, "Queer linguistics puts at the forefront of linguistic analysis the regulation of sexuality by hegemonic heterosexuality and the ways in which nonnormative sexualities are negotiated in relation to these regulatory structures" (p. 471). Thus, the theoretical influences of Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics can be productive for examining the ways in which heteronormativity excludes subjects who do not align with its normative ideals.

Upending norms: Queering language education

Identity in research related to second language acquisition (SLA) has often been disavowed in favor of positivistic approaches that center on what learners can "do" with the target language. As Pennycook (2001) discussed, theories of SLA often positioned language learners as a "language learning machine" (p. 143) thereby approaching identity as a "learner variable" (p. 143). As such, this approach to SLA often overlooked the social implications for learners' identities. However, Norton Peirce's (1995) call for SLA to foster a "comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context" (p. 12) served to emphasize that subjectivities created in and through discourses can provide power to some, while marginalizing others. A critical foreign language education, then, can consider the social implications for identities in the classroom as well as the implications of power and inequality (Kubota & Miller, 2017).

As heteronormativity is always already part of the language classroom (Liddicoat, 2009; Nelson, 2006), students with non-normative gender and sexual identities may experience policing of their identities and be forced to "come out" during interactional moments in the classroom (Liddicoat, 2009, p. 201). Moreover, learners can potentially be "positioned as a single gender group by the practices of the language classroom itself" (Cameron, 2005, p. 488), therein illustrating the heteronormative context of the classroom. Thus, problematizing gender and other norms in the classroom is often dependent upon the teachers' assumptions, which can favor those who are perceived to align with the norm (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004). In foreign language classroom discussions, gender is often an unmarked category (Appleby, 2014; Cahnmann-Taylor & Coda, 2018). Although the language classroom may not always attend to the social implications of gender, Pavlenko (2004) proposed that "learners could be encouraged to examine their language choices, perceptions, attitudes, and alternative selves offered to them in the new language" (p. 60). Thus, the language classroom can serve to challenge students' notions of normalcy related to the target language and culture.

While gender is often left unquestioned in the classroom, we might be inclined to ask, what about sexuality? The foreign language classroom is often a space for "becoming" as learners explore the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language. As a space of "imaginary worlds" (Pavlenko, 2004, p. 55), foreign language education can possibly serve to upend and challenge normative notions surrounding gender and sexuality in the target language and culture as well as in the students' language and culture. However, the dearth of attention to sexuality and issues of sexual diversity in the classroom (see Curran, 2006; De Vicenti, Giovanangeli, & Ward, 2007; Kappra & Vandrick, 2006; Nelson, 1999, 2006, 2009) can potentially exclude students who fall outside of normative expectations of gender and sexuality. As such, the language classroom is often

a monosexual space (Nelson, 2006) insofar as the dominance of heterosexuality is apparent in the materials, research, and pedagogy. Challenging the dominance of heterosexuality in language education, Nelson's (1999) seminal study of a community college ESOL classroom discussion involving a worksheet where two women were walking arm-in-arm culminated in the advocacy for queer inquiry in the classroom. While a gay and lesbian approach seeks to include "authentic" images of gays and lesbians, Nelson noted how this can still serve to produce exclusion as it upholds the hetero/homo dichotomy. As such, Nelson proposed queer inquiry, modeled from classroom inquiry and Queer Theory, which problematizes the production of *all* sexualities. Through such an approach to language education, queer inquiry "encourages participants to demystify potentially unfamiliar aspects of the target language and culture, but without reductively constructing the culture as homogeneous or unchanging" (Nelson, 1999, p. 379). Moreover, Nelson's (2009) study of over 100 TESOL teachers illustrated how issues of sexual diversity were examined through spontaneous classroom moments, activities that focused on sexual diversity and connected to broader cultural discussions.

As queering language education upends normativity related to gender and sexuality, Bakhtin's (1965/1984) "essence of carnival" (p. 7–8) can be applicable to queering language education as rules, orthodox, and prohibitions can be challenged in the students' first languages and the target language. In carnival, expectations for who is or is not in power are disrupted; such as in the case where the "clown" is "king." Such imaginative shifts in power and role offer insights to how language education can challenge norms, from word order to pronoun selection. For example, English terms for family members only consider the factors of gender and generation (e.g. uncle or great uncle). In Mandarin, distinctions are made regarding sibling birth order, maternal or paternal lineages, marriage, and blood distinctions. Thus, learning the "simple" concept of family titles in Mandarin can refresh learners' attention to lots of other kinds of communication that can be attached to how human (and non-human) objects are named. Exposing the unmarked norms of non-English language use, then, often results in laughter, which Bakhtin, 1965/1984 referred to as an "element of victory" (p. 92) over "all that oppresses and restricts" (p. 92).As such, Bakhtin's carnival and queering language education raise questions surrounding the constructedness of all identities (Paiz & Zhu, 2018), while also serving to illustrate how language education can invoke criticality in its engagement with the affective, corporeal, and more-than-human world (Appleby & Pennycook, 2017; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008; Kubota & Miller, 2017).

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling and Comprehensible Input

In contrast to linear or scripted approaches to language education, TPRS/CI utilizes improvised, co-constructed stories between the instructor and students to focus on targeted vocabulary and allows for fluidity when teaching grammatical tenses, even at the beginner level. Drawing upon prior approaches to SLA, namely, Asher, Kusudo, and de la Torre's (1974) Total Physical Response, which incorporated physical actions with language learning, and Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach, which emphasized deferred expectations of output, TPRS aims to teach second languages through natural, input-driven methods. Developing in the 1990s, TPRS was first introduced by a U.S. high school French teacher Blaine Ray (Ray & Seely, 2002) and has become widely popular among thousands of U.S. foreign language teachers who attend TPRS/CI conferences, join chatrooms, and publish in new journals such as *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching* (*IJFLT*), which began as a free, open access journal in 2004. As TPRS/CI has grown in popularity, nationally-known WL scholars and educators such as Carol Gaab (2011, 2017), Krashen (1982, 1985), and VanPatten (1996, 2003) have been proponents of the approach, which has produced podcasts such as "Tea with BVP" (VanPatten, 2017) that reach a wide array of practitioners who are interested in CI approaches to foreign language education.

TPRS/CI emphasizes quality teacher input before the production of output in the target language. As such, beginning students are often exposed to a variety of input methods such as Personalized Questions

and Answers, co-created stories between the instructor and students, "movie talk," and a "three-ring circus" that invoke a compelling and improvisational component of foreign language education, often requiring only short one word, phrasal, choral, or gestural responses from students.

With the emphasis on CI, students are provided a means of what Segalowitz (2003) described as *feeling* language before *thinking* about it. Through the use of yes/no questions posed to the students by the instructor, the three-ring circus whereby students are directed to perform the actions of the teacher, and embodied storytelling which is often "bizarre, exaggerated, and personalized (BEP in TPRS jargon)" (Alley & Overfield, 2008), TPRS/CI provides humorous opportunities for learners to become fictionalized or imagined characters in stories co-constructed in the classroom. TPRS/CI allows for the disruption of normalized teaching practices so as to allow for students to explore other identities and *become* in the target language, much like in Bakhtin, 1965/1984 carnival. Moreover, as TPRS/CI queers the typical notion of the professor and textbook as the authority (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010), it also provides an improvisational and interactive space that is predicated on "informal and incidental learning" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 12) instead of a more formal approach.

While many scholars and practitioners have been inspired by such approaches, others remain much more critical of TPRS/CI practices. Alley and Overfield (2008) asserted that TPRS/CI can potentially invoke a teacher-centered environment that largely relies upon the teacher's input and can potentially be devoid of authentic cultural content. They compare TPRS with other approaches, such as the grammar translation method, which propose "input" and limit student participation. The dearth of research related to TPRS/CI (Alley & Overfield, 2008) as well as the potential disavowal of "learners who request more grammar" (Davidheiser, 2002, p. 32) draw attention to the need to document and study such approaches to foreign language education. As we were excited by the potential that TPRS/CI has to offer in queering language education, not only through the content, but rather through an unscripted, non-linear method, our qualitative study documented three adult Mandarin and Spanish TPRS/CI classes. As we seek to expand upon previous research related to language and gender/sexual identity (Cahnmann-Taylor & Coda, 2018), our research is guided by the following questions:

(1) In what ways do TPRS/CI co-generated stories trouble and/or uphold classroom gender and sexuality norms?
(2) What implications can be drawn from TPRS/CI approaches for queering foreign language education?

TPRS/CI study context and methods

Cahnmann-Taylor became a participant observer in three such adult language learning settings: one five-day Spanish workshop in 2015 and two three-day Mandarin workshops in 2016 and 2018, all in various geographic locations with different language instructors and adult student learners. The group size for each TPRS/CI seminar ranged from 18 to 45 participants, featuring a blend of pre-service and in-service teachers in the areas of TESOL and foreign language education. For the two Mandarin workshops, only one native Mandarin speaker and three native Mandarin speakers were present for all sessions in each group which otherwise consisted entirely of novice level Mandarin learners. All participants were between the ages of 22 and 50 and ranged from little to no classroom experience to decades of classroom practice. All Mandarin speaking participants were pre-service or in-service Mandarin language teachers.

Sessions were video recorded (over 500 hours of recorded instruction) and transcribed (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Participant observation settings.

Settings & students	Location	Language (number of participants)	Data
TPRS/CI Five-Day Adult Workshop	Tennessee	Spanish (n = 25)	Video recorded Classroom Discourse (CD), transcriptions, and interviews with participants; participant observation (PO) fieldnotes
TPRS/CI Three-Day Adult Workshop Mandarin A	Tennessee	Mandarin (n = 18)	Video recorded CD, transcriptions, and focus group with participants; PO fieldnotes
TPRS/CI Three-Day Adult Workshop Mandarin B	Georgia	Mandarin (n = 45)	Video recorded CD, transcriptions; PO fieldnotes

Data analysis

Constructivist methods (Charmaz, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) guided the analysis as Coda, Cahnmann-Taylor, and Jiang separately coded and interpreted the data. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke (2006) phases, which are: (a) "familiarizing yourself with the data," (b) "generating initial codes," (c) "searching for themes," (d) "reviewing themes," and (e) "defining and naming themes" (p. 87). Initial codes were developed by providing "full and *equal* attention to each data item" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89) and were then collated into themes which we applied across the data set. Deductive and inductive analysis served to "search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (Bernard, 2006, p. 452). Moreover, participant fieldnotes and videos where used to attend to the nonverbal aspects of the student-teacher interactions in the classrooms we observed. We also utilized techniques from the arts, specifically, trans/scripts or "compressed renderings of original transcripts that utilize techniques from poetry and the dramatic arts" (Cahnmann-Taylor, Wooten, Souto-Manning, & Dice, 2009, p. 2548) to illustrate critical incidents (Tripp, 1993) and hot points in the data. Thus, employing arts-based approaches in our research served "to make the trans part of trans/scription apparent, utilizing tools from both the arts and sciences to render the original impact and feeling on the page and to guide the researcher to focus points in the text" (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009, p. 2550). As the insights of Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics also guided our analysis, we sought to maintain a queer reflexivity, "which offers the possibility of articulating the relationships between researcher/writer and the texts we produce, the possibilities of knowing and the words we construct in our writing" (Rooke, 2010, p. 35). A queer reflexivity, then, requires the researcher to be open "rather than holding on to a sense of self which provides an ontologically stable place from which to enter the fieldworld and subsequently come back to" (Rooke, 2010, p. 35).

It takes time for language to change: Normativity endures

While we were enthusiastic about the possibilities we found in TPRS/CI approaches to foreign language education, our analysis identified several moments where gender and sexuality norms were upheld, rather than problematized. Like all language educators, TPRS/CI teachers instruct in and through a subject that is laden with heteronormativity and power differentials between men and women; hence TPRS/CI language instruction is also beholden to those norms. Whether in Spanish or Mandarin, languages often privilege unmarked nouns as male. This was the case in Mandarin B course, for example, where a vocabulary review reified gender dichotomies. See the following example (bold is used to highlight points for analysis, and English translation is provided in the square brackets) when the instructor asked the correct translation for the fifth vocabulary Mandarin word, "ren":

Teacher: Eat. Right? Chi. [Eat.] *What would the number seven be called?*

Students: Qi. [Seven.]

Teacher: Qi. Chi. Qi. [Seven. Eat. Seven.] *Remember the tone for seven. Number five,* ***ren****.* [Person.]

Students: Person.

Teacher: ***Person****. I will take* ***man****, and I will take person. People is fine. Yeah. Number six, zai.* [At. In.]

Reviewing the answer to vocabulary quiz question number five, "ren," the students responded with "person" as the correct Mandarin-English translation. However, as we see in this example, the instructor correctly indicated that "person" and "man" are both acceptable for the Mandarin noun. Like nouns in English that have unmarked gender, but are gendered by default, such as "postman" and "stewardess," the instructor's acceptance of "man" and "person" left the conflation of norm and male as unmarked and unquestioned in the classroom discourse.

In the five-day Spanish workshop, we observed gender and hetero/homo dichotomies being reinforced by a female, heterosexually-identified instructor. Using a picture of a conventional family on the overhead screen, which depicted a father, mother, and child, the instructor began the lesson by asking questions related to the family, such as "*¿Cuántas personas hay en la familia*?" [How many people are in the family?]. After the students replied there were three members of the family, the instructor then related the example of the fictional family on the screen to her own family. See the following example below:

Teacher: Es una familia pequeña. Hay tres personas en la familia. (Shows picture of father, mother, and son on the screen). Hay la mamá. La mujer. El hombre, el papá. Y un chico. En mi familia, yo soy la mamá, ***obvio****. ¿Soy el papá?* [It's a small family. There are three people in the family. There's the mother, a woman. The father, a man. And a child. In my family, I'm the mother, **obviously**. Am I the father?]

Students: No.

Teacher: Yo soy la mamá. Y tengo un esposo, y un bebé. Pero un bebégrande. [I'm the mother. And I have a husband and a baby. But, a very big baby.]

Describing the small family consisting of a father, mother, and child, the instructor then brought students' attention to her own gendered subjectivity through stating how she was "obviously" the mother and not the father. The obviousness of her gender was then posed to the students as they were asked, "*¿Soy el papá?" [Am I the father?]*, to which the students responded "no." As beginning TPRS/CI students are instructed to reply with short answers, the students' reply to the obviousness of the instructor's gender supported conventional notions of gender and sexuality norms.

In the Mandarin A workshop, the adverb "romantically," like the adverb "obviously" in the Spanish course, reinforced expected gender norms. As the Mandarin instruction centered on the verb "give" and the adverb "romantically," it became a way for students to practice the expression of "giving" through humorous performance.

Teacher: Robert gei Michelle qiaokeli. [Robert gives Michelle chocolate.]

Student: ***Langman de*** *(laughing).* [**Romantically**]

Teacher: Oh Robert ***langman de*** *gei Jamie, haojile!* [Oh! Robert **romantically** gives Jamie, very good!]

In this excerpt, the student's suggestion of the adverb "romantically" drew attention to the fictional love story between Robert and Michelle. As heteronormativity frames the foreign language classroom discourse (Liddicoat, 2009), this example of a romantic longing between a male and female student was unsurprising. Across these observed TPRS/CI courses, we observed several missed opportunities to connect to expansive social lessons on gender and sexuality. However, these environments were all intense, short-term courses focused on teaching adults the target language rather than discussing social themes. Therefore, we were surprised by the number of observations we made in these classroom environments where "normal" was called into question.

Calling "normal" into question

While we found in our observations that TPRS/CI approaches to foreign language education can potentially reify conventional gender and sexuality roles, we also observed instances where norms in the students' first and target language were upended, thereby calling "normal" into question and fostering new, more expansive sets of social, cultural, and linguistic norms in the classroom.

For example, there were several moments in the Mandarin B workshop where the instructor's input instruction resulted in a larger discussion related to the nuances of Mandarin and gendered language. In this classroom moment, students drew attention to an error in the instructor's PowerPoint where "older sister" had been written in error, whereas "older brother" was intended, thereby resulting in a discussion of how to refer to gender fluidity in Mandarin:

Teacher: Ta xing Obama, danshi ta bujiao Barack. [His family name is Obama, but his given name is not Barack.]

Teacher: Ta bujiao Barack. Ta xing Obama. Ta bushi Barack Obama. [His given name is not Barack. His family name is Obama. He is not Barack Obama.]

Teacher: Ta shishei? Ta shishei? (*Point to the screen*.) [Who is he? Who is he?]

Student: ***Ta shi Barack de gege***. [He is the older brother of Barack.] ***Not "older sister," but "older brother."*** [student notices *jiejie* (older sister) on the powerpoint instead of *gege (older brother)*]

Teacher: Oh. The point. I love this student to spark things like that. Good for you. Let's fix that. You may want to use that. Good. Miracle technology. (change the PowerPoint) It's already fixed. Ta bushi Barack Obama. Ta shi Barack Obama de gege. [He is not Barack Obama. He is the older brother of Barack Obama.] *(Students Giggle)*

Teacher: Ta shi Barack Obama de gege. Barack Obama you meiyougege? [He is the older brother of Barack Obama. Does Barack Obama have an older brother?]

Students: You. [Yes, he does.]

Teacher: You. Barack Obama you meiyoudidi? You meiyoudid? [Yes, he does. Does Barack Obama have a younger brother? Does he have a younger brother?]

Students & Teacher: Meiyou. [No, he doesn't.]

Teacher: Ta shibushi Barack de didi? [Is he the younger brother of Barack Obama?] *OK, I need to hear you all answer, or else I am going to assume that you do not understand what I am saying. And then I will walk you through it. You don't want it. Ta shibushi Barack de didi?* [Is he the younger brother of Barack Obama?]

Students: Bushi. [No, he is not.]

Teacher: Bu shi. Ta shibushi Barack de didi? [No, he is not. Is he the younger brother of Barack Obama?] *Oh, you are all right. Good. Ta shibushi Barack Obama de jiejie?* [Is he the older sister of Barack Obama?]

Students: Bushi. [No, he is not.]

Teacher: ***Now, in the United States, of course, let's say the person is gender fluid and we didn't want to identify as a sister or a brother. In Chinese, so far, it's too bad. It's just a conservative language, and that's the way it is****. However, having said that, Taiwan has some of the most enlightened laws about gay marriage and things like that of all over Asia. So, it's a conundrum. Sometimes language does not keep up with thought. It takes more time for the language to be changed. It's very, what do you call, inertial. There is a lot of inertia in language.*

In this example, we observed the collaborative nature of this method as the teacher and students co-constructed a story that involved fictional characters such as Bob Obama, the brother of Barack Obama.When the students were asked whether Bob Obama could be the older sister of Barack Obama, the instructor commented on the relative impossibility of communicating gender fluidity in Chinese Mandarin compared to U.S. English. This classroom "error" resulted in an important moment where gender identity became an overt part of classroom discussion.

While this generative moment did not result in further discussions of language shift and change in response to social movements such as the active and global movement in transgender identity, the improvisational components of TPRS/CI facilitated possibilities for such a discussion and became a lasting moment for student participants. Eight months after the program, we interviewed three pre-service teachers who had participated in the Mandarin B course. Now certified to teach Spanish, one made important connections between traditions of language grammar, how foreign languages provide opportunities to study, and questions related to and beyond grammar to other aspects of socially (and linguistically) constructed identity.

> When [our Mandarin teacher] mentioned the pronouns and the labeling we use in language, I immediately thought of how certain forms in Spanish such as "nosotros," "vosotros," and "ellos" are the masculine forms, yet they are used to describe any group comprised of both males and females. When addressing a group of females in the second person plural, they are referred to as "vosotras" but as soon as one male enters the group, we use "vosotros." It reminds me of how we are so focused on labeling based on gender and physical appearance. In some ways, this makes it easier to make distinctions, yet it also puts people into boxes. Many don't mind being labeled as such, but I think this is easier to say if those labels don't affect you negatively in some way. For example, as a woman, I don't like being labeled as a "girl" or "girls" (in a group) if addressed by a man. I feel as if I hear that term thrown around by men to describe young women, yet I don't hear the word "boys" used as much. I hear "guys." The term "girls" just sounds repulsive to me for some reason when used to describe women. It doesn't seem appropriate to my ear since it makes me feel like I'm being put on a low rung of the ladder. Similarly, if I were transgender, it would bother me to be called the gender I no longer associate with, for example. I don't think many people think about this though, especially if they cannot relate. I think it is wise to use the language classroom to bring up these topics in language since they affect how we communicate with others and our understanding of how language influences our thinking and labeling and how we might challenge the norms of today.

This post-course interview response indicates that months after the workshop some participants carried with them important connections between teaching foreign languages and teaching shifting understandings of gender identity, status, sexual orientation, and power. A queer(er) foreign language classroom perceives language acquisition as an important curriculum area to articulate connections between language and social change.

The "new" normal and TPRS/CI classroom potential

Relying upon TPRS/CI approaches to language instruction, such as humor, circling, improvisation, and co-constructed stories, the instructors in the Mandarin A and B courses and the five-day Spanish course all devised love stories in their classrooms involving real and fictional characters that challenged heteronormativity and expanded possibilities for diversity. In our first analysis of the Spanish and Mandarin A courses, Cahnmann-Taylor and Coda (2018) observed how heteronormative gender and sexual roles were challenged and called into question. In the Mandarin A course, the "romantic" giving of chocolate to Michelle by Robert discussed above became the beginning of a love triangle story that ended with Robert "romantically giving" a well-received breath mint to another male member of the classroom, David. Such improvisational aspects in the co-created stories allowed for more inclusive classroom narratives where homosexual attraction was validated in the "new normal" of the classroom. In the Spanish course, we also documented an instance where heteronormative gender roles were subverted when a male-identified student, Sean, insisted on a non-normative gender role in a TPRS/CI story. While the teacher and peers at first assumed he was making an error, Sean clarified he could become a "princesa" (princess) instead of a "príncipe" (prince) in the invented class story, just as a younger female peer could become a "super heroe chicken."

In analysis of Mandarin B, we observed new moments of disruption to conventional sexuality roles beyond the discussion of "older sister" and "older brother" illustrated previously. Perhaps responding to an improvisational error made earlier, the teacher surprised the Mandarin students by creating a story targeting high frequency verbs such as "like," "is/are," and "has" related to a romance

between the fictional characters, "Bob," Barack Obama's brother, and "Ronald Trump," brother to the sitting president of the United States at the time of this inquiry.

Teacher: All right. Tongxue men. ***Bob he Ronald Edberg you yigemimi.*** [Students. Bob and Ronald Edberg have a secret.]

Students: Oh!

Teacher: Tamen you yigemimi. Tamenliangge ren you shenmemimi? Shenmemimi? Ronald chi Cheetos shibushimimi? [They have a secret. What secret do they two have? What secret? Is it a secret that Ronald eat Cheetos?]

Students: Bushi. [No.]

Teacher: Bushi. [No.] *Naturally acquired. Zhidao. Bu shimimi. Bob Obama zai Hawaii tiaowushibushimimi?* [We know. Not a secret. Is it a secret that Bob Obama dances in Hawaii?]

Students: Bushi. [No.]

Teacher: Ye bushimimi. Yinwei New York Times zhidao. Tamen you shenmemimi? Shenmemimi? (working on the computer and slides.) [Not a secret either. Because New York Times knows it. What secret do they have? What secret?] *Oh, that's not good. Oh I was gonna tell you this one. Tamen you yigemimi.* [They have a secret.] *Oh, sorry. Let's do this. Tamenshipengyou. Tamenshipengyou.* [They are friends. They are friends.] *What does that mean?*

Students: ***They are friends.***

Teacher: They are friends. Dui. Ronald Trump he Obama shibushipengyou? [Yes. Are Ronald Trump and Obama friends?]

Students: Bushi. [No.]

Teacher: Bushi. [No.] *OK. Danshi Ronald Trump he Bob shipengyou. Shi bushi?* [But Ronald Trump and Bob are friends, is that right?]

Students: Shi. [Yes.]

Teacher: Shi mimi. Shi mimi. Wei shenmeshimimi? Yinweitamenshipengyou. Tamenshipengyou. ***Tamenshi nan pengyou***. [It's a secret. A secret. Why a secret? Because they are friends. They are friends. **They are boyfriends**.].

Students: ***Oh! (Students laugh.)***

In this excerpt, circling target structures, the instructor and students co-constructed a story surrounding Bob and Ronald's retirement homes, eating habits, ages, and other related information, while also drawing students' attention to Bob and Ronald's "big" secret: Bob and Ronald are not only *friends*, but were *boyfriends*, which resulted in students' laughter.While TPRS/CI often relies upon humor and emotions to make connections with the target language structures, students' laughter surrounding Bob and Ronald's homosexual relationship presented "an invitation to think relations differently" (Mayo, 2010, p. 511).While this example of the fictional characters, Bob and Ronald, becoming "boyfriends," as a comical moment, may not reflect a new normal in expansive understandings of romantic relationships, such a moment might not necessarily invoke laughter if there were new a normal. However, this classroom moment does illustrate how the discourses of learning new languages may also include different ways of conceptualizing gender and sexual identity in the unique space of the language classroom.

Discussion and conclusion

In conventional approaches to foreign language education, vocabulary and grammar are often discretely taught and disconnected from critical issues (Kubota et al., 2003; Liddicoat, 2009; Nelson, 2009). TPRS/CI, relying as it does upon co-constructed stories, humor and emotions, personalized questions and

answers, and improvisational comprehensible input, provides opportunities for shifts, big and small, for questioning what appears normal, feasible, and done in the new language and culture.

For the purposes of our study, we sought to better understand the ways in which TPRS/CI practices may trouble conventional content and practices. Findings indicate that TPRS/CI approaches can encourage students to question "normal" in relation to language, gender, and sexuality, but are still predicated on the socio-cultural conventions of the host culture where language learning is taking place. However, humor and improvisational components of this method allowed for male-identified students to become princesses, for romantic relationships between male-identified students to flourish, and for troubling conventional norms in the context of classroom-generated, fictionalized stories. Therefore, we concur with Mayo's (2010) assertion that "for education involving difficult issues, humor has the potential to refigure ideas and motivate the formation of communities" (p. 511). While there were moments where humor may have reinforced the heteronormative status quo, as in the case of students' laughter regarding Bob and Ronald's relationship, it also offered room in the classroom discourse for non-normative scripts and delving into what might be considered taboo. Thus, the implications of such instances of challenging normativity and fostering a new classroom normal in these short courses could be expanded in full semester courses.

The unscripted component of TPRS/CI provided an opportunity for the pre- and in-service teachers in our study to engage with queering their understandings of foreign language instruction. As Morgan and Clarke (2011) elaborated, "the ubiquitous reinforcement of heterosexual norms through language learning tasks, course texts and teaching habits has presented itself as an especially important focus for queer pedagogies" (p. 822). Thus, developing our understandings of how TPRS/CI approaches and queer pedagogy can work together in the foreign language classroom can possibly help to ensure that we do not dismiss the centrality of identity in the classroom and perpetuate historical inequalities (Nelson, 2009). Experiencing TPRS/CI through a queer approach, then, can potentially create a "space for engagement with cross-linguistic differences in discursive and social construction of gender and sexuality, for exploration of oppression through dominant discourses of gender, and for production of discourses (and, thus, subjectivities) of resistance" (Pavlenko, 2004, p. 55). Moreover, TPRS/CI and queer pedagogies can also offer a way of understanding how language and its legacies of standardization "are socially and historically constructed to support the interests of a dominant group within a given society" (Norton, 2013, p. 56). While a queer approach to TPRS/CI can raise questions surrounding norms and the construction of identities, the instructor's role is still paramount in problematizing such norms. As such, we concur with Vélez-Rendón's (2010) claim that "language teachers become more versed in the tenets of critical pedagogy" (p. 646), and Kubota and Miller (2017) call to "stay cautious about our complicity with the knowledge, gaze, power, and language that have perpetuated oppression and seek instead to reframe, appropriate, or replace the existing systems" (p. 17). Thus, imagining a foreign language education where dominant systems, such as heteronormativity, homonormativity, and male status are called into question should be our focus as language education scholars and teacher educators. Through approaches such as TPRS/CI that challenge not only conventional teaching methods of languages, but rather, status normativity, we can build a critical language education that centers on issues of language, power, and identity.

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