

Teaching World Languages in Middle and Secondary Schools

A Critical Introduction



Timothy Reagan
Terry A. Osborn

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From Tim

For my father, Gerald Reagan

זכרונו לברכה

From Terry

To Joy, Joshua, Sarah, Juliana, and my grandchildren, Madison and
John Mario.

May we all pursue the chief end of man.

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EPIGRAPH

*If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's
we rob them of tomorrow.*

—John Dewey

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AAE</i>	African American English
<i>AATA</i>	American Association of Teachers of Arabic
<i>AATF</i>	American Association of Teachers of French
<i>AATG</i>	American Association of Teachers of German
<i>AATI</i>	American Association of Teachers of Italian
<i>AATJ</i>	American Association of Teachers of Japanese
<i>AATK</i>	American Association of Teachers of Korean
<i>AATMG</i>	American Association of Teachers of Modern Greek
<i>AATSEEL</i>	American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages
<i>AATSP</i>	American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese
<i>AATT</i>	American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages
<i>ACL</i>	American Classical League
<i>ACTFL</i>	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
<i>ACTR</i>	American Council of Teachers of Russian
<i>AI</i>	Artificial Intelligence
<i>ALM</i>	Audiolingual Method
<i>ASHA</i>	American Speech, Language and Hearing Association
<i>ASL</i>	American Sign Language
<i>ASLTA</i>	American Sign Language Teachers Association
<i>ATTA</i>	American Tamil Teachers Association
<i>BCE</i>	Before the Common Era (i.e., BC)
<i>BEST</i>	Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking
<i>BFLA</i>	Bilingual First Language Acquisition
<i>BIPOC</i>	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
<i>CASE</i>	Conceptually Accurate Signed English
<i>CE</i>	Common Era (i.e., AD)
<i>CEFR</i>	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<i>CIA</i>	Central Intelligence Agency

xviii *Abbreviations*

<i>CLASS</i>	Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools
<i>CLL</i>	Community Language Learning
<i>CLS</i>	Critical Language Scholarship Program
<i>CLT</i>	Communicative Language Teaching
<i>CLTA</i>	Chinese Language Teachers Association
<i>CNN</i>	Cable News Network
<i>CODAs</i>	Children of Deaf Adults
<i>Conlang</i>	Constructed Language
<i>CTL</i>	Commonly Taught Language
<i>DEI</i>	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
<i>EFL</i>	English as a Foreign Language
<i>ELL</i>	English Language Learner
<i>ELT</i>	English Language Teaching
<i>ESSA</i>	Every Student Succeeds Act
<i>EU</i>	European Union
<i>FLES</i>	Foreign Language in the Elementary School
<i>FSI</i>	Foreign Service Institute
<i>GPA</i>	Grade Point Average
<i>HL</i>	Heritage Language
<i>HLL</i>	Heritage Language Learner
<i>IEA</i>	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
<i>IELTS</i>	International English Language Testing System
<i>ILCE</i>	International Language Certificate Exams
<i>ILR</i>	Interagency Language Roundtable
<i>IPA</i>	International Phonetic Alphabet
<i>ISN</i>	Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan Sign Language)
<i>L1</i>	First Language
<i>L2</i>	Second Language
<i>LAD</i>	Language Acquisition Device
<i>LCTL</i>	Less Commonly Taught Language
<i>LGBTQIA+</i>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and More
<i>LOVE</i>	Linguistics of Visual English
<i>LP</i>	Long Playing (Record)
<i>LSA</i>	Linguistic Society of America
<i>MLA</i>	Modern Language Association
<i>MLU</i>	Mean Length of Utterance
<i>MRI</i>	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
<i>NAACP</i>	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
<i>NAHET</i>	National Association of Hebrew Teachers

<i>NCLB</i>	No Child Left Behind Act
<i>NCTE</i>	National Council of Teachers of English
<i>NDEA</i>	National Defense Education Act
<i>NEA</i>	National Education Association
<i>NSEP</i>	National Security Education Program
<i>NSLI</i>	National Security Language Initiative
<i>NTL</i>	Never Taught Language
<i>OECD</i>	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
<i>OPI</i>	Oral Proficiency Examination (ACTFL)
<i>PIRLS</i>	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
<i>PISA</i>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<i>RAE</i>	Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy)
<i>S-R</i>	Stimulus-Response
<i>S-V-O</i>	Subject-Verb-Object
<i>SALT</i>	Suggestive-Accelerative Learning and Teaching
<i>SEE-I</i>	Seeing Essential English
<i>SEE-II</i>	Signing Exact English
<i>SLA</i>	Second Language Acquisition
<i>STEM</i>	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
<i>TESOL</i>	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
<i>TIMMS</i>	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
<i>TOEFL</i>	Test of English as a Foreign Language
<i>TPR</i>	Total Physical Response
<i>UbD</i>	Understanding by Design
<i>UDL</i>	Universal Design for Learning
<i>UG</i>	Universal Grammar
<i>U.S.S.R.</i>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Timothy Reagan, PhD, is Professor of World Language Education in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. He also holds the position of Research Fellow in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and is CSU (“Distinguished”) Professor of Education Emeritus at Central Connecticut State University. He has held positions at a number of universities in the United States and overseas, including at Gallaudet University, Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan), the University of Connecticut, and the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa). Reagan is the author of more than a dozen books and 150 journal articles and book chapters. His most recent books are *Democracy and world language education: Toward a transformation* and, with Terry A. Osborn, *World language education as critical pedagogy: The promise of social justice*.

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PREFACE

The origins of this book are quite simple: we took the advice of the great American novelist Toni Morrison, who once observed, “If there’s a book you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” We have in fact written a number of books dealing with issues related to world language education, both singly and together. What we have not done, though, is to write a book that would adequately combine ideas, concepts and practices from two traditions in the world language education literature that rarely overlap: the kinds of information that a foreign language teacher needs to be an effective and competent classroom teacher (that is, largely technical skills and knowledge), and the growing literature that addresses critical pedagogy in the specific context of foreign language education. It is this combination that we hope that this work will help to fill, and it is what we believe differentiates it from most foreign language methodology textbooks currently available.

Teaching World Languages in Middle and Secondary Schools: A Critical Introduction is intended to serve primarily as an introductory text for preservice students in teacher education programs who intend to become world language teachers, most probably in courses focused on teaching methodologies. It inevitably includes information that some students might have been exposed to in other teacher education courses, but for the most part we believe that it will provide future teachers with an introduction not to teaching as a career, nor to particular aspects of teaching that are common across grade levels and subject matters, but rather to the specific, and unique, nature and practices of world language educators.

We would like to thank all of our colleagues and students over the past few decades from whom we have learned an immense amount—and who have led us, in a host of different ways, to reflect upon and reconsider our ideas about the best ways to teach and learn foreign languages. We would also like to thank two graduate students in particular, Bushra Amil and Abdur Rehman Tariq, for their careful editing and thought-provoking insights as we worked on this manuscript. As always, any mistakes or errors

are our responsibility; we are reminded of the following passages from the Bible: “At this point I shall bring my work to an end. If it is found to be well written and aptly composed, that is what I myself desired; but if superficial and mediocre, it was the best that I could do” (2 Maccabees 15: 37–38), and “My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

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CHAPTER 1

“ENGLISH IS ALL I NEED”: TEACHING WORLD LANGUAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

In this chapter, we will:

- discuss the many different labels that can be used to describe “world language education,” and explain why each label makes a difference.
- consider what we mean when we talk about both “language” and “a language,” such as English, French or Spanish.
- describe the nature of language change and evolution, especially as it applies in the case of the Romance languages.
- discuss the growing popularity of nonbinary pronouns in English as well as in several other world languages as examples of language change.
- explain the nature of mutual intelligibility, and suggest ways of distinguishing languages from dialects.
- discuss the implications of linguistic diversity in the world language classroom, and explain why such diversity matters.
- describe the implications of the artificial nature of world language teaching and learning for the world language classroom.

2 Teaching World Languages in Middle and Secondary Schools

The fact that you are reading this book at all makes you a very unusual person, especially at the start of the second quarter of the 21st century in United States. You have not only chosen a very important and meaningful profession—becoming a teacher—but have also decided that you want to teach a world language. To accomplish this goal, you have already done something that is extremely uncommon for English-speaking students in the United States: you yourself have actually managed to learn the language that you want to teach. We do not mean in any way to denigrate native speakers of the language that they wish to teach; they, too, have had to learn a second language (English), but unfortunately (and unfairly) in the United States that is not seen as being as impressive as when a speaker of English learns another language.¹ One of the interesting paradoxes in world language education in the United States—a paradox that we will discuss in greater detail later—is what can be called “ideological monolingualism.” Ideological monolingualism is basically the idea that being monolingual—especially in English—is somehow “normal,” while being bilingual or multilingual is in some sense “abnormal.” In other words, in contemporary US society, our “default setting” is that a person should either (a) be a native, monolingual speaker of English, or (b) be a native speaker of some other language, but be fluent in English. This is an especially interesting notion, since most human beings throughout most of human history have in fact been bilingual and multilingual, and this remains the reality around the world today. Moreover, there has not been any time in recorded history where people in the United States as a whole have spoken only one language. It is individual monolinguals who are exceptions in a broader sense, although they seem, at least in the United States, to be generally unaware of, or unmoved by, this truth.

There are several words that are commonly used in discussions about the teaching and learning of languages that need to be explored here. First, historically we have talked about *foreign languages* and *foreign language education*, but these labels are misleading at best and continue to be avoided when possible. Most of the time, the languages that we teach in US schools are not really *foreign* at all. In 1996, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) published the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, which presented voluntary national standards for world language instruction. Interestingly, even ACTFL has decided to move away from *foreign* while keeping the recognized acronym as ACTFL and adding the tagline of “Language Connects” to address this issue (see <https://actfl.org/about-actfl/history>).

The *Standards* created by ACTFL, in collaboration with many other language associations (and now called the *World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning*) have since been elaborated and adapted for specific languages,

including Arabic, Chinese, Classical languages (Latin and Greek), French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish (see [National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 2006, 2015](#)), as well as for American Sign Language (see [Ashton et al., 2014](#); [Rosen, 2019](#); [Swaney & Smith, 2017](#)) and Esperanto (see [Fonseca-Greber & Reagan, 2008](#); [Reagan et al., 2005](#)). One important aspect of the *Standards* is the discussion of the issue of “foreignness.” In the original *Standards* document, it was pointed out that:

The use of the word “foreign” to describe the teaching of languages other than English is becoming increasingly problematic within the U.S. context. Many of the languages taught within our schools are not “foreign” to many of our students (for example, Italian, Chinese, or Spanish), nor are they “foreign” to the United States ... ([National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999](#), p. 27)²

The alternative label used for languages such as French, Spanish, German, and so on—the languages that we typically offer in the public schools—is now *world languages*. “World language” as a phrase refers to a language that is spoken throughout the entire populated world to an extent that it can be distinguished from other languages. Although in general in this book we will use *world languages*, it is important to understand that this term, too, is problematic in several ways. The first problem with the phrase *world languages* is that English is arguably *the* world language *par excellence*, but it is certainly *not* the language that we are concerned with teaching in the United States in world language classes.³ The second is that while most students study Spanish or French—both of which are also clearly world languages—there are many other languages taught (or which might be taught) for which the label *world* would be somewhat misleading at best. Italian, Portuguese, and even German are all valuable languages worthy of study, but none are really *world* languages in the sense that English, French and Spanish are (though Portuguese comes close). Further, when we used the term *foreign language* in the past, the basic idea was that the language being learned was *foreign to the learner*. This way of talking about *foreign languages* and *foreign language education* works very well, of course, until one considers both the historical influence of such languages in the United States (where loanwords, for example, hamburgers, frankfurters, tacos, macaroni, and similar foods are “American” staples), or the case of English Language Learners learning English as a second language in the US context. For such students, *English* is the language being studied, and yet there is virtually no tradition of including this use of the term in our discourse in the US. Indeed, this is a distinction that is made not only in our everyday language, but in terms of teacher preparation, professional organizations (e.g., ACTFL vs. TESOL),⁴ journals and textbooks and a host of other ways.⁵

4 Teaching World Languages in Middle and Secondary Schools

This makes the ideological component—and most especially, the way in which languages other than English as deemed as “Others”—in the use of the labels *foreign languages* and *world languages* clear, but the effect of that usage can perhaps be minimized or even reversed if it is recognized. Recent efforts to change nomenclature, utilizing the term *world languages* in place of *foreign languages*, have to some extent addressed such concerns, but only at the level of what might be called articulated bias. Regardless of what they are called, in US public schools languages other than English are in fact perceived, by both adults and students, as *foreign*. The risk with such word games (for this is what they are), as Michael Apple noted, is that:

...historically outmoded, and socially and politically conservative (and often educationally disastrous) practices are not only continued, but are made to sound as if they were actually more enlightened and ethically responsive ways of dealing with children. (1979, p. 144)

The second commonly used terms that need clarification are *native speaker* and *native language*—terms that we have already used a number of times in this chapter. There are several problems here of which you should be aware. First, the word “native” is sometimes taken to be racist, or at the very least to carry racist overtones. Second, there is the problem of what is called the ideology of nativism (sometimes called “nativespeakerism”)—including the recognition that the *native speaker* is actually a hypothetical (and idealized) construct that confuses linguistic competence and linguistic performance. It is for these reasons that many linguists prefer to simply use L1 rather than any of the alternatives. Finally, there is the modality problem—the use of the word *speaker* can be taken to be audist, in other words excluding users of sign languages (see Bauman, 2004; Eckert & Rowley, 2013). In spite of these problems and limitations, in world language education we continue to use the terms *native language* and *native speaker* quite commonly, and we have chosen to do so here based on their recognizability at present—with the proviso and understanding that these are both potentially deeply problematic.

What Is Language?

“Language” is one of those words that we use all of the time, and when we do so, we usually believe that we know precisely what we mean by it. If someone were to ask, “How many languages does Paul speak?”—whether or not we knew the answer—we tend to assume that at the very least we know what the question is. As Ronald Wardhaugh once commented, though:

Language plays an important role in the lives of all of us and is our most distinctive human possession. We might expect, therefore, to be well-informed about it. The truth is we are not. Many statements we believe to be true about

language are likely as not false. Many of the questions we concern ourselves with are either unanswerable and therefore not really worth asking or betray a serious misunderstanding of the nature of language. Most of us have learned many things about language from others, but generally the wrong things. (1999, p. viii)

In fact, the more that we try to provide a clear, concise, and accurate definition of the word "language," the fuzzier and more problematic the concept seems to become. The problem with the word "language" is similar to one raised by the historian Carl Becker many years ago, when he discussed both the importance and power of definitions:

Now, when I meet a word with which I am entirely unfamiliar, I find it a good plan to look it up in the dictionary and find out what someone thinks it means. But when I have frequently to use words with which everyone is perfectly familiar – words like "cause" and "liberty" and "progress" and "government" – when I have to use words of this sort which everyone knows perfectly well, the wise thing to do is to take a week off and think about them. (1955, p. 328)

Language is, in many ways, a good example of such a "week-off word." In Lewis Carroll's masterpiece *Through the Looking-Glass*, there is a passage in which Alice and Humpty Dumpty engage in an argument about the meaning of words. In this passage, Alice suggests, as would most of us, that the meaning of a term cannot be decided by the speaker alone, while Humpty Dumpty argues otherwise. Their conversation goes as follows:

"There's glory for you."

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant, 'There's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." (Carroll, 1992, p. 163, emphasis in original)

While Alice's view is not at all an unreasonable one, issues of meaning are actually somewhat more complex than they might at first appear. How words acquire meaning, and how the meaning that they acquire can change, is in fact a rather complicated matter. We have tended to view language from a perspective that is, at its heart, fundamentally positivistic in orientation. In other words, we have assumed that language as an abstract entity, in a

kind of Chomskian sense,⁶ exists as singular and knowable. As Neil Smith commented,

There is an intuitive appeal to the notion that there is an external language that different people speak. Indeed, it is so self-evidently true that it would be pointless to deny it. However, when taken to its logical conclusion, the idea turns out to be problematic, as the notion of “language” involved is different from the notion that linguists theorize about. (2002, pp. 102–103)

Just as “language” does not really exist “out there, somewhere”—as a singular, knowable entity, neither do *particular* languages—in a powerful sense, there really is no such thing as English apart from speakers who use it, any more than there is Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Hindi, or any other language. And yet, such assumptions about both human language in general and different languages are embedded in our discourse, and in turn have important implications for the world language classroom. We routinely make claims about English, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Navajo, Zulu, and so on, just as we make claims about the nature of human language more generally. When we engage in teaching languages, our goal is to move the student’s linguistic behavior closer to preconceived norms of the language. We do so by first, constructing or holding a singular reality of the target language. What we do, in short, is to engage in the objectification, or reification, of the construct of language, which in turn can lead us to misunderstand the nature of language and to accept what are essentially technicist views of the teaching and learning of languages. This means that both world language teachers and students have come to think of the target language less as a living, changing, and dynamic collection of different, related dialects and more as simply a singular reality that is contained in textbooks, dictionaries, and grammar books.

But We’re Teaching *Something*: Language Must Exist

A somewhat skeptical reader may be tempted to stop reading at this point, frustrated, and opine that this is all simply academic doubletalk. *Of course* languages exist—the authors are writing this book in a language, after all. The argument that we are attempting to offer here may be better understood using the analogy of a coastline. If one were to look at a map, the coast of Florida would be drawn with clearly demarcated lines, showing where the water meets the land. The coastline would seem to be clear: static, measurable, and constant. However, if one were to actually visit Florida and go to observe the coastline, the reality would seem quite different. The coast is not at all static—it is constantly changing as the water ebbs and flows. Indeed, it would really be impossible to measure the

coastline except for at a single, particular moment in time, since it would be constantly changing and in a state of flux. So it is with language. As world language teachers, understanding the nature of language itself is a prerequisite to teaching it.

Language Change and Evolution

In its most commonplace and everyday sense, the term language is in fact both ahistorical and atheoretical. It is ahistorical in that it presupposes that language is, in some sense as discussed above, fixed and static—that is, it is a singular reality. As David Pharies, in his history of the Spanish language, observed,

Human culture is constantly changing in every way: in the way people dress or wear their hair; in the technologies they use; in their political, religious, and educational institutions; in the way they treat children and animals; in what and how much they eat; in the way the sexes relate to each other Language can be characterized as the ultimate manifestation of human culture ... Perhaps because language is so omnipresent in our lives, the subtle yet infinite series of changes that it undergoes are sometimes difficult to perceive. (2007, pp. 1–2)

Consider the case of Latin, commonly described in introductory textbooks as the language spoken by the Romans as well as the language first of the Roman Republic and then of the Roman Empire—the language associated with the long period of time of Roman preeminence (the *Pax Romana*), and the language in which such authors as Cicero, Catullus, Virgil, Seneca, Livy, and Ovid, among others, wrote. While such a description is true, it distorts the reality of the history of the Latin language (see [Clackson & Horrocks, 2007](#); [Janson, 2002](#); [Ostler, 2007](#); [Waquet, 1998](#)). Latin existed prior to the rise of the Roman Republic, and it continued to be used for centuries after the fall of Rome in 476 CE. Indeed, long after the end of the Roman Empire, Latin served as the language of the Roman Catholic Church, the language of diplomacy, the language of science, and the language of literature for virtually all educated people throughout western Europe. It was not, though, the same Latin that was used in antiquity—the language changed and evolved over time, and the Latin used at the time of the Emperor Augustus was quite different from that used in later periods.

Latin also changed and evolved at what might be called the grassroots level—while varieties of formal, written Latin remained the language of education and the educated elite in western Europe for centuries, the everyday language used in the areas where Latin had been the daily spoken vernacular language also changed, and the accumulated changes in all aspects of

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the language led to the development of a series of “daughter” languages that had their origins in Latin, but which over time ceased to be Latin and evolved into a series of other languages—the Romance languages.⁷ The close relationship among the different Romance languages, which shows their common ancestry, can be seen in the comparison of selected lexical items in [Table 1.1](#).

In fact, the similarities among the lexicons of the different Romance languages are quite impressive, as can be seen in [Table 1.2](#).

Table 1.1

Comparison of Selected Vocabulary Items in Romance Languages

English	Latin	Italian	Spanish	French	Portuguese	Romanian
to love	amare	amare	amar	aimer	amar	a iubi
house	casa, domum	casa	casa	maison	casa	casă
milk	lac	latte	leche	lait	leite	lapte
night	nox	notte	noche	nuit	noite	noapte
to eat	manducare	mangiare	comer	manger	comer	mânca
today	hodie	oggi	ayer	hier	ontem	azi
late	tardus	tardi	tarde	tard	tarde	tâ
father	pater	padre	padre	père	pai	tată
good	bonus	buono	bueno	bon	bom	bun
life	vita	vita	vida	vie	vida	viată
mother	mater	madre	madre	mere	mãe	mamă
water	aqua	acqua	agua	eau	água	apă

Table 1.2

Percentage of Lexical Similarities Among Romance Languages

	Italian	Spanish	French	Portuguese	Romanian
Italian	–	82%	89%	80%	77%
Spanish	82%	–	75%	89%	71%
French	89%	75%	–	75%	75%
Portuguese	80%	89%	75%	–	72%
Romanian	77%	71%	75%	72%	–
Catalan	87%	82%	85%	85%	73%