

# #BLACKLANGUAGE MATTERS: A CASE STUDY OF BLACK IDENTITIES IN AN L2 ISIXHOSA CLASSROOM

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of Black identity in a critical and culturally relevant beginner L2 isiXhosa course. While Black students have been a major focus in American education, little attention has gone to their identities in L2 classrooms. In African language courses specifically, Lee (2005) found that Black university students largely enrolled to connect with their African heritage. Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) classified these types of students as *learners with heritage motivation*. However, there has been little research on how Black students negotiate their historical-cultural heritage in a contemporary L2 classroom. In a case study conducted at the University of Hawai‘i, four students participated in three two-hour isiXhosa lessons designed to be culturally relevant and to critically examine their identities in relation to South African Xhosa culture. Along with survey and lesson discussion data, I interviewed students before and after the course to measure the development of their intersectional identities and perspectives. Drawing on a negotiated syllabus discussion, survey responses, and interviews, I used Rosa and Flores’s (2017) raciolinguistic perspective as a framework to analyze student perceptions of race, gender, and language to understand how the goals of these learners with heritage motivation converged with their intersectional identities and African heritage in an isiXhosa classroom. My findings show that the students developed awareness of their African heritage by shifting their perspectives away from negative outsider perceptions of Black and African communities. Their positive responses to the course relied both on the critical/cultural and linguistic content. This suggests that Black learners with heritage motivation value linguistic acquisition, and benefit from curriculum focused on the connections between Black and African cultures, exclusive of their historically *linked* oppressions.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the Marvel film *Black Panther* made headlines around the world for numerous accomplishments. The story of Wakanda—a hidden African nation uncolonized by Europe—broke box office records (Mendelson, 2018), won numerous awards (Bundel, 2019), and was the first film publicly shown in Saudi Arabia after a 35-year ban (Alsultan & Hubbard, 2018). But what was it that drew international audiences to a film dominated by Black faces?

Much of the media attention went to the film's two main characters, T'Challa and Erik Killmonger. As the king of Wakanda, T'Challa portrayed an introspective Black male monarch surrounded by Black female warriors and advisors in an African country that was prosperous in a holistically African way. His antagonist, Killmonger, was a Black child raised in Oakland, California, surrounded by the oppression inflicted on its Black inhabitants. His reaction to these conditions, combined with his awareness of Wakanda through his father (T'Challa's uncle) led him to the American military where he learned skills to exact revenge for his father's death and for the historical oppression imposed on Black peoples throughout the world—both of which Wakanda had ignored in its isolation. One exchange in particular exemplified the conflict between the diasporic Killmonger and his Wakandan relatives: “Y’all sittin here comfortable. Must feel good. It’s about 2 billion people around the world that looks like us, but their lives are a lot harder” (Feige & Coogler, 2018). While Killmonger argued for the use of Wakanda’s elite technology and weapons to liberate Black people, T'Challa responded with, “It is not our way to be judge, jury, and executioner for people *who are not our own*,” and distanced Africa’s Wakanda from the African diaspora (Feige & Coogler, 2018). While general audiences revelled in the beautiful architecture of Wakanda and the strength of T'Challa, Black viewers in particular were drawn to Killmonger’s argument (Miranda, 2018). For many in the African diaspora, “going back to Africa” and understanding this heritage is a life-long struggle repeated generation after generation. As Killmonger’s violent approach suggests, the desire for connection is complex. While there is no denying the heritage of African nations in the Americas, that history is the result of a slave system that brutally suppressed African indigeneity and resulted in the systemic erasure of African genealogies (Gilroy, 1993). In reckoning with the contemporary consequences of this destruction, interactions between Black peoples include conflicts of difference as much as they work towards solidarity.

*Black Panther* not only brought this cultural dilemma into mainstream conversations, but also created content that suggests how it may be negotiated. Implicit in its construction of

Wakanda is a depiction of Africa that contradicts stereotypes of poverty and violence. It challenged Western viewers to reflect on what they know about Africa and its nations in creating a world outside of the Western perspective. It did so in part by consciously using a non-European language and accent on the part of the Wakandan characters. Though the country itself is fictional, the language billed as “Wakandan” is actually isiXhosa, spoken in South Africa and Zimbabwe. In making an indigenous African language central to the Wakandan identity, *Black Panther* exposed audiences to a language they may have never heard before. For Black viewers, it was a subtle yet important detail that removed a major feature of the colonial legacy from the film. From the suppression of indigenous language use among African slaves in the Americas to colonial language policies in Africa, European liberal and racial ideologies have delegitimized indigenous African languages and promoted European dominance through disregarding the importance and diversity of African cultures (Rosa & Flores, 2017, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986, Wolff, 2016). By centering an African language in a Black-led film seen by numerous Black audiences around the world, *Black Panther* challenged the relevance of European languages for Black people. If the example of a successful uncolonized African nation includes fluency in isiXhosa, then the prominence of European languages within the African diaspora—especially in connection to their African heritage—comes into question. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) explicitly critiqued the dominance of colonial languages in African media given the role of all languages as carriers of culture, history, and identity. *Black Panther* implicitly brought this discussion to the modern-day diaspora through Killmonger, who asserted his status in the film as a Wakandan not through English, but in isiXhosa. For others in the diaspora, the question then is how can we speak to and establish our place in Africa as displaced and distanced members?

In addressing this dilemma in the context of *Black Panther*, I ask how Black people can benefit from the speaking of isiXhosa in a superhero movie. In the field of L2 education, there are few answers. While culturally relevant pedagogy has given a lot of attention to Black students, it has rarely reached into the realm of L2 teaching. At the intersection of heritage language education and culturally relevant teaching are curriculum and research devoted to Native American and immigrant groups in the United States (Wiley, 2001). But the case of Black students whose ties to Africa are temporally distant and have been systemically kept out of written historical records remains perplexing. If one were to take this moment prompted by *Black Panther* and use the film as tool for teaching isiXhosa as a heritage language, what would

that mean for Black American students? What would they want from such a course? How would they negotiate it? What would learning isiXhosa mean for their Black identity, and what could language educators learn from asking such questions?

To provide some answers to these questions, I built a curriculum to teach isiXhosa specifically to Black students. In doing so, I used critical and culturally relevant pedagogy to both directly ask and respond to what these students wanted to learn, and to address the relationship between their heritage and identity. The analysis of what these students told me before, during, and after the course provide important context for how Black students may benefit from responsive language curriculum, and the details that may require particular attention in such a design.

### ***Positionality***

My interest in this topic relates directly to my experiences as an African American woman. Having learned French in American public schools and developing my proficiency in Quebec and France, my visible racial identity has been influential in my acquisition process. Given the Eurocentricity of French and my experiences in learning the language, I have sought to conduct research that would complicate the prominence of colonial languages (e.g., English, French, Spanish) specifically for Black students. I chose isiXhosa because of its current relevance in the Black community from *Black Panther*, and its status as an indigenous African language. However, I am not a native speaker nor do I come from Xhosa or any South African culture. My teaching of the language in this study was done in consultation with Lwando Scott, a Xhosa scholar currently living in South Africa.

While my identity allowed me an experienced understanding of my students based on our shared racial background, they also came from places that I did not and had other identities that I did not share. These included gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and other characteristics. Carefully negotiating these dynamics was at the forefront of my research process, given that they are present in every classroom, and highlighting the diversity of Black people is central to my study.

### ***Terminology***

Given the diversity of the African diaspora, I will use the term *Black* to refer to all diasporic peoples and cultures of indigenous African heritage. *Blackness* is a colloquial term used to describe the concept of Black identity. In addition to respecting the terminology of reference sources, distinctions such as *African American*, *Afro-Caribbean*, and other respective hyphenated terms will be specified to indicate national and/or regional heritages. I use *African* primarily to reference non-Arab indigenous African peoples and cultures, or when the distinction between African cultures is not clear by my intention or in another text. That being said, there is an enormous heterogeneity of cultures covered by the term, African. This study touches on that diversity but cannot address it completely. I give this attention to terminology because of the highly political nature of racial and ethnic categorization, particularly in the case of Black-identified peoples.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***The Black Atlantic***

Defining Blackness as a historical question has been debated since before slavery created an African diaspora across the American continents and Europe. From the various labels (Negro, Colored, Black, etc.) to the ever-evolving intersections of cultures and histories, understanding the boundaries of Blackness is a complicated subject. Gilroy (1993) explored this topic to define what he coined the *black Atlantic*<sup>1</sup> in reference to all the descendants of those stolen from Africa and enslaved throughout North and South America. He included in this definition communities later established within the West, such as Afro-Caribbean populations in the United Kingdom.

In developing his theory of a black Atlantic, Gilroy (1993) rejected ethnic absolutism in its conceptualization of Blackness as a culture with defined lines of authenticity. He instead advocated for a pluralistic view that integrates diverse histories to define Black culture with the understanding that there are overall themes underlying any differences. Gikandi (2014) and Zeleza (2015) both found fault with this pluralism as distancing the diaspora from its African

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the lowercase *b* in black Atlantic comes from Gilroy's (1993) original lack of capitalization.

influences and lacking commentary on the relevance of Africa in the modern era. Zeleza (2015) specifically critiqued the centrality of the African American experience in defining the black Atlantic. This concern speaks to a larger discussion about the diversity of Black communities in the West, a topic that is especially pertinent given the increasing interactions between groups. The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 resulted in increased diversity in immigrant groups establishing themselves in the United States (Kent, 2007). Cultural differences between the descendants of enslaved Africans based on their different geographic histories became more pronounced as Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latinx groups came into more frequent contact with African Americans. Immigration from African countries also increased, meaning that these slave-descendant communities were also interacting with a new African diaspora (Kent, 2007). Given the fact that this new diaspora experienced colonialism separate from slavery in the Americas, Gilroy's (1993) distinction of these two diasporas is highly valuable. However, it is concerning that there has been little attention paid to how black Atlantic communities interact both with each other and with their African heritage, especially when contemporary African communities are increasingly accessible and, in some places, unavoidable.

Another critique made of Gilroy (1993) was his focus on men within discussions of identity. Though he did comment on Black feminism, he only sporadically analyzed the intersectional experiences of Black women and non-binary people (Zeleza, 2015). These concerns about who is truly represented in Gilroy's black Atlantic must be addressed when trying to understand how Black people interact with their identities on a daily basis. Both those within and beyond academia have problematized the prominence of heterosexualized cisgender male figures in Black culture (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989). The lack of visibility of diverse gender identities within Black communities further ignores their realities, in not understanding how racial definitions are only one of many identities that Black people negotiate on a daily basis. Blake (2016) recognized this particular issue in her research of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), noting how descriptions of the language are largely based on data collected from male speakers in urban areas. Given these concerns, it is vital that future research be conscious of how identities are amplified and how they may be flattened.

In light of this specific concern in language research, Gilroy's (1993) dismissal of African influences on modern language is highly questionable. The contributions of researchers like John R. Rickford and Renée Blake on the diversity of Black language provide a foundation for

investigating the relationships between Black cultures and Black identities. Thus, while Gilroy's (1993) outline of the black Atlantic is essential to understanding the histories that Black students bring into the classroom, it is only one part of the puzzle. In order to gain a better understanding of the communities that these students come from, my study sought to understand what gender and culture mean to Black people through the process of language learning.

### ***Raciolinguistics***

Flores and Rosa (2015) first defined *raciolinguistic ideologies* in their commentary on hegemonic linguistic attitudes observed throughout the United States. In this context, they identified conceptual White listening and speaking subjects as the determiners of American raciolinguistic hierarchy. This ideology determines the ideals of language use by racializing speakers. Thus, White speakers demonstrate normalized and idealized English use, while also being able to use other dialects or languages without negative consequences. On the other hand, Latinx Spanish speakers are broadly viewed as deficient unless they acquire English, and then are not valued for their bilingualism as White Spanish speakers are. This holds the same for Black AAVE speakers who are expected to acquire normalized forms of English but can actually never benefit from doing so because of their race.

Rosa and Flores (2017) further developed these types of ideologies in defining five components of the *raciolinguistic perspective*: (a) norms of race and language framed by colonialism, (b) perceived differences in language and race, (c) the discrete categorizations of race and language, (d) the intersectionalities within and between language and race, and (e) resistance to racial and linguistic hierarchies.

***Race and language framed by colonialism.*** According to Rosa and Flores (2017), the concept of White listening and speaking subjects descends from European ideologies that simultaneously categorized race and aligned language with nation-states. This epistemology was spread through colonization and expanded as Europeans came into closer contact with non-European indigenous groups. These groups were then racialized and dehumanized physically, culturally, and linguistically according to the European framework.

***Perceived differences.*** Rosa and Flores (2017) argued that it is the colonial legacy that established the White listening and speaking subjects in the modern era by replacing Europeanness as the norm with Whiteness. These listening and speaking subjects are not only

individual people, but are also expressed by institutions through policy-making. Thus, both people and governments reinforce raciolinguistic ideologies that interpret all types of communication (both verbal and non-verbal) as aligned with Whiteness or not. Rosa (2016) observed that the policies in a predominantly Latinx public high school segregated English Language Learners (ELLs) from their classmates and connotated bilingualism with deficiency. This was in contrast to selective-enrollment language academies that benefited from the higher economic status of their students' families and promoted linguistic diversity. Whereas Latinx students who were developing their bilingualism were stigmatized in their public school, the students at the elite academies not only were celebrated for their linguistic development, but also had more resources to support it.

***Discrete categorization.*** Raciolinguistic ideologies, according to Rosa and Flores (2017) synthesize language and race in part through *raciolinguistic enregisterment*. In this process, race and language are defined conjunctively and into discrete sets. As a result, descriptors of both align with these categorizations, such as with AAVE. Without the category of African American, there could be no racialization of English, and without the distinction of English and its dialects, there could be no separation of language or dialect types. But raciolinguistic enregisterment is not neutral—this differentiation carries with it the hegemonies that center Whiteness racially and legitimize languages according to their alignment (or lack thereof) with a nation-state. Roth-Gordon (2016) observed young Black men in Brazilian favelas who adopted White Brazilian speech patterns when interacting with police. She identified this change in speech as *racial malleability* in that the Black men distanced themselves from Blackness and “borrowed Whiteness” to gain prestige through adopting a standardized way of speaking. The Black men and police had absorbed the categories of race and standardized language use, thus allowing the interaction to happen as both these groups understood the consequences of leaning into Blackness through speech versus leaning into Whiteness.

***Intersectionality.*** In addressing the intersectionality of identity, Rosa and Flores (2017) noted that while their racial context is largely American, they argued that its historical context as a method of categorization makes it relevant for international examination. They qualified this by also noting that the raciolinguistic perspective does not ignore how other identities, such as nationality and gender, factor into ideologies. These identities have been simplified by the same colonial framework that have created and intersected racial and linguistic categories. In South

Africa, Williams (2016) observed the significance of geography within Blackness and Hip Hop. Artists who employed the African American art form made sure to maintain local language use down to linguistic features specific to their respective neighborhoods. If they did not do so, audiences read them as inauthentic. Within the United States, Podesva (2016) noted not only the differences in speech between White and African American speakers in Washington, DC but also how African American women tended to have higher rates of t/d deletion at the end of words and employed falsetto more when discussing gentrification in their neighborhoods. These examples demonstrate how racialized speakers are defined, and define themselves according to the identities they hold outside of race, while also integrating those identities into their racialized speech.

***Resistance to hierarchies.*** Given the discriminatory ramifications of raciolinguistic ideologies, Rosa and Flores (2017) argued that it is precisely the oppressive systems that must be resisted. As opposed to focusing on adapting racialized peoples to the ideologies that dehumanize them, Whiteness and White supremacy should be questioned and deconstructed. This echoes an argument from critical race theory that people of color should transform oppressive systems rather than conform to them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It also aligns with calls within language education to give students the tools to resist their marginalization. Alim (2005) specifically referenced critical language awareness as a tool that Black students can use to combat the sociolinguistic hegemony of American educational institutions. According to him, making students aware of the differences between AAVE and other forms of English or teaching them about the grammar of Black language is not enough. Educators must explicitly confront racism in the linguistics of their classrooms and push against ideologies that frame language used by marginalized students as deficient.

Students who have the legacy outlined by the black Atlantic have a common struggle “towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 16). The raciolinguistic perspective provides an understanding for how language is an element of this struggle. This framework thus can help work towards liberation by critically reflecting on historically constructed hierarchies and allow Black peoples to confront those prejudices directly.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Learners with Heritage Motivation*

Defining heritage language education has many complications given the diverse histories and identities of students, especially given its context in the United States. This includes how language learners define themselves (Lee, 2005), the connotation of “heritage” as a distant phenomenon (Baker & Jones, 1998), and determining who is an “outsider” versus “insider” learner for any given language (Wiley, 2001). Noted in these discussions is the particular situation of African Americans learning African languages. Though this demographic may not fit into definitions of heritage language learners, there is evidence that confirms the relevance of examining their classification.

Moore and English (1998) focused on African American students and their language learning experiences with respect to heritage through an Arabic course designed for African American male middle school students. The researchers chose Arabic specifically because of its use in Africa and the presence of a Black Muslim organization in the area of the school. They found that students responded positively to content focusing on culture and the integration of AAVE, which was their first language. However, Moore and English (1998) also noted that students questioned the relevance of using Arabic outside of the class. In response, the teacher discussed with the students possible advantages of Arabic use in their futures and engaged them in activities that drew on their daily lives, such as ordering food from McDonald’s.

In order to better understand the curricular needs of heritage language learners versus non-heritage learners, Lee (2005) surveyed American university students in 11 different less commonly taught language (LCTL) programs given the tendency of heritage learners to enroll in these types of classes. The courses included Swahili and Yoruba, both African languages. Lee found that these African language courses consisted overwhelmingly of African American students who self-reported enrolling in order to better connect with their African heritage but did not necessarily see themselves as heritage language learners. Wiley (2001) posed this question of how to categorize African Americans learning languages in order to connect with their heritage, though the relationship to the target language’s culture may be more distant than for students who grew up with a heritage language spoken around them. Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) coined

the term *learners with heritage motivation* and specifically cited African Americans in doing so. These are learners who “seek to reconnect with their family’s heritage through language, even though the linguistic evidence of that connection may have been lost for generations” (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, p. 222). Popular definitions of heritage language students tend to refer to those whose families exposed them to a minority language at home (Chipila, 2016; Wiley, 2001). The concept of learners with heritage motivation then encompasses the cultural connection central to understanding what heritage is, while also recognizing that the relationship to the culture may not be immediate.

Given this foundational difference in the relationship to the target culture, it is important to understand the goals of learners with heritage motivation versus those of traditional heritage learners. Lee (2005) observed that while students enrolled in courses like Chinese and Hindi expressed wanting the ability to use the target language in everyday life, those in Swahili and Yoruba did not anticipate pursuing the language past two semesters. These students viewed the experience more as a way to connect with their African heritage and develop their ethnic identity. While the goals between traditional heritage language learners largely differed based on how the students envisioned using the language, Lee (2005) also suggested that the perceived lack of opportunities to speak Swahili or Yoruba made usage outside the classroom impractical to the African American learners. Moore and English (1998) suggested that this issue may be addressed by making course content immediately and individually relevant to Black students. Given the limited amount of research done with respect to Black students in language education, however, these two studies demonstrate a need to explore the motivations of these learners in order to better engage them in the classroom.

Various studies have suggested that throughout the 20th century, African American students became more engaged in foreign language learning as it became more relevant to them culturally (Davis, 1992). Thus, if Black students coming into an isiXhosa classroom prioritize the development of their ethnic and racial identity, a curriculum that ignores these goals may not be useful at best and may alienate them at worst. Further, if students want to explore their relationship to Africa as a whole or a particular African culture, it is just as vital to understand that relationship before the course even begins. Finally, educators must be aware of how different Black cultures may influence Black students, in terms of what content may or may not

be appropriate, and how these students may interact with each other. Gilroy (1993) hinted that the ways in which those within the black Atlantic see Africa are complex:

the conspicuous differences of language, culture, and identity which divide the blacks of the diaspora from one another, let alone from Africans, are unresolved within the political culture that promises to bring the disparate peoples of the black Atlantic world together one day. (p. 34)

Given the distance in time and space between black Atlantic and African cultures, raciolinguistics offers a framework to evaluate and respond to perceived similarities and differences as expressed by Black students. How has colonialism defined that relationship? What are the boundaries and categories set within the African American community that descend from that legacy? What are the most relevant intersectionalities? What should educators critique in their classrooms, and how?

### ***Critical Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Based on previous findings concerning African American students in African language courses, a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum provides an approach to teaching that may best predict future students' interests in the same environment. Ladson-Billings (1995) originally gave three criteria in her development of culturally relevant pedagogy: "an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical and critical consciousness" (p. 483). *Culturally sustaining* and *culturally revitalizing* pedagogies are extensions of this teaching theory—developed to respond to different populations, environments, and goals (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This paper will focus on culturally relevant and responsive teaching given the work done specifically with Black students.

***Cultural relevance for Black students.*** One of the most famous cases of a culturally responsive curriculum was that proposed in the Oakland Unified School District's 1996 Ebonics resolution. Based on the work of linguists and educators in the last half of the 20th century, the school board approved the development of an academic program to support speakers of what is now commonly referred to as AAVE. Programs from the 1970s through the 1990s had demonstrated the successful use of Ebonics in helping develop reading skills and increase test scores, as well as the higher proficiency of Ebonics speakers in Ebonics-translated texts (Gay,

2000). Despite the national backlash at the time of the resolution, school districts like those in Los Angeles have adopted plans as recently as 2018 to help students who speak “African-American Language, Mexican-American Language, Hawai‘ian-American Language, and Native-American Language” acquire academic English by using culturally responsive education (Los Angeles Unified School District/Multilingual and Multicultural Education Department, 2018, p. ix). This suggests the continued relevance of Black students’ language within American public education and acknowledgement that culture is tied to linguistic development.

Adkins (2012) noted the use of African American call-response patterns in two high school English classrooms taught by Black instructors who had been recognized for their success with Black students and used features of culturally responsive English instruction. Both Bonn (2003) and Hill (2009) observed African American communication patterns and AAVE use by first and seventh grade teachers, respectively, and concluded that the techniques promoted environments that rejected discriminatory linguistic practices and empowered students. Gay (2000) also found commonalities across African American-centric educational programs in the United States, which sought to promote achievement in basic literacy, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills and provided socialization through content focused on African and African American history and culture. Students in these programs tended to score higher on state-mandated tests as well as measures of self-esteem compared to their African American peers in other schools. Designing courses to help Black students explore their ethnic identity and history is thus not only a method to help engage students, but also promote their achievement.

However, educators must also understand that Black students are a diverse group, and the content must respond to their experiences. Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) investigated the preferences of African American students toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons. Sampson led six lessons targeted at these students as an intervention in a high school American history class that was predominantly African American and Latinx. While overall the African American students had positive reactions to the lessons, there were also some that voiced discomfort with the focus on their culture in a diverse classroom. While culturally relevant pedagogy by nature is defined by its adaptation to the environment, there has been little investigation into the complications of choosing appropriate materials for Black students with respect to their different identities and cultural backgrounds. In a language classroom, the

process of selection and delivery of the content must be ever more careful given the cultural differences between the students and the target culture.

*Critical language pedagogy.* In outlining “sociopolitical and critical consciousness” as essential to culturally relevant teaching, Ladson-Billings (1995) overlapped culturally relevant curriculums with those designed according to critical pedagogy tenets. Freire (1970) situated critical pedagogy as that of “the oppressed.” Critical courses are meant to work towards liberation for both the oppressors and the oppressed, who both suffer in the dehumanization of the latter. This kind of education seeks to transform the reality of the oppressed into one of “permanent liberation,” wherein the marginal critical pedagogy becomes normalized (Freire, 1970, p. 54). The conditions for this pedagogy also should be situated in the experience of the oppressed, who not only are the most equipped to design the content and practices needed for their liberation, but also will benefit through that process of design. Though culturally relevant pedagogy does not intrinsically promote the same kind of social change as its critical counterpart, it does seek to change conditions in that students (especially those who are marginalized) learn to be more attentive to their cultural, political, and social positions. Ladson-Billings (2014) faulted the lack of critical analysis in many curriculums that called themselves culturally relevant and called for those in mainstream education to interrogate their privilege.

Evidence persists that language learning materials both within and outside of the United States have lacked proper critical thought in their treatment of culture. Herman’s (2007) survey of American textbooks used to teach high school Spanish critiqued their cultural relevance and hegemonic features. Older textbooks focused on Spain and tourism in their linguistic content. Newer textbooks were slightly more appropriate to the American schools, with attention given to Latin American countries; however, representation of Spanish speakers remained predominantly middle class and European with little exposure to the actual dynamics of Latin American countries. In Japan, Tai (2007) analyzed the need for alternatives to dominant pedagogies through the history of ethnic education for Koreans to develop and maintain their Korean ethnic identities. The germination of different educational movements, from an “ethnic-culture” approach developed by Japanese teachers and Korean activists in Osaka City to an anti-discrimination approach that emerged in Takatsuki City and Yao City, demonstrated that even when the student population is ethnically homogenous, attention must be paid to the local environment. These critiques of mainstream curriculum when trying to understand culturally

relevant teaching for Black L2 learners suggest that the lack of attention given to the subject is not for lack of significance. Instead, there is a need to investigate what Black students need when learning a language, what they want, and how that might vary across populations.

White, Cooper, and Mackey (2015) proposed an approach of combining culturally responsive and critical pedagogy in their analysis of an English-medium elementary school in Central America which brought in teachers from Canada who taught in English despite it being a minority language in the area. They believed that such a curriculum would improve student engagement through cultural inclusion and addressing the political realities of a community school influenced by global economies. They concluded that the benefits of a combined culturally relevant and critical approach would allow students to contribute to their learning, provide an anti-discriminatory environment, and empower children in a disadvantaged community to shift perspectives to their own rather than against or ignorant of them. White, Cooper, and Mackey (2015) included in this the learning of Kriol and Spanish before learning English in order to be culturally relevant to the local culture. They suggested that this in part be done through texts that would allow students to critically examine their own curriculum, and give them the language to “to reflect upon and shape their experiences and to transform such experiences in the interests of a larger social responsibility” (White, Cooper, & Mackey, 2015, p. 133). This would still be done with the goal of learning English, but with students understanding the political and economic impetus behind the curriculum and the tools to critique it.

These three studies demonstrate that it is not enough to be either critical or culturally relevant. To address critical issues, students may best respond if the content is culturally relevant. In order to be culturally relevant, educators should be aware of critical issues within the culture. Thus, if Black students are to learn languages in a critical way, then attention must be paid to the cultural diversity of what it means to be Black.

While there are many identities that educators should pay attention to, my study focused on gender in relation to Blackness. As illustrated by the black Atlantic, Black identity is rich with complexities. This includes how Black people experience the world not as separate from their gender identification, but simultaneously. In critical language pedagogy, gender and sexuality is a relatively recent topic of exploration. Nelson (1999) provided a template of how to discuss lesbian and gay identities through her observations of an American English as a Second Language (ESL) course. She suggested that in a language classroom, lessons about sexuality

should be culturally contextualized, position sexuality as relational rather than individual, and be relevant to all sexualities. O'Mochain (2006) expanded beyond sexuality to include gender in discussing queerness in his university ESL course in Japan. Using two real-life narratives about growing up queer in Japan, O'Mochain (2006) prompted conversations in which students critiqued gender norms and definitions, and reflected on how they had seen sexuality and gender converged in their experiences. In doing so, O'Mochain (2006) intentionally developed materials responsive to the local culture which his students came from. Both of these studies demonstrate how educators can incorporate queer topics into language classrooms by intersecting race, ethnicity, and nationality as context to engage students. While Nelson's (1999) reflection on how to discuss gay and lesbian identities in ESL materials is valuable to queer critical pedagogy, O'Mochain's (2006) study provides a more inclusive model given how mainstream recognition of these identities and intersectionality has developed in recent years.

These examples of critical pedagogical approaches have demonstrated the value of culture in working against systems of oppression through education. However, as shown in the reaction to the Ebonics resolution and the policies of Rosa's (2016) public high school case, mainstream evaluations of culturally relevant curriculums may not seek to address the goals Ladson-Billings (1995) established. The democratization of a course by engaging students in its design is one of the main components in critical pedagogy (Crookes, 2013). In calling for teachings to emerge from the oppressed community, critical pedagogy provides a framework through negotiated syllabi and assessments, which can be made to be culturally responsive. This process helps create an environment that decenters the teacher from an authoritarian position. In doing so, it also demands that the content be designed *with* the students, not *for* them (McLaren & da Silva, 1993; Monchinski, 2008). Given the lack of awareness about the goals of Black learners in language courses and the suggestions provided by Davis (1992) and Lee (2005), a negotiated syllabus as outlined by critical pedagogy is vital to creating a language course that is truly culturally relevant and responsive for such students.

## THE STUDY

The purpose of this case study was to understand the experiences of Black students as learners with heritage motivation. Gilroy (1993) explored how the connections between black

Atlantic peoples and their African heritage are complicated by history, an experience depicted through Killmonger's character in *Black Panther*. As suggested by Lee (2005), one way that Black students may seek to interact with this heritage is through language-learning. However, the negotiations of identity for Black students, specifically as learners with heritage motivation, has been little explored. Thus, there is a need to investigate what African heritage means to Black learners, how that relationship functions in an African-language classroom, and from that, how heritage influences the goals and expectations of these learners. For this, I created and taught a curriculum to teach isiXhosa (see Appendix A) given its relevance in pop culture and the context presented by *Black Panther*. Also spoken in Zimbabwe, isiXhosa is one of 11 official South African languages and the second-most widely spoken in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2012). I focused on the South African context also because of *Black Panther*, as well as the prominence of South African Xhosa figures like Nelson and Winnie Mandela and *The Daily Show* host, Trevor Noah. Using critical language pedagogy, I sought to both understand the students' goals as learners with heritage motivation and interrogate their ideas of identity and heritage as Black people. Partly based on their responses, I integrated culturally relevant pedagogy to relate the course content to their racial and gender identities in order to address their diversity as individuals. My research questions were:

1. What are the relationships between Black students and their African heritage?
2. How do Black identities interact with language learning in an African-language classroom?
3. What are the goals of Black L2 learners with heritage motivation?

## METHODS

### *Students*

I recruited four undergraduate Black students attending the University of Hawai'i in the spring of 2019. The students included three women (Angela, Crissle, Gina)<sup>2</sup> and one man (Jason), all 20-30 years old. Angela and Crissle self-identified exclusively as African American, though Angela revealed in an interview that she had an African parent and a White parent. Jason

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<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

self-identified as Pacific Islander, White, and Black, while Gina was Black and Latinx. None of the students reported previous learning experience with or exposure to any indigenous African language, though they had learned European, Asian, and signed languages. Crissle and Jason attended all three lessons, while Angela and Gina missed one class each.

### ***Design***

The isiXhosa course took place over six hours, comprised of three two-hour lessons. The lessons were based on a “Wakanda curriculum” based on *Black Panther* (Raser, 2018), an American public school foreign language curriculum (Yang & Bangia, 2015), various South African isiXhosa curriculum (Kirsch, Skorge, & Matsiliza, 1996; Xhosa Fundis Language School CC, 2014), and consultations with Lwando Scott. Each lesson focused on a set of linguistic targets (such as click pronunciations) within a critical cultural framework. For example, I framed the second lesson with the question, “What is ‘proper’ speech?” and the class discussed a recent news story concerning AAVE and discrimination. I designed this case study based on Sampson and Garrison-Wade’s (2010) investigation of the preferences of African American students toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons. Their study used student feedback forms, transition-termination group discussions, feedback questionnaires, and a focus group of African American students to gather data on the students’ preferences between such lessons.

For my study, students completed a feedback form at the end of every lesson asking about the relevance of the content to their Black and gender identity. Instead of group discussions or a focus group, I conducted two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews in order to understand the students’ perspectives on Black and African cultures (see Appendix D). Prior to the course beginning, I asked how the students defined their racial/ethnic identity, how they defined Black culture, and their views on gender and language within African and black Atlantic cultures. These identity and culture questions mostly remained the same for the post-intervention interviews in order to measure any effects the course may have had. I also audio-recorded a negotiated syllabus discussion during the course to prompt students about their goals and expectations for the class, and collected a final questionnaire for them to reflect on the entire course.

### ***Data Analysis***

I transcribed both the interviews and the negotiated syllabus discussion, then coded them using the qualitative analysis software, NVivo. The feedback forms distributed after each lesson allowed students to provide anonymous responses on their reactions to each lesson (see Appendix B). These forms asked students to identify their gender and answer four open-ended questions and three four-point Likert scale questions about their thoughts on the individual lesson.

I completed axial coding of the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018) based on the five components of a raciolinguistic perspective to understand the students' relationships to their African heritage through their perspectives of race, language, and gender in the black Atlantic context versus the African context (Rosa & Flores, 2017). These categories were chosen based on the open coding of a pilot interview done before this study. The coding themes were (a) colonial formations, (b) the White listening subject, (c) raciolinguistic categories, (d) intersectionality, and (e) resistance.

I triangulated the themes from responses to the open-ended questions from the feedback forms and final questionnaire with the negotiated syllabus discussion to investigate Lee's (2005) conclusion that Black students in African language courses prioritize cultural learning.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Negotiated Syllabus Discussion***

In the negotiation of the syllabus during the first lesson, I asked three of the four students about the what they wanted from the class. The two major themes that emerged from that discussion were a set of linguistic and content targets for the class. The linguistic targets included the desire to learn sentence structures and pronunciation, as well as idioms and the ability to read and recognize the language. Content targets set goals of learning about social movements in South Africa and using podcasts and videos in part because of outside demands on the students' time. Angela also specifically mentioned wanting to "connect" in a "back to Africa" sense.

To respond to these goals, I integrated pop culture, Black culture and news, and Xhosa culture and news into each lesson. For example, when learning isiXhosa clicks, I compared teeth-sucking to isiXhosa clicks, given the relationship between the Black language practice and

the Bantu grammatical form discussed by Rickford (1999). The students practiced the pronunciations of these clicks each lesson and had a basic command of them by the end of the class. In learning isiXhosa noun classes, the students analyzed the poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho (the first South African woman to publish poetry in isiXhosa) and an article about how the Xhosa language largely excludes modern LGBT+ identities. While the students did not completely acquire these noun classes and other more complex grammatical forms (i.e., subject pronouns, negation), a final quiz demonstrated that they could collectively understand the basic language introduced throughout the course with little aid. This final quiz included the numbers 11-29, responding to basic questions, and the translation of simple present tense sentences such as, “Umntu ngumntu ngabantu” [A person is a person through other people].

### ***Feedback Forms and Questionnaire***

All four students chose the highest Likert-scale ranking for every lesson (4) when asked how they enjoyed the content. However, the highest frequency for how each lesson related to their Black and gender identities was a slightly lower score (3), as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Average Ratings By Lesson (1=Strongly Disagree, 4=Strongly Agree)*

	<b>This lesson helped me reflect on my experiences as a Black person.</b>	<b>This lesson helped me reflect on my experiences as a man/non-binary person/woman.</b>	<b>How well did you like this lesson?</b>
Lesson 1*	3.33	3.33	4
Lesson 2	3.67	3.33	4
Lesson 3*	3	3	4

*Note:* Only 3 of the 4 students were present for Lessons 1 and 3.

Student responses to the open-ended questions tended to fall into the same categories as those from the negotiated syllabus discussion. The positive ratings to the lessons correlated with comments about sentence structure and having grammar broken down to be easily understood when in the practice of linguistic targets. In terms of content, students mentioned that they

enjoyed the use of media like podcasts and articles, as well as learning more about South Africa and sexuality in the country.

Students also completed a course feedback questionnaire at the end of the class to rank the lessons that they most enjoyed and explained why (see Appendix C). Though the rankings varied from student to student, all four based their top choices on what they learned about isiXhosa grammar, as shown in Table 2. Angela and Crissle both mentioned content about gender and sexuality as justifications for their second choices. While Jason marked the third lesson as his least favorite because, it reflected on the previous two lessons. Gina said it was her most favorite for the same reason.

Table 2

*Student Rankings of Lessons (1=most favorite lesson, 3=third most favorite lesson)*

	<b>Crissle</b>	<b>Jason</b>	<b>Angela</b>	<b>Gina</b>
Lesson 1	3	1	2	--
Lesson 2	1	2	1	2
Lesson 3	2	3	--	1

*Note:* Angela was absent for Lesson 3. Gina was absent for Lesson 1.

In both the lesson feedback forms and the course questionnaire, the four students drew on both linguistic and cultural content to evaluate how they felt about the curriculum. While they consistently rated each lesson as they experienced the course, in reflection they diverged based on how they individually interpreted the content.

### ***Interviews***

***Colonial formations.*** *Colonial formations* indicate references to the influence of colonial and slave histories. The students all discussed these influences in one way or another, from the effects of colonialism on language and gender in Africa to how slavery systems played a major role in Black culture today. Of the four, Crissle most consistently brought this subject up. While this trend continued through both of her interviews, her approach to it changed after the class was over. Compared to the first interview, Crissle was more critical of not only the effects of colonialism on topics like national borders in Africa, but also she recognized how that imposition

of European categorization was a tool of colonialism, saying, “Like when you see anything that has like influence through colonialism or imperialism—like the way that they were able to, I guess, be successful in the takeover was to like categorize everything.” The other three students were more neutral in their references to colonial or slavery influences, touching on them mostly in the context of pre- versus post-colonial Africa languages and gender roles. Slavery was a much less common reference.

***White listening subject.*** I marked mentions of interpretations of race, gender, and language by mainstream culture under *White listening subject*, especially when those interpretations were contrasted with realities in Black or African communities. This topic usually came up for the students when they used examples from pop culture and the media to explain their ideas. These interpretations were mostly used to either talk about African cultures, or to show contrasts between negative perceptions of Black culture and their personal experiences. Gina in particular focused on this subject in her first interview, as she reflected on a paper she had written for one of her classes:

Well I actually just did, in my English class, a paper on how the media portrays, like the different genders—I mean not genders—well yeah, genders and races. And how it’s detrimental how they do portray them because then kids, as they’re growing up; they’re gonna disassociate themselves from being that race because if you keep telling them, “Oh being Black is bad, being Black is—you’re mean, you’re gonna go to jail, you’re gonna be a drug dealer.” And they’re like, “Well I’m none of those, so I must be White.”

In this example, Gina connected her analysis of how the media negatively portrays Black people to how Black children might then dissociate themselves from Blackness. In doing so, they drift towards Whiteness, which has been constructed by the White listening subject as optimal and thus affects how people like Gina view themselves as Black people. While Gina and the other students all discussed these negative stereotypes and the relationship between Black American culture and mainstream American culture before the class, besides one mention by Jason, they did not bring this topic up at all in their interviews after the class.

The White listening subject was also a theme in the first interviews in how the students tended to define Africa by countries that have historically received more mainstream attention, like Egypt. References to other African countries only received attention when personally related to a student’s identity, such as in the case of Angela and her African father. This trend was not as

present in the second round of interviews, and Crissle specifically took it upon herself to name Ghana as an example to explain a point where she had been referencing South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria previously.

**Raciolinguistic categories.** This theme covers descriptions of language when defined by race, such as mentions of AAVE. Overall, the students did not talk much about the relationship between language and race in this way in either of their interviews. However, the way they talked about this topic did change for every student between interviews. For Jason in particular, his description of languages within the black Atlantic went from one that focused on how it is used outside of the community and influences mainstream American pop culture to one that focused on a characteristic of AAVE and other Black languages. He specifically referenced a class discussion of a news story about French schools banning teeth-sucking and the ensuing controversy in his post-intervention interview:

**Taylor:** I did wanna also go back—you were talking about the teeth-sucking. What—I guess I wanted to know more kinda your thoughts on that.

**Jason:** I guess, I mean cause I feel like we always have like teeth-sucking in our culture in the U.S. where it's like [makes teeth-sucking sound]. Yeah, so that's kinda just like what I was thinking about.

**Taylor:** I guess, so what kinda thoughts did you have around that? In terms of, cause you talked about the ban, and how it's something very common here. So...

**Jason:** Just my thoughts in general about teeth-sucking?

**Taylor:** And I guess the ban as well since you brought that up.

**Jason:** It's kinda crazy. Considering that's such an important part of the language. That to just ban it is just wild to me. And you don't really, like I never really thought of it being similar to African clicks. I just kinda thought it was just something we did. But I never really thought of it as being a part of language.

This heightened awareness of language use in the black Atlantic came up in all of the post-course interviews. Students demonstrated this through describing American Black language as AAVE (as opposed to “slang”), examining the terminology surrounding the LGBT+ community, and discussing AAVE translations.

**Intersectionality.** I coded for *intersectionality* when students talked about how non-racial identities like gender and nationality were influenced by Black or African cultures. In the first set

of interviews, all the female students focused on women when asked about gender in black Atlantic and African cultures. Jason initially talked about men, but then referenced women in his descriptions of gender in African cultures. In the second set of interviews, discussions of gender more evenly balanced men and women, as well as masculinity and femininity in general. These mentions also intersected with sexuality and geography. Angela noted an article called “South Africa Needs to Find a New Way to Talk about Being Gay” that the students read about Xhosa culture and language regarding the LGBT community (Scott, 2015). This prompted her comparisons between masculinity and sexuality in black Atlantic and African cultures:

We talked about the isiXhosa language and how they talked about, how they um, defined, or what term they came up for a gay man. And how it was just like, or like a man who has sex with other men, and it was all like condensed into one word, which I thought was interesting. And how that kinda shaped our—like what we think is right or wrong and our connotations surrounding sexuality in Africa, which I thought was very interesting, and how they’re not very much open to that. Whereas in America, I don’t think that we are as open to [it] as a Black community, like as a whole.

In this quote, Angela reflected both on the relationship between Blackness and sexuality, and how that differed between the American and Xhosa cultures. While she had focused on women and her personal experiences before the course, afterwards, she based her intersectional discussion of gender and sexuality within Black and African communities on a wider context.

Already aware of the relationships between race and other identities before the course, the students expanded their descriptions of these intersections beyond their own gender and personal experiences after the course. When doing so, they all drew on content from the course as shown in Angela’s quote.

**Resistance.** When the students mentioned defiance to mainstream expectations and boundaries by people (including themselves) or groups, I coded for *resistance*. Before the course, students mostly referenced themselves or people they knew as resisting constraints like gender roles or negative stereotypes. There was also some mention about their desire to resist these imposed boundaries through education. After the course, all of the students talked about how they had enjoyed the content and voiced a desire to have the course continue. This was done in the same tone that they had discussed their previous attempts at educational resistance. This was coupled with a higher awareness of Blackness and African cultures, wherein the students

explicitly talked about isiXhosa, other African languages, and their own identities as Black people. Angela articulated how this self-reflection connected her to Blackness as an international concept, where she had not previously thought to do so:

[The class] got us thinking more about, I think, personal, like personally how you, not identify as Black, but like—I don't know, I think I had to talk, and think about more in a like—what it is to be Black in the world. Instead of just like, you. Like everywhere. Like globally, I think.

In resistance to the constraints that colonial legacies and White mainstream culture had put on their experiences of Black and African cultures, all the students had previously sought out ways to learn more about their racial identity and history before the class. They experienced the isiXhosa course as another way of doing so and enjoyed it because of the language they were learning and how they were learning it. In addition, their descriptions of language tended to depend less on categorizations like French versus English, and more on differences in vocabulary and ability to communicate. While this kind of resistance was not an explicit focus in the class, it was one that frequently came up in the post-intervention interviews.

## DISCUSSION

### *Black Students and Their African Heritage*

In their interviews before the isiXhosa course, the students tended to be less comfortable describing black Atlantic and African cultures as they felt they lacked the knowledge and vocabulary to do so accurately. After studying isiXhosa, these students often referenced content from the course to describe their own Blackness and heritage. These references reflected the course's deliberate exclusion of European and White frameworks both through the choice of isiXhosa as a target language and the critical culturally relevant design. While the students had initially relied on countering negative stereotypes and mentions of previous attempts (often complicated by colonial and White influences) at learning about Africa in their interviews, they ended up resisting these imposed knowledges by using information from the course based on Black perspectives.

As Gilroy (1993) pointed out, the relationship between the black Atlantic community and Africa is unresolved, in part because of differences in identity. For the black Atlantic, this

identity has constantly been in resistance to the European ideologies that framed the colonization of Africa and the Transatlantic slave trade. While the hesitation of students to talk about Africa may be interpreted many ways, the consistent observation was that they simply did not have the knowledge they wanted to speak in-depth about their own heritage. Given the delegitimization of non-European peoples by colonial powers and the contemporary dominance of the White subject (Rosa & Flores, 2017), the fact that these students struggled to find information about Africa specifically in relation to themselves is not surprising. However, they demonstrated resistance by undertaking that work of learning where they could.

As noted from Angela's contribution to the negotiated syllabus discussion, the desire to go "back to Africa" has a historical legacy within black Atlantic communities (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998). Despite that history, the students from this study suggest that there still remains a knowledge gap in that connection. In reaction, Black people are not passive, but may resist erasure by seeking out educational resources responsive to their heritage. As demonstrated by the students' shift of framework from before and after the course, supporting that resistance should be a critical aspect of what perspectives outline the information being delivered in a classroom. Black students do not necessarily need to be taught more about Europeans in Africa, or the harmful histories between White and Black cultures. They may benefit more from lessons about how African cultures and diasporas have defined themselves historically and internationally.

### ***Black Identities in an African-Language Classroom***

The power of the colonial legacy on the students' knowledge also translated into how they thought about themselves and their own culture coming into the isiXhosa classroom. Before the course, the students often used contrasts between negative depictions or stereotypes and their personal experiences as Black people to frame their descriptions of Black culture. This included how they thought about Black languages (e.g., describing it as slang). When pushed to think critically about these topics in an environment of others with similar racial backgrounds, they overwhelmingly enjoyed the experience. This reflects findings from previous studies on culturally relevant pedagogy, with Black students responding positively to content designed based on their identities (e.g., Bonn, 2003; Hill, 2009).

Paying attention to Black culture in a classroom, however, is not just designing content about race. As outlined by Ladson-Billings (2014), culturally relevant curriculum should be as critical

as it is cultural. In this isiXhosa course, it was not simply learning about an African culture that the students found the most intriguing. They more explicitly responded to the integration of topics of gender and sexuality as discussed in the context of Xhosa culture, in addition to being prompted to reflect on how that knowledge related to themselves.

Just as important as the critical component of the lessons was making the content relevant to learning the language of isiXhosa itself. This study thus suggests that it is beneficial to have Black students interrogate their identities in an L2 classroom through both critically examining the target culture and their own, even at the beginner level. At the same time, linguistic acquisition should not be ignored or diminished in doing so. Through this process, Black students may be able to both distance themselves from the colonial influences that obscure them and propagate negative perceptions, and create their own understandings of their Blackness and how it relates to their African heritage.

### ***Goals of Black Learners with Heritage Motivation***

In her analysis of heritage language learners, Lee (2005) found that most Black students in observed Swahili and Yoruba classes did not envision using those languages outside of the classroom. This study counters that with the consistent expressed desire of the Black students to learn how to use isiXhosa in authentic settings. The students in my isiXhosa classroom stated specific goals of wanting to learn grammar and comprehension, as much as about South Africa and Xhosa culture. In their evaluations of each class and in their overall reflections, they specifically referenced the comprehension of these linguistic targets as parts of the course that they enjoyed the most. Thus, while Black learners with heritage motivation may come into the classroom with a complex relationship to their heritage and diverse identities that they want to explore, that should not override attention paid to their linguistic acquisition.

## **LIMITATIONS**

While this study provides insight into the experiences of Black learners with heritage motivation, there are several factors that limit the ability to generalize from my findings. Only four students participated in the class, and of those four students, only one was male. Thus, my study may not reflect how Black students of various genders could differently experience the

class. The limited duration of the class also restricts how my conclusions may be taken up, though it is significant that the students all responded positively to the lessons they individually attended. A future study with a more diverse and larger Black population, and a longer course could provide more insight on the topic of Black learners with heritage motivation. Finally, I taught the course as a non-native speaker of isiXhosa. Future research could examine the effect of non-native versus native teachers leading Black L2 learners in a similar setting, especially given my findings on the relationship between Black students and their African heritage.

### IMPLICATIONS

The classification of isiXhosa and other indigenous African languages as LCTLs fails to communicate their value, particularly for Black communities. As seen by the responses of my students, there is more than a desire for the infusion of culture and heritage into language learning for Black students. There is also a need for these students to critically reflect on their identities and relationships to their heritage in order to move away from colonial and White constructions of Blackness *and* Africa. In an African language classroom with Black students, this suggests that educators mindfully teach the target culture. This means moving away from content based off of European and White perspectives of African cultures, and working to include those that come from the specific culture being taught through the language. In doing so, we should also understand that neither the Black students nor the African culture and language they are learning are homogenous. Exploring Black identity in an African-language classroom is not a singularly racial or ethnic endeavor. Educators must include as many dimensions of humanity as possible in order to not flatten the target language and culture or their students, which may be done with critical content about subjects like gender and sexuality. This design, however, cannot distract from the linguistic acquisition of the students. Culturally relevant pedagogy should promote academic development, and in the case of an L2 classroom—linguistic development. Black students with heritage motivation enroll in language courses to learn a language. That process should not exclude the reality and relevance of their identities, or that of the African language they are learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

As Black peoples come more into contact with each other and Black diversity gains more popular recognition, the topic of language demands increasing attention. This discussion, though, cannot be taken up lightly. For Black peoples in the Americas and in Africa, there is a colonial legacy that continues to wreak havoc on culture and identity. The students in my study revealed that damage as they dealt with the implicit erasure of heritage and contemporary Black realities by mainstream culture. In working to resist past oppressions, Black students should be given the tools to reflect and learn about themselves as African-descended people. Just as important is allowing Black students to look forward and interrogate the complexities of their present and future. Through the linguistic and cultural exchange of African-language classrooms, these students may learn more about themselves and create new visions of “what it is to be Black in the world.”

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**APPENDIX A**  
**ISIXHOSA SCOPE AND SEQUENCE**

Linguistic Goals	Critical Questions
<b>Day 1: Introduction</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students will be able to recite the alphabet from A-Z.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to recite the three types of clicks.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to distinguish click variations.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to recite numbers 1-29.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to recite basic greeting expressions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are the demographics of South Africa and what historical/political events have influenced those demographics?</li> <li>● What are the dominant languages of South Africa and what historical/political events have influenced dominance of those languages?</li> <li>● What are the relationships between Black languages and African Bantu languages?</li> <li>● What role does gender play in initial impressions?</li> </ul>
<b>Day 2: Grammar</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students will be able to identify isiXhosa noun classes.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to recite and understand present tense sentence construction.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to construct sentences using first/second/third person pronouns.</li> <li>➤ Students will be able to understand and recite negation in sentence construction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are American perceptions of “correct” speech?</li> <li>● What is the connection between “correct” speech and race?</li> <li>● What are Western/American constructions of gender?</li> <li>● What are Xhosa constructions of gender?</li> </ul>

<b>Unit 3: Liberation &amp; Translation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Students will be able to understand and recite sentences using basic descriptions of people, places and things.</li><li>➤ Students will be able to understand and recite sentences to describe basic questions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What are American gender expectations?</li><li>● What are African American gender expectations?</li><li>● How does American culture view African Americans?</li><li>● How does American culture view Africans?</li></ul>

**APPENDIX B**  
**LESSON FEEDBACK FORM**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Circle:

I am: Female / Male / Non-binary

1. Did you like this lesson? Why or why not?

2. Would you prefer to have lessons like this one, as compared to other lessons you have received in school? Explain.

3. This lesson helped me reflect on my experiences as a Black person. (Circle your answer below).

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. This lesson helped me reflect on my experiences as a man/non-binary person/woman.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. How well did you like this lesson? (Circle using scale below)

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Very much

**APPENDIX C**  
**FINAL FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Circle:

I am: Female / Male / Non-binary

Which lesson(s) did you prefer (favor or like)? Rank the lessons in the order that you liked them, and indicate why you liked the lesson.

1=most favorite lesson 2= second favorite lesson 3=third favorite lesson

Rank

\_\_\_\_\_ Lesson 1: Introduction: Why:

\_\_\_\_\_ Lesson 2: Grammar: Why:

\_\_\_\_\_ Lesson 3: Liberation & Translation: Why:

Is there anything else you would like to share?

**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is your ancestry? How do you define your ethnic and racial heritage/culture?
2. How would you define Black culture in America?
3. How you would define the relationships between Black cultures within the Americas?
4. How would you define the language(s) of Black culture in America?
5. How do you think of/see gender (your own or others) within Black culture in America?
6. What were your perceptions of Africa growing up? What are they now?
7. What were your perceptions of African languages growing up? What are they now?
8. How do you think of/see gender within African cultures?