ABSTRACT

ANGELA TRAMONTELLI. Living Languages: Developing Sociolinguistic Curricula in Foreign Language Teaching. Under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Reaser.

Sociolinguistics is the study of language and linguistic features in cultural contexts. We say that there are “living languages” in the sense that speaking the language of another culture is a way to connect with people, and it is also true that languages take on life through the social meanings they carry. It is because of this link between language and society that teaching about the culture of a target language in foreign language study is considered essential.

This project synthesizes perspectives from sociolinguistics with foreign language teaching pedagogy and materials development to create a unit of lesson plans on language diversity in society for Italian language teaching. These five lessons each focus on a sociolinguistic theme, such as historical development of language, regional accents and dialects, levels of linguistic analysis, and language contact and shift. The sociolinguistic content was modeled to meet the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, with the goal of strengthening students’ linguistic proficiency and cultural skills simultaneously. Rather than presenting cultural content as separate from language, here language itself is treated as a product, practice, and perspective of culture.

Similar efforts to include sociolinguistic materials in primary and secondary education curricula are viewed as effective in promoting an appreciation for diversity in language and in society: Teaching students about language variation as it relates to society supports students’ development of greater multicultural skills. This connection ideally situates sociolinguistic materials to position foreign language teaching as an exercise in the development of cultural competency and appreciation of diverse perspectives.