

Abstract submitted to AAAL on 7/15/2024 and accepted on 10/1/2024: Graduate Teaching Assistants' use of materials in the language classroom

How do Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) use materials in the classroom? And how do they make sense of their use of materials in the classroom, after the fact? GTAs in foreign language programs in the US often must teach according to dominant materials (i.e., syllabus and textbook) within a neoliberal foreign language education (Bori & Canale, 2022). It is also common practice for teachers to use textbook materials with their students in creative and idiosyncratic ways, and to depart from the language textbook and include other resources while drawing from their own personal experience and knowledge. Yet, the dynamic use of textbooks in language learning and teaching settings remains underexplored in comparison with the analysis of textbook content, and the role of materials in classroom-based research has been overlooked (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Larsen-Freeman, 2014). GTAs are a unique type of teaching professional and the realities of their teaching contexts and practices deserve more attention. Drawing on a critical pedagogy framework that views GTAs' own reflections on their use of materials as essential to change, as well as a thematic analysis of field notes, video-recorded classroom observations, and stimulated-recall interviews with four GTAs, this ethnographic study seeks an in-depth understanding of the ways in which four student-instructors in Spanish at a US university use pre-existing materials. The analysis of findings sheds light on how teachers co-construct their own instructional dimension with materials, finding alternatives and opportunities to humanize the foreign language curriculum. This study adopts a bottom-up approach to suggest areas of improvement in current GTA training models toward the development of critical language teachers and "curriculum thinkers" (Graves, 2023, p. 204) who are aware of how they can make the most of the materials at their disposal.