

# Naming a Place for Occitan in the US French Curriculum

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The discipline of Romance philology, although no longer common in American universities, validated regional Romance varieties as objects of scholarly study. Yet, as Tom Field had already noted in (1978), Occitan is only frequently taught in American universities as an ancillary to medieval French literary studies or as a source of substrate effects on the French language.

Within the last twenty years or so, calls to diversify the French curriculum in American departments have led to an increase of availability in materials for courses of French sociolinguistics (e.g., Ager 1990; Ball and Marley 2016; Sanders 1993). More recently, they have also fueled sociolinguistic approaches to the teaching of French language courses (Beaulieu et al. 2018; Weiher 2020). The shared goal in these endeavors is the recognition of the many ways of being a French-speaking person. However, Occitan and other regional languages, —which are typically recognized as part of the broader Francophonie (Polzin-Haumann 2017) —, are still largely constrained to the margins of the French curriculum; only to be discussed briefly in specialized courses.

In this paper, I describe the design of an Occitan studies lesson for three levels of French courses through the lens of Critical Language Pedagogy. Critical Language Pedagogy advocates for students to think critically about the status quo and ponder alternative forms of knowledge and social empowerment (Crookes 2021). Over the duration of three contact hours, students consider the debates surrounding the naming of the Région Occitanie in 2016, following the analysis of Costa and Brennan (2021). The language of instruction for this lesson combines written Occitan readings with spoken French and is scaffolded according to the level of French required for each of the three courses: beginner French language (A1-A2), intermediate French language (B1-B2), and Occitan Studies for scholars of French. The lesson prompts students to ask questions concerning the ideologies of naming, social structure, and regional organization. It also pushes students to question the existence of languages in France other than French, an idea which is typically not part of the beginner and intermediate curriculum.

By questioning social relations via language policy and by problematizing the narrative of traditional French curriculum that is familiar to students, Crit-

ical Language Pedagogy resonates with the tradition of Occitan sociolinguistics (Lafont 1997). The lesson demonstrates that contemporary Occitan and other minority language studies (e.g., Ryon 2002) are relevant and applicable to the generalist French curriculum and should be expanded in efforts to create a more inclusive French learning experience (see also Meyer and Hoft-March 2021).

## References

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