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Second Language Teaching  
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#### **Reflection 4: Gender and Sexuality in the L2 Classroom**

At the risk of waxing hyperbolic, this was one of the most therapeutic, affirming roundtable discussions that I have ever been able to attend. Many of the points raised by the panelists were in accord with similar best practices that I provided to my colleagues in the Less-Commonly-Taught Languages Center at the start of the year, but it was a new experience for me to see language professionals actively engaging with *teaching* gender theory as part of their L2 curriculum. Despite some initial concerns over the fact that each participant was there to represent an Indo-European language (I still feel the roundtable could have been more adequately titled “Gender and Sexuality in the Latinate Classroom”), I was more than satisfied by the depth of thoughtful consideration that each panelist poured into not only their prepared remarks, but also their responses during the question and answer portion.

While the content covered during the roundtable was not necessarily applicable to the immediate context of working with my tutees, it was broadly informative and generalizable to other types of language instruction. In fact, attending it even caused me to reconsider why I *hadn't* asked my tutees for their pronouns at the start of our meetings, despite having consistently done this in prior teaching engagements. There is probably something to be said for the nuances of working with a group of learners that I am unaccustomed to interacting with in a professional setting, namely ones who do not share an L1 with me and for whom I may not always be able to explain complicated, abstract concepts in a relatable, culturally-sensitive way. The capacity for distilling sensitive issues into manageable language without losing the importance of the topic is a learned skill like anything else, one that I still need to work on refining.

Additionally, there's also the matter of my role as a white, masculine-identifying person who is the tutor for three feminine-presenting people of color. I can't say that I wouldn't feel some amount of anxiety at the idea of potentially "mansplaining" Feminist beliefs or gender sensitivity to a group of women, although I would be more comfortable in talking about sexuality as a person who identifies as Queer; finding comfort in talking about these subjects with them would necessitate allowing them to know a great deal about myself, which is antithetical to common attitudes toward teacher-student relationships in the United States. This does in a way relate to the ideals of Feminist pedagogy that both David and Lorraine described, which, in my understanding, hold that educators should be transparent about their standpoints, identities, and worldviews as much as possible.

To that point, the content of the presentation was certainly geared towards instructors of foreign language in a US higher education environment, not K-12 or (pre-)academic ESL, and as such, much of it was based on the *a priori* assumption that instructors would even be able to safely broach the topics in their classrooms—in fact, "safety" also played a large role in the Q&A portion, with a number of panelists (and myself) stressing that learners needed to understand the inherent risks associated with using certain kinds of language (ex. Queer slang). In my experience, there is still a lingering hesitance in ESL to address topics like gender and the more incendiary subject of sexuality as part of the curriculum, if even *ad hoc*. While I can't necessarily blame anyone for playing it safe in the interest of catering to the language-learning needs and sensitivities of their clientele (and in many ESL contexts, learners are exactly that: the clientele which keep a business running), I do question at what point it becomes a disservice to the notion of teaching languaculture to pointedly avoid a specific topic that may prove controversial.