

Teacher as a peace leader: A new peace linguistic approach to “Freedom Writers”

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ABSTRACT

The role of a language teacher as a character educator and peace-builder is sometimes undermined by the pervasive thinking that language teaching solely entails transference of knowledge about language. However, it is a fallacy that language teaching is not facilitative of character development. Since language has the power of creating peace and even war, this study seeks to interrogate how a language teacher as a leader in a classroom can be a model of peacebuilding through language use. Using New Peace Linguistics (henceforth NPL)—a newly emerging framework in linguistics and peace studies—this study analyzed the pragmatics, specifically the speech acts, as found in Erin Gruwell’s utterances in “Freedom Writers”, a movie about teacher who has to deal with a group of rebellious students. The study found that Erin Gruwell mostly used mediating, expressing empathic concern, complementing, disciplining, apologizing, giving instruction, and encouraging for creating peace, healing traumatic experiences, and changing the students’ behavior.

Keywords: *New peace linguistics; Peace language; Speech acts; Teacher*

1. Introduction

Perhaps, globalization—a term referring to the “deepening interconnectedness of economies (exports/imports), cultures, and people throughout the world as a result of technological advancements, cross-border commerce, and the movement of capital, labor, and information” (Ortega, 2023, p.11)—has become the center as to why language learning has grown exponentially. Under such a condition, language learners actively, or perhaps passively, decide which foreign language to learn. Furthermore, globalization has also pushed the need to have the ability to communicate effectively for multifarious

purposes and with people from different and diverse cultural backgrounds. While learning a language has some positive outcomes (Tum & Kunt, 2021), it is also inevitable that, in the process of communication, conflicts may arise due to various undesired communicative practices.

While serving as a communicative tool, language may effectuate peace and harmony among people or, on the negative note, conflicts and wars (Curtis, 2022). Unconscious personal judgments about right or wrong also underlie the language use which can feasibly affect how others respond to the way the communication is performed (Sullivan, 2007). This is especially a highlighted issue among scholars who take interest in the amalgamation of peace education and language learning. They argue that globalization is a genesis of the peace and conflict created through language as a means of communication. Nevertheless, learners' motivation to learn a language can be used to challenge the negative outcomes of language learning itself. Against this backdrop, language is deemed to be an important tool for promoting sustainable peace—especially within classroom contexts. This underpins the aspects of language that are functional in supporting good behavior, cooperation, and empathy (B. Birch, 2022). Language use, therefore, serves as an evaluation over what is moral and immoral and what is positive and negative. Hence, the positive force of language learning provides the opportunity for language educators to use such a demand as a fruitful tool to promote peace through the integration of peace education and language learning.

One newly emerging field that integrates linguistics and peace studies is New Peace Linguistics (henceforth NPL)—which serves as the newest development of Peace Linguistics (hereafter PL). An important yet distinctive facet of NPL is its shifted focus to world leaders' language use to influence people (Curtis, 2022). However, rather than focusing on the world leaders' language use per se, this present study views teachers as leaders in their own right. In other words, the present study seeks to interrogate the language use of teachers as leaders of peace who have the capacity to legitimize empathy and even encourage violence.

2. Literature review

2.1. Teacher as a leader of peace

Teachers' traditional prerogative might solely include transference of knowledge. As the view towards education has shifted, the role of teachers is no longer constrained to giving knowledge. Holistic view into the role of teachers includes ensuring the students' character development (Birhan, Shiferaw, Amsalu, Tamiru, & Tiruye, 2021; Liang, Dai, & Matthews, 2020). This is a testament that teachers assume a significant role for the sustenance of learning within and beyond a classroom. Several studies have revealed how teachers can be the leaders exemplifying peacebuilding. In his article addressing the influx of popular opinion about how the U.S has become an institution of war, Braatz (2018) foregrounds the critical role teachers have in shaping popular opinion. Similarly, Clarke-Habibi (2018) emphasizes that teachers are not separable from peace

education. He believes that for peace education to be successfully implemented, teachers must be an integral part—meaning that their conceptualization of peace must be by no means taken into account. Other scholars such as Kuppens and Langer (2020) frame teachers as agents of socialization—who are able to go beyond what is stipulated in the curriculum and transmit certain values, attitudes and essential knowledge for peacebuilding through repeated encounter and intense interaction with the students. Furthermore, one of the Freirean concepts postulates that teachers have to establish dialogue and equality of relationship with the students (Freire, 1970, stated in Millican et al., 2021). This idea is also supported by Fu (2021) who puts forward that the establishment of a positive relationship between teachers and students can be achieved through certain strategies of peacebuilding. Linguistically, one strategy teachers can employ is using positive language (Oxford, 2020). This linguistic strategy can manifest in several forms. One form which is closely related to the teachers’ role as peacebuilders is mediating (Corbett, 2021). This finds support in the study of Baker-Bell (2020) finding that teachers’ language or language teaching can be tantamount to resistance towards anti-Black racism.

Against this backdrop, it can be concluded that more than giving knowledge, a teacher leader must exemplify what being a peacemaker truly is, especially through language. Exemplification as such entails coaching and modeling good behavior in front of a student, correcting destructive behavior, and using positive language as a means of promoting peace—with the lattermost aspect being the central focus of this study. This is also in line with one of the concepts of teacher leader (Dickerson, White, Levy, & Mackintosh, 2021). York-Barr and Duke (2004) provide a framework which stipulates the specific roles of teacher leaders. They suggest *model*, *coach*, *curriculum developer*, and *broker*. These specific roles are mostly contextualized in teachers’ relationship with other teachers; implying that teachers are being leaders for other teachers. However, it is not within the scope of this paper to frame teachers as leaders for other teachers. Instead, interpolating the characteristics of teacher leaders from educational management into mapping out teacher leaders’ role in promoting language of peace within language education context serves as the aim of this study.

2.2. Peace linguistics

Peace Linguistics (PL) was first introduced by Francisco Cardoso Gomes de Matos, a peace linguactivist who advocated for a positive use of language within the classroom context. The purpose of PL has been cultivating positive, encouraging, and peaceful language rather than conflict-precipitating language—implying that the culture of using human-dignifying-and-edifying vocabulary must be encouraged (Gomes de Matos, 2002). Gomes de Matos formulated such a vision into a list of second language learners’ *rights* for humanizing language. It must be noted, nevertheless, that *rights* of the learners here, as Gomes de Matos (2002) remarks, go beyond what the learners simply can claim. According to him, it is a *quality* defined by the learners’ individual characteristics and the

learning ecosystem—where learners can exercise the rights and teachers can assert as well as assure the rights (p. 306). In his idea, “the responsibility to learn how to use a language humanizingly should be one of the fundamental rights of all language users and essential in the preparation of L2 learners” (Gomes de Matos, 2002, p. 308). Therefore, he formulated *experiencing*, *benefit*, and *humanizing* as L2 learners’ rights.

Humanizing aspect especially garners attention as the chasm of humanism and humanizing must be made clear. Gomes de Matos (2002) argues that teachers—as peace agents—must be categorized as humanizers rather than humanists due to the nature of the former being central to human linguistic rights, justice and communicative peace. Hence, PL is rooted in the humanizing approach into language education—with teachers being the advocates and models for peaceful language use. This further suggests that teachers play an overriding role in promulgating peace language as a *philosophy*, *process* and *pedagogy*. Borrowing from the purpose of peace education as *philosophy*, *process*, and *pedagogy* foregrounded by Kurian and Kester (2019, p.1), peace linguistics:

As a philosophy,...emphasizes love, compassion, empathy, harmony and nonviolence through [language]; as a process, it aims to replace cultures of violence with cultures of peace; as a pedagogy, it promotes a form of transformative [language] to help individuals and societies acquire the skills, values, attitudes and behaviors required for peaceful living.

Although PL has been a long-established field, it has maintained its unpopularity in the academic arena. A recent publication entitled “*Creating Classrooms of Peace in English Language Teaching*” provides some interesting articles about PL as a branch of applied linguistics. The run-through of the book however signals a necessity for more studies focusing on a more operational and analytical aspect of peace language. Therefore, as an effort to materialize an alternative for such a need, Andy Curtis, one of the leading pioneers in PL, proposes a new framework called New Peace Linguistics.

2.3. *New peace linguistics*

New Peace Linguistics (hereafter NPL) is considerably a new field of study. The major aspect of NPL is its attempt to synthesize systematic linguistic analysis and peace studies. As one of the major exponents of NPL, Curtis (2022) believes that the dearth in research devoted to the systematic study of how language is actually used to call forth peace, especially within the area of language teaching, necessitates a more rigorous application of linguistically analytical technique to peace language use. Thus, he tries to develop a more bottom-up approach to PL—which he calls as NPL—while still maintaining the purpose of the old PL itself.

While still centering on the use of language to create peace, NPL strives to underscore the language use of people with power who—by virtue of the words they use—can manifest peace or war (Curtis, 2022). A number of studies on the influential power of language have revealed how people with epistemic power can influence the

behavior and elicit certain responses from the masses (Archer, Alfano, & Dennis, 2022; Archer, Cawston, Matheson, & Geuskens, 2020; Chu & Huang, 2021; Driessen, 2022). Still, these studies do not explicitly inquire into the practice of peace linguistics. Instead, peace language is nuanced or implied in the aforementioned studies. In recent years, there have been a few studies that focus on PL and NPL. However, only a couple of studies are devoted to the analysis of peace language in discursive practice such as those of Calle-Díaz (2019) and Curtis (2022). The former reveals that discourse analysis can be a useful tool to analyze a classroom episode which focuses on peacebuilding. By analyzing the interactional patterns among the students and the teacher, the study offers a theoretical view into the reconstruction of peacebuilding in the classroom. The latter study by Curtis (2022) is specifically for analyzing NPL—meaning that the central focus of his analysis is the world leaders. He took the example from America’s former president, Donald Trump, who mischievously used the word peace during his oration. The outcome of his word was a riot at the capitol—further suggesting that language has a significant power to perpetuate violence. The number of reviewed previous studies on PL and NPL above speaks of the *sine qua non* of further research into NPL.

Curtis (2022) asserts that understanding NPL is a valuable field of inquiry for peace teachers and practitioners given that NPL “will expand their meta-cultural and metalinguistic awareness, critical consciousness and empathy for the oppressed” (p. 59). Therefore, in studying the role of teachers as leaders in modeling and promoting peace language, NPL serves as the nucleus of this paper. I intend to perform a pragmatic analysis on “*Freedom Writers*” (LaGravanese, 2007) in terms of how the teacher uses language to transform a melting-pot classroom filled with conflicts and misconducts into one that permeates peace and harmony.

The analysis focuses on the language use of Erin Gruwell from “*Freedom Writers*” (LaGravanese, 2007). The said movie was selected due to several reasons. First, the movie addresses some issues related to intercultural conflicts that transpire in the classroom. This movie shows the effort of a teacher to transform the class through certain approaches, such as classroom management, classroom activities and assessment, and language use. What is depicted in the movie is a reflection of what teachers encounter in their daily teaching practices. Therefore, I argue that the movie highlights some important linguistic practices that are supportive of peace as well as provide insights into how teachers could approach conflicts among students from the use of language. Second, although the movie has been analyzed from various perspectives, the analysis into applied linguistics and NPL has yet to be performed. Furthermore, the analysis of peace language use in “*Freedom Writers*” might also be exemplary of how teacher leaders use peaceful language for transformative purposes.

As NPL is considerably a new field of inquiry which integrates peace education and linguistics, this analytical study shall serve as a contributive effort to the scanty scholarship devoted to the study of NPL. Seeing the importance of NPL, this paper seeks

to answer the following question: in “*Freedom Writers*”, what speech acts are reflected in Erin Gruwell’s utterances which signify the use of NPL?

3. Method

This present study employs a qualitative descriptive method on “*Freedom Writers*” (LaGravanesse, 2007). It is a movie which revolves around Erin Gruwell, a teacher who has to teach a group of underperforming, and rebellious, students of different backgrounds. The movie succinctly depicts numerous conflicts that happen among the students, especially those involved in ‘gangster’. Racial issues are also observable in the movie. In the effort to bring about positive transformation, she has to come up with ideas to cope with her students’ issues of conduct. Her language use in particular demonstrates her endeavor to model peace-making through language use. After toiling to transform her students, she manages to bring peace to the classroom through rich provision of peace language and peace-promoting class activities. For that reason, the movie may serve as a microcosm of a social issue which occurs within classroom context—and relates to the issue of peace.

Specifically, this study focuses on the pragmatics which revolves around aspects of NPL. The analysis on the speech acts in the movie shall generate insights into the performativity of a teacher’s language use in light of peacebuilding. The study of speech acts using movie dialogs have been previously done (Haristiani, Septiana, Nor, & Ryota, 2023; Rizki & Golubović, 2020), as movie dialogs may arguably resemble the real ordinary, spontaneous speech found in everyday lives. This analysis shall present several strategies of the peace speech acts from Erin Gruwell such as mediating, expressing empathic concern, complementing, disciplining, apologizing, giving instruction, and encouraging. These categories were generated based on the analysis of the locution, illocution, and perlocution as well as taking into account speaker’s intention, the following of certain conventions depending on the context, and speaker’s authority (Gasparatou, 2018).

In order to analyze the aspects of NPL, I watched the movie two times. The first viewing was to generate the general idea of the movie, while highlighting some important parts in my notes. The second viewing was carried out to perform in-depth analysis into one of the pragmatic contents as suggested by Jakupčević and Čavar Portolan (2021). In their study, these pragmatic contents encompass speech acts, discourse markers, social expressions, interjections, exclamations, and different conversation management devices. As the present study specifically focuses on the speech act, I analyzed the script of the movie—which was available online. While watching the movie, I assigned codes to important parts that demonstrated the application of the aforementioned pragmatic contents. The initial analysis of the study focused on the classroom episodes. Hence, coding was applied to all utterances transpiring in the classroom. For that reason, giving instruction, for example, previously had 23 utterances. However, after the second analysis based on the perspective of NPL, several utterances (e.g. ‘switch with Ben’, and ‘close

the magazine') were omitted as they did not specifically demonstrate peace language use. Furthermore, since this present study sought to analyze a teacher's peace language use, utterances by other characters that share no relation with Erin Gruwell were also omitted from the analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

Based on the analyzed excerpts from the movie, it was found that Erin Gruwell uses multiple strategies to promote peace and bring about transformation among the students. Some of these strategies were derived from the data that were analyzed. On the other hand, some other strategies were determined based on the literature related to language use for conflict and peace language, such as expressing empathic concern (Curtis, 2022) and mediating (Corbett, 2021). However, one strategy In order to explicate her peace-sustaining language use, the number of peace speech acts strategies is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

The number of peace speech acts strategies in Erin Gruwell's utterances in Freedom Writers.

Peace speech acts strategies	Number of utterances	Percentage
Mediating	6	10.5%
Expressing empathic concern	2	3.5%
Complementing	3	5.3%
Disciplining	15	26.3%
Apologizing	1	1.8%
Giving instruction	17	29.8%
Encouraging	13	22.8%
Total	57	100%

4.1. Mediating

When the students have conflicts with their peers, Erin Gruwell always steps up to mediate the students. The way she mediates the students is often through storytelling. One example can be seen in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 1:

I saw a picture just like this once in a museum. Only it wasn't a black man, it was a Jewish man. And instead of the big lips, he had a really big nose, like a rat's nose. But he wasn't just one particular Jewish man, this was a drawing of all Jews.

Storytelling can be notably useful in mediating intercultural differences. In order for rapprochement to be established, storytelling can serve as a strategy to mediate parties

who are involved in a certain conflict (Heisterkamp, 2022). As a mediator, Erin Gruwell uses storytelling to bring awareness of the aftereffects of the students' hostile actions towards others.

Additionally, the storytelling of Erin Gruwell mostly involves her narrating what happens in the past. In the excerpt above, the narrative about a drawing of all Jews represents her attempt to evoke students' idea about what indirect physical bullying is like. Her attempt to compare the drawing made by the students to the picture she previously saw in a museum is driven by racial orientation of the conflict. What the students draw from the other student is an attack on the phenotypic characteristics of the student, who is racially different from them. Therefore, although some students initially show some resistance, Erin Gruwell's storytelling is effective to bring mediation, as well as peace.

This is an important facet teacher needs to bear in mind. Classroom is where a teacher has the most power to bring about changes to the students. By practicing peace language through storytelling as a way to mediate students in conflict, a teacher not only models how to practice conflict resolution through effective communication but also cultivates reflective thinking. Reflective thinking in this case is derived by knowing about history. It must be noted that "*Freedom Writers*" presents a classroom condition where students from diverse cultural backgrounds mingle in the same class, bringing their stories of violence and discrimination. Such a situation is ground for divide and discord among learners (Ogilvie & Fuller, 2017; Winn, 2013), but at the same time, it is also a fruitful site for mediation. According to Jun (2020), building the students' affective historical empathy is a key to creating a caring environment, understanding present and future problems as well as building mutual understanding among students. Similar to the study by Jun (2020)—who uses the history of comfort women in South Korea to raise 'caring' character among students—Erin Gruwell uses the holocaust and history of Black people and Jews.

4.2. *Expressing empathic concern*

The use of the term empathic concern in this study stems from a concern that there is no clear indication whether what Erin Gruwell says to the students is based on empathy or sympathy. It is important to note that although Malbois (2023) have provided thorough definition and exemplification of the two, there is still no consensus about the definition of both empathy and sympathy due to their nature of being a cognitive phenomenon (Bollen, 2023; Pounds, Hunt, & Koteyko, 2018). Therefore, I use the term expressing empathic concern—which I borrow from Malbois (2023)—to include any sympathetic and empathetic expressions from Erin Gruwell. One utterance from Erin Gruwell which best exemplifies this strategy is as follows:

Excerpt 2

I heard about your brother's conviction. I'm sorry. Is that why you've missed class so much?

This particular utterance demonstrates how Erin Gruwell does not treat her students as objects for her career as a teacher. Instead, she treats her students as a group of people deserving of care and fair treatment. Gomes de Matos (2002), who is the major pioneer in the field of peace language, maintains that learners deserve human-dignifying and humanizing language. Erin Gruwell—as shown in the excerpt above—models this empathic concern by asking a question. By doing so, Erin Gruwell shows her understanding towards her student's situation which has caused her to be absent from class multiple times.

4.3. Complementing

The use of complement in building peace and positive relationships is evident in this movie. Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) define compliment as evaluative acts which foreground the positive features or qualities of the addressee. This definition leads to its established connection with social relationships. As noted by Alqarni (2020), as a speech act, compliments might be driven by the need to maintain a harmonious relationship. Two excerpts which demonstrates the compliment given by Erin Gruwell is as follows:

Excerpt 3:

They're very special books, and they each remind me, in some way, of each of you.

Excerpt 4:

Wow, you used your library card?

She compliments her students in several ways. In Excerpt 3, she compliments the students using a metaphor. The metaphorical expression she uses is to build positive relationships with the students as well as to motivate the students to read the books for reflective purposes. Excerpt 4 shows Erin Gruwell's compliment towards her student who has demonstrated a big change. Here, Erin Gruwell uses two different approaches to compliment. While the first one pertains to an unbound semantic formula—referring to a compliment which works autonomously—the second compliment pertains to a bound semantic formula—referring to a compliment that has to include an unbound semantic formula for it to work (Alqarni, 2020). This implies that compliment, despite being simplistically viewed in discursive practices, has a causal relationship with social relation. Positive social relationship is the condition that peace requires.

4.4. Disciplining

In their study, Mendenhall, Cha, Falk, Bergin, and Bowden (2021) explain that “Teachers working in conflict-affected settings ‘may feel disempowered and resort to physical punishment’ in order to establish their authority” (p. 3). Traditional view of teaching has indeed forced teachers to use, say, corporal punishment as a means to achieve obedience to school rules and to gain control over the students. However, punishment may not be of use when the aim is to nurture prosocial behavior (Pfattheicher, Nielsen, & Thielmann, 2022). This is a challenge that Erin Gruwell finds in her classroom. Nevertheless, in disciplining the students, for example, Erin Gruwell tends to use non-harsh words. She uses questions to elicit reflective thinking and to imagine “what if...”. An example of such a question is as follows:

Excerpt 5:

So what you're saying is, if the Latinos weren't here, or the Cambodians or the blacks or the whites or whoever they are, if they weren't here, everything would be better for you, isn't that right?

Another interesting way that she uses to discipline the students is the use of compliment, or to be precise, satire. This is in accordance with Golato (2005, as stated in Maíz-Arévalo & García-Gómez, 2013) who argues that a compliment can also manifest itself as a form of a reprimand or satire. The next excerpt is an example of the satire she uses:

Excerpt 6:

Maybe we should talk about art. Tito's got real talent, don't you think?

Satirizing is helpful, as exemplified by Erin Gruwell, in approaching undesirable behavior non-punitively. The satirical expression that she uses is intended to shift a student's focus to the lesson without having to use violent words or punitive punishment. By doing this, Erin Gruwell also employs the positive politeness strategy to correct the behavior of the student (Haristiani et al., 2023). Furthermore, she also employs questioning as a way to discipline the students. One example of it can be seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 7:

Would this be funny if it were a picture of you?

Questioning, clarifying and asking for explanation in the movie are linked to one aspect of peace: reflecting. When a student does something that is emotionally detrimental to others, Erin Gruwell uses questioning, clarifying and asking for explanation as a way to help the doer reflect on the outcome of their actions. In the recent movement of peace education, the restorative justice principles in education have seen a significant rise in literature. One aspect of it is the facilitation of reflective conversation (Ogilvie & Fuller,

2017; Winn, 2013). Here, Erin Gruwell demonstrates herself as a leader as well as a mediator who advocates reflection.

4.5. Apologizing

Lastly, Erin Gruwell also demonstrates peace language through apologizing. However, there is only one instance where she apologizes to the students.

Excerpt 8:
I apologize for asking. My badness.

Although the practice of apologizing has been prevalent in peace education, the small number of appearances in the movie is perhaps explicable in terms of the social position of apology. Erin Gruwell is a teacher leader in a disruptive class—which explains her frequent use of declarative as well. Shukla and Shukla (2020) argue that the social view of apology lexemes is weak. Hence, a leader must avoid the use of apology. Although this social view of apology does not fully explain Erin Gruwell's scanty use of apologizing speech act, a leader must appear to be strong and decisive, especially teachers who have to lead a class under the aforementioned condition.

4.6. Giving instructions

Based on the information in Table 1, giving instruction appears to be the most frequent speech act. Giving instruction is closely related to Erin Gruwell's profession as an English teacher. For example:

Excerpt 9:
We're gonna write every day in these journals.

The excerpt above shows Erin Gruwell uses a classroom activity to gain understanding of her students' past or experience. She uses it to foster reflection as well as bring about change among the students. The instances of her commands and instructions seem to be divided into two; content-related and off-task instructions. The previous excerpt is one example that is related to content-related instruction. On the other hand, Erin Gruwell also uses off-task instruction as follows:

Excerpt 10:
Stand on the line if you've lost a friend to gang violence.

According to Lie, Tamah, and Gozali (2022), off-task is defined as "social interaction linked to the use of language by the teacher for socializing purposes unrelated to the lesson" (p. 5). In other instances, Erin Gruwell's frequent use of giving an off-task instruction relates to her attempt to change the students' clustering. It must be noted that the students sit in groups with their preferred friends. Seeing how divisive the sitting

arrangement is, she exercises her power by using command to change the sitting arrangement. However, it can be traced in her command-related utterances that she still uses respectful and non-labelling words. Such a practice is suggested by Curtis (2022) as it marks the start of a peaceful relationship.

4.7. Encouraging

Encouraging which appears 13 times is also necessary for transforming the students. From the psycho-affective lens, encouraging words influence the interpersonal relationship of an individual as well as create a caring environment as students develop a positive outlook of themselves (Ariza, Forero, & Cardona, 2022). In so many instances, Erin Gruwell encourages the students to go beyond their comfort zone. For example:

Excerpt 11:

Everyone has their own story, and it's important for you to tell your own story, even to yourself.

To facilitate reflection to the students, Erin Gruwell uses encouraging words to allow students to reflect. In some other cases, her encouragement is achieved through several sub-strategies such as questioning, instructing and assuring. For example, her effort to make the students open up about their own struggles, she says:

Excerpt 12:

How can I give an A or a B for writing the truth, right?

This question is used to assure the students that they have the freedom to voice their own mind without being constrained by fear of getting undesired grades. Erin Gruwell attempts to motivate the students to change into individuals who are caring and open towards each other, in spite of their differences. Through her continuous use of motivating, human-edifying language, she models the way to communicate peacefully.

5. Conclusion

This present study aims to contribute to the body of literature devoted to NPL. In the context of this study, while PL aims to create peaceful conditions through language use among teachers and students, NPL aims to analyze teacher leaders' use of language to create harmonious and positive classrooms. Given the aim of the present study of examining the speech acts related to peace linguistics, Erin Gruwell's language use in the movie, *I would express*, exemplifies how language use has the power to transform a disorderly class into a community that supports harmonious and agreement-abiding behavior among its members. This argument lies in how the main character of the movie, Erin Gruwell—who positions herself as a teacher leader—uses positive language as a transformative approach to change the students' disruptive behavior caused by a long history of cultural segregation and violence as well as family issues. The analysis of the

speech acts reveals that Erin Gruwell mostly uses *mediating, expressing empathic concern, complementing, disciplining, apologizing, giving instruction, and encouraging* for creating peace, healing traumatic experiences, and changing the students’ behavior.

From the epistemic perspective, teachers have been traditionally responsible for transferring knowledge through teaching. However, the modern and holistic view of a teacher places emphasis on the balance of knowledge and character. Therefore, from the example of Erin Gruwell in “*Freedom Writers*”, language teachers must not solely position themselves as teachers of grammar, writing, reading and any skills related to language. Instead, the teaching of language must entail fruitful and constructive use of language to manifest transformation among the students rather than to perpetuate symbolic or visceral violence and discord among students.

Classroom is a social space where students bring in their differences—whether it is cultural, racial, personal, or any other traits that could possibly create a divide among them. Therefore, teachers must serve as a bridge that accommodates those differences and lower the possibility of conflicts. Hence, language practice that brings peace to the class is rudimentary and of magnitude in order to embody a peaceful environment.

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