PART 1

SITUATING CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION
2 Conceptualizing Critical Pedagogies

2.1 Introduction

In daily life, the worst scenario of being critical is probably, in my opinion, that of harsh criticism that may be produced by any kinds of people regardless of their countries, cultures, academic credentials, and faiths. This is typically realized in inconsiderate, sarcastic words or subtle insinuation on things a person dislikes about another or other persons, situations, and things. Ironically, even a highly educated, male professor can be very harsh to his wife when he, without thoughtful and circumspect attitudes, criticizes the meals prepared by the wife. This is certainly not the spirit of CPs.

Neither is this more subtle phenomenon when a person, claiming to be a critical educator, considers the government (state apparatus) to always be at fault of oppressing the people. Such an educator is trapped in his or her bias and a logical fallacy: “some government officials are crooked, nasty, and oppressive; hence, all officials are”. This hasty generalization is very common and a lot of parents are allergic to politics in many forms: they do not want their children to be involved in any political affairs such as demonstrations to challenge policies unfavorable to certain groups of people because they think the children will only waste their valuable times for studying academically seriously; they condemn a government for oppressing the people and hence find it inappropriate for the children to become authoritarian officials themselves, etc. Another implied fallacy is, although many would not admit this logic: “State apparatus is the culprit of all evils in a country; the people are often innocent and at the mercy of this apparatus’ tyrannical wills”. Probably, this is a bit of exaggeration. Nevertheless, people’s voices are definitely not unison. Some are supportive to (or mouthpieces of) the government; some are vehemently opposing the government, or even destructive not only to the government but also to the state or country as a whole as in the case of terrorism.

After exploring what CPs are not, then we can begin to conceptualize what they entail. A myriad of concepts have the spirit
of criticalness, which may be related to (or are inherently) CPs: critical thinking, critical literacies, critical reading, critical theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, critical applied linguistics, and critical pedagogies (Bakhtin, 1981; Carter & Nunan, 2001; Hall, 2001, Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2004, 2007; van Dijk, 2003).

2.2 Critical thinking

A major shift from harsh criticism is when a person intentionally activates his or her academic capacity to use critical thinking. One of the strands of such thinking is introduced by Benjamin Bloom (1984) who suggests that teachers encourage learners to push their thinking beyond knowing and comprehending facts and data. It is desirable then that learners can use higher-order thinking skills to apply, analyze, synthesis, and evaluate pieces of known and comprehended information. Applying denotes learners’ skills to use what they know (data, theories, concepts, laws, approaches, or methods) in another context that is specifically meaningful to them. Analyzing basically involves (a) identifying materials/texts to be focused on, (b) recognizing the organization of ideas/issues of one or several texts, (c) selecting salient issues or important parts that are relevant to a task to be completed by learners; and (d) figuring out the relationships of ideas (their similarities or differences) in these texts. Next, synthesis is achieved when learners come up with a central, “novel” idea of his or her own which is then supported by assembling various sources/texts that have been (or are continuously being) analyzed. In Bloom’s taxonomy, this set of critical thinking stages culminates in evaluation in that learners assess how claims, arguments, and presentation of data by other authors cited in these learners’ synthesis are valid, logical, and reliable (cf. Hall, 2001, pp. 88-89; see also chapter 6 below in which assessments on students’ performances in light of higher-order thinking skills are at stake). With this taxonomy, harsh and naïve criticism can be reduced to a minimum.

Bloom’s taxonomy can be a starting point to begin using critical thinking in exploring issues in CPs. Nevertheless, attaining critical thinking skills is not the ultimate end of CPs.
2.3 Critical literacies

Another “neutral” but somewhat similar to Bloom’s taxonomy is what is termed as “critical literacies” by Hall (2001) that include “the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate nonprint texts and other kinds of media, and to apply them in solving problems and increasing personal understandings” (p. 61). Although it seems lacking in the discussion of power relations (but see 3.3 below), the inclusion of media, especially non-print and most recently the electronic ones, facilitates critical reading. Reading is certainly a part of literacy/literacies.

2.4 Critical reading

In Carter and Nunan’s (2001) glossary, critical reading refers to “a reading practice which attends to the ideological underpinning of text, as signaled not so much by what a writer chooses as a topic but how people, places and events are talked about” (p. 220). For example, if a government is one-sidedly described in a newspaper article as the hero that has given financial and other kinds of aids to victims of volcanic eruptions, we can tell that the author of the article is the mouthpiece whose ideology might resemble that of the government (whether it be a communist, socialist, or a capitalistic government).

2.5 Critical theory

While critical reading from Carter and Nunan’s (2001) perspective is somewhat limited to identify the “ideology underpinning of text”, critical theory encapsulates (almost) the whole notion of critical approaches and denotes:

an approach to the study of society (including literature) which questions things which we have come to take for granted. In so doing it seeks to unmask the ways in which power is exercised by one group to the disadvantage of other groups. (p. 220)
2.6 Critical Discourse Analysis

In language studies, critical theory has been explored through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Historically, CDA is a development from “critical linguistics” originally popularized by scholars in the UK and Australia as an attempt to “[react] against the dominant formal (often ‘asocial’ or ‘uncritical’) paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s”. In a nutshell, CDA is “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and equality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2003, p. 352).

2.7 Freirean critical pedagogy

Unlike CDA which is somewhat restricted to critical analysis of spoken and written text to find the hidden agenda of the dominant society and how inequality has been perpetuated by this society and challenged by disadvantaged groups, critical pedagogy (CP) in general pushes both educators and learners to get involved not only in critical reading (as more elaborated on in CDA) but also in empowering learners to get involved in some form of resistance in real practice through advocacy (politically and maybe legally) for a group of people being assisted by the learners. With this working definition, I challenge carter and nunan (2001) who argue that:

critical pedagogy [is] a way of teaching that strives not only to transmit linguistic knowledge and cultural information, but also to examine critically both the conditions under which the language is used, and the social, cultural and ideological purposes of its use. (p. 220)

CP began to flourish in Latin America, especially Brazil, in the 1960s and 1970, after the publication of Paulo Freire’s book whose English translation is entitled Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This book has been so influential internationally that we cannot overlook Freire’s historic contributions to CPs. Challenging capitalistic “oppressors” (particularly feudal landowners in his time), he attempted to empower
the “oppressed” people (specifically the peasants who worked for landowners) through raising their critical awareness of their being oppressed through dialogues which are mediated by critical educators. One of his theories is called “a humanizing pedagogy” as opposed to “banking education system” (see pp. 55-74). To sum up his theory here, I will focus on three main aspects central to a humanizing pedagogy: the views of (1) human, (2) education, and (3) history.

First, humanizing pedagogy puts human at its central subject which does not simply live in the world as an object but exist “with the world” and “with others” (i.e., with other humans or people). Inside the world in the Freirean sense are different forms of reality, various meanings, and fellow human beings. Merely living in the world in a biological sense only makes people become viewers of the world without abilities to re-create it with other people. Furthermore, people simply living in the world know that they have “consciousness” but they are unable to be “conscious being[s]” who think critically. People who only think they have consciousness are prone to be passive receivers (or depositors) of reality from the world they live in (Freire, 1990, p. 62, italics original). As passive depositors of reality, they take things for granted, adapt to the “normal” way of life, and do not question it.

Second, making the analogy of banking, Freire contends that non-humanizing pedagogy (or education) is “deposit-making”, which should be transformed into liberating education that contains “praxis” (reflections and actions), which, in view of Pennycook (1999, 2001, 2004), entails problematizing practices (cf. sections 2.8 below). Typical of banking education system is the fact that educators determine which “deposits of information” are considered “true” knowledge (Freire, 1990, p. 63). In a humanizing pedagogy, the educator’s role should be to nurture communication that allows students to express their authentic thoughts without the educator imposing or indoctrinating their own “truth” into the students’ minds. In view of Bloom’s (1984) cognitive skills, a humanizing pedagogy pushes learners to think beyond depositing knowledge, but also to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

The roles of teachers and students in banking education system and humanizing pedagogy also differ. In the former, teachers always
teach students ("students-of-the-teacher" and "teacher-of-the-students"). Arguments are based on "authority" (i.e., teachers) and are to be swallowed by students (Freire, 1990, p. 67). Teaching is also geared to "preservation of culture and knowledge" (p. 68) which only restricts students' creativity because the students are shaped by whatever is considered "good", "true", or "normal" knowledge and culture. In such a culture, students’ consciousness is in many ways intentionally submerged below teachers’ (or educational system’s) domination. In the latter, however, the teacher is “himself [sic] taught with in dialogue with students” (p. 67). Put another way, teachers not only teach but also learn from their students dialogically. Besides that, a humanizing pedagogy calls for more awareness ("conscientization") on the part of the students of the realities around them that are not static but subject to transformation (more specific discussions on conscientization will be in chapters 3 and 4).

Third, a humanizing pedagogy can be distinguished from banking education system in terms of how humans view their history. A humanizing pedagogy does not fail to recognize that humans are “historical beings” (Freire, 1990, p. 71). Such beings are aware of the transforming capacity they have at their disposal. This is based on the premise that humans are “beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p. 72; cf. also Bakhtin’s view of “ideological becoming”, as elaborated on by Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5). Also inherent in the belief of humans as historical beings is, therefore, its “prophetic” (instead of “fatalistic”) perception. That is, the past situation is reflected upon in the present (“here and now”) situation in order that humans “transcend themselves” and “look and move ahead” to the future (Freire, 1990, p. 72) by resisting oppression through political or legal advocacy, among others.

There are certainly some other tenets of CP that denote Freire’s legacy in the field of education. In fact, I used these tenets in my analysis (see chapter 4). However, in an attempt to conceptualize critical pedagogies in a more pluralistic way, I need to address some other critical approaches that have critiqued the Freirean CP (see 2.8.2). One of such approaches is labeled as critical applied linguistics by Pennycook (1999, 2001, 2004, 2007).
2.8 Critical applied linguistics

The spirit of “critical” in critical applied linguistics (CAL) may be associated with “to criticize”, which is defined as “to call into crisis” by Barthes (1977, p. 201, italics original). Critical here is therefore being literally in dangers – as critical can be synonymous with dangerous. Accordingly, critical educators are in constant search for realizing their being in dangerous states. They will not be satisfied with teaching and/or learning practices that are within the comfort zone of their time, albeit being labeled as CP. Hence, critical educators can even be very critical to them themselves and are not carried away with parroting the “regime of truth” of their time.

In fact, the problematizing spirit, which bears some resemblance to Barthes’ calling into crisis, is central to Pennycook’s (1999, 2001, 2004, 2007) CAL. Problematizing practices entail being self-critical (Pennycook, 1999, 2001, 2004). As Pennycook (2004) puts it: “…problematizing practice… [is] a perspective that insists on casting far more doubt on the categories we employ to understand the social world and on assumptions about awareness, rationality, emancipation, and so forth” (p. 329). Casting such doubt implies putting into question our own present understanding of things very susceptible to being taken for granted. This includes casting doubt on (or being critical towards) the critical. Critiquing a critical framework is what Pennycook (2007) in his recent formulation of “transgressive theories” puts forward. This theory extends his former notion of problematizing practices.

2.8.1 Pennycook’s transgressive pedagogy

Pennycook’s (2007) most current thought on a “critical philosophy of transgression” (p. 43) is characterized by – non-exhaustively:

- “a way of thinking and doing that is always problematizing” (p. 37) – which, in my opinion, entails thinking more questions on language teacher education, oppressive realities in language pedagogy, how to incorporate Freire’s humanizing pedagogy to language learning, and problematizing the distancing from spiritual issues in language teaching and learning, among others;
• Foucauldian “constant skepticism towards cherished concepts and modes of thought” (p. 39), e.g., problematizing the definition of “poverty” that simply focuses on economic deprivation;
• “[opposing], [pushing] against and [traversing] the oppressive boundaries of race, gender, and class domination” (p. 40);
• “[trespassing] on forbidden territory but also attempt to think what should not be thought, to do what should not be done” (p. 40), e.g., citing Jenks (2003), “… go beyond the margins of acceptability or normal performance” (Pennycook, 2007, p. 41). In fact, Pennycook’s focus of analysis in his book is on hip-hop songs which “[perform] language and identity transgressively…[to create] new identities… as a form of local subversion… [and] disrupt forms of domination” (p. 76). “Transgressively” here is specifically exemplified by “twisting German, Turkish and American slang in resistance to the official language” by Turkish hip-hop singer in Berlin (Kaya, 2001, as cited in Pennycook, 2007, p. 131).
• “…pleasure of doing things differently”, such as thinking “…which has not been thought” and “… [exploring] boundaries of thought” (p. 42). Pleasure in (language) teaching, from my understanding, is taking risks through novel paths others or at least I have never passed through before. This journey requires me to go beyond the “routine culture” of schooling or teaching (cf. Kleinsasser, 1993). I remember telling my students that sometimes I used different approaches or stories for illustrating the same material as I want to prove (at least to me myself) that I have ten years’ experiences of teaching, not one teaching experience repeated ten times in ten years. I am also interested in finding some “critical moments” (see Pennycook, 2004, p. 330) in which new insights from students’ responses in spoken or written form and my own spontaneous reflections as to how to improvise my teaching approach emerge (see chapter 4 sections 4.2 and 4.3 below).
• “… a profound and methodical investigation of how to understand ourselves, our histories and how the boundaries of thought may be traversed” (Pennycook, 2007, p. 42). This echoes Paulo Freire’s (1990) notions of “conscientization” and “thematic investigation”,

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which merit further explanations in their own right (see chapter 4 below).

• Going “…beyond the ‘post’” theories (e.g., postcolonialism, poststructuralism, postmodernism), although Pennycook does not entirely reject post theories.\(^3\) He further contends that transgressive theory involves “[a] move to look at ‘trans’ rather than ‘post’ theories… shifts the relationship from a temporal to a more spatial domain, from time to movement…” (p. 43). Post theories, in other words, attempt to link the ‘afterwards’ (post) to the past, whereas trans-theories is more into movement (p. 44). To illustrate, the concentric circles in the world Englishes paradigm (“the ‘norm-providing’ inner circle, where English is spoken as a native language…, the ‘norm-developing’ outer circle, where it is a second language…, and the ‘norm-dependent’ expanding circle, where it is a foreign language…” ) emphasizes the superiority of English as a native language over that as a second (ESL) or a foreign language (EFL) – which is subject to problematization. The paradigm assigns a standard English variety according to its “postcolonial political history” such as “a monolithic Indian English” (p. 21) that only allows some “pluralization of English” as far as they still conform, by and large, to the standard English in the inner circle countries and yet excludes “all those other Englishes which do not fit the paradigm of an emergent national standard” (p.22). This postcolonial understanding of the emerging Englishes here cannot explain satisfactorily the “…constant movement of linguistic, musical and cultural influences around the world” (p. 129) in hip-hop culture. In fact, the phenomena of language or musical borrowing, mixing, sampling, and making other Englishes in hip-hop challenge show that hip-hop rappers do not have to adhere to the standard English; rather, they make use of codes (languages) to express their unique identities that resist (or transgress) domination they critique through their performed lyrics (recall Kaya’s example of twisting German, Turkish, and American slang to oppose the official language).

\(^3\) In fact, I do not totally reject poststructuralist stance. See Mambu (2008a).
To comprehend problematizing (and now transgressive) spirit, it is also important to address Bakhtin’s (1981) insightful ideas. His thoughts open our minds to recognize the power of non-authoritative forces that can be utilized as tools for dialogues that challenge the authoritative forces.

2.8.2 From Bakhtin’s perspective to a critique of Paulo Freire and beyond

One of the central thoughts of a Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) philosophy of language is heteroglossia (p. 263). It is a field in which the contesting forces in discourse (centripetal versus centrifugal forces) intersperse and clash (p. 272 onwards). Centripetal forces contain an authoritative voice that usually necessitates people to obey or at least to attend to, e.g., the church dogma of divinity, the teacher’s rule, the Standard English (cf. Morson, 2004, p. 320). Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, constitute voices that attempt to question, challenge, or rebel against the authoritative voice. The centripetal force (also termed as “authoritative discourse”) and the “centrifugal force” (“internally persuasive discourse”) are not only at flux but also are at odds (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 272-273, 342).

To illustrate, let us consider this made-up anecdote. While a teacher agrees not to depend heavily on lesson books, s/he at times still succumbs to them. This suggests that in his/her process of “ideological becoming” – the process in which someone “[develops his/her] way of viewing the world, [his/her] system of ideas” (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5), including embracing the idea of not relying too much on textbooks – the teacher encounters two forces at work. The demand of adhering to textbooks represents the centripetal force of the school policy.
and the desire to liberate him-/herself from the mainstream practice concerning textbook use endorsed by the school policy reflects a degree of centrifugal force. Supposing the teacher intentionally rebels against the policy, then the “voice” of the policy is put in a lower position than his/her vision to venture out of the traditional practice of over-reliance on textbooks. However, when the teacher submits to the authority, then the centripetal force prevails.

Centripetal and centrifugal forces, within heteroglossia, are always in a state of flux. Likewise, the oppressors and the oppressed, going back to Freire (1990) again, cannot be interpreted without taking into account its fuzzy logic: the oppressed may become the oppressors. To illustrate, when an oppressed employee kills his oppressive employer (as the former oppressor), the employee becomes a new oppressor.

One of the criticisms toward Freire’s dual notions of “oppressors” and “the oppressed”, however, is that each represents a monolithic group of people: the former being the Brazilian government in his time (or the centripetal force), and the latter the illiterate people (or the centrifugal force) that need to be “civilized” or “cultured” by the former. He does address, and indeed envisions, other possible groups of people who can be both the subjugated and the tyrants at the same time. Nevertheless, he has not adequately addressed other subtle ramifications of despotism. Hypothetically (and realistically), for instance, a male breadwinner in a working-class community can be oppressed in his job but oppressive to his wife at home (Jary & Jary, 2000, p. 228).

Furthermore, by understanding the Bakhtinian heteroglossia, we are more aware of the danger of being double-minded or having “centripetal and centrifugal” personalities in a negative sense (e.g., being an oppressed person and an oppressor at the same time). The awareness forces us to address a myriad of open-ended questions like how to make people (more) aware of their being oppressed and an oppressor simultaneously. For instance, a mentor teacher was oppressed by her inattentive students in a class and yet gave relatively low marks to pre-service teachers who probably did better at teaching the same students in the class. However, we do not know how or whether it is necessary (or ethically viable) to let this mentor
teacher know about her being oppressed-versus-an-oppressor duality in herself. Still unknown are what strategies the pre-service teachers have to cope with this difficult-to-satisfy teacher: Being a bootlicker? Maintaining their own belief of high-quality teaching regardless of the mentor teacher’s comments? Vehemently confronting the mentor teacher for her “stinginess”? These are hard questions hardly, if at all, asked by applied linguists. Heteroglossic investigations open up more avenues and more uncharted lands in the study of second/foreign/additional language pedagogy.

Despite its enlightening framework, interpretations of heteroglossia may run the risk of being oversimplified as a dichotomous model to make sense of realities or single, monolithic entities, e.g., “good” vs. “bad”, “present” vs. “past”, “oppressors” vs. “oppressed”, Standard English vs. non-standard English(es). It may be possible to transcend beyond (or “transgress”) such simplistic dichotomies. For instance, beyond past and present is future. Beyond Standard English and non-standard English(es) is the use of L1 (first language) in foreign language classrooms (cf. Lin, 2005; Mambu, 2008b; and chapter 4 of this book). Besides that, even a “good” entity may have some “bad” characteristics, just as “the oppressed” can also be “an oppressor” at the same time. In essence, not questioning or problematizing dichotomous ways of thinking means confining thinking and language use into monologism.

Related to heteroglossia is Bakhtin’s notion that “language is inherently dialogic” (Greenleaf & Katz, 2004, p. 173). In contrast to dialogic language is monologic language which is purposely produced by people who do not want to open up dialogues to discuss or challenge their language. But even this monologic language (at least from its creators’ view) is open to people’s agreement and at the same time susceptible to yet other people’s doubts, questions, challenge, and utter disagreement. By implication, a monologic teacher does not give opportunities for his/her students to have real dialogues in their classrooms. S/he typically dominates the classroom discourse by lecturing without interacting with the students. In spite of his/her

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6 Some pre-service teachers’ complaints concerning their “stingy” mentor teacher in a high school in Salatiga brought this to my attention. These pre-service teachers, who were English Department students of Satya Wacana Christian University, did their teaching practicum from January to April 2009.
dominating discourse, outside of the classroom students dialogically may cherish, ignore, or mock the teacher’s teaching in their own hearts (i.e., intrapersonal dialogues) or with their friends (i.e., interpersonal dialogues).

Thus, extending the teacher’s discourse to a student’s own mind or his/her friends is an evidence of dialogism in the Bakhtinian sense. As Bakhtin (1981) says in a more profound way:

> The living utterance, having taken the meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (p. 276)

Using the analogies of teacher and students again, the teacher’s imposed monologic discourse is in fact a “living utterance” that has “meaning” at a certain event in a classroom. Despite its monologic nature, it does not live in a vacuum. Once it is broadcast to the students, the discourse revives a myriad of “living dialogic threads” that have existed even before the teacher says that utterance to the students and will go on as “an active participant in social dialogue” intrapersonally in the students’ minds as well as interpersonally among students or elsewhere.7

It is within the space of dialogism that CAL – CP[s] included – from the Bakhtinian perspective can be nurtured. An utterance, once it is accessible to people, can be rejected, critiqued, accepted, re-interpreted (or parodized), and refined. By implication, even a person claiming to be “critical” (me included) is not free from his/her own future criticism toward his/her own older self (through inner or

7 To clarify further, when the teacher imposes the polite use of “would you be so kind as to open the door, please?” on the students (cf. the centripetal force and monologism), students might as well already be familiar with less polite ways of requesting, e.g., “open the door!”, “Hi, you! Open it!” (cf. the centrifugal forces). When students accept happily the teacher’s lesson on the use of the polite form, they will use it for dialogues with respectable people in contexts other than classrooms. But when they find the lesson “silly”, they can parodize it in indecent ways dialogically with their friends, e.g., “would you be so kind as to kiss her ass, please?” (cf. also Lin & Luk, 2005, pp. 86ff).
intrapersonal dialogues over time); s/he is not free from other people’s criticism through interpersonal dialogues. This is the critical sense that Freire has yet to address adequately even though his understanding of dialogue (especially at the interpersonal plane – see section 2.7) bears some resemblance to that of Bakhtin.

Recalling Pennycook’s (2007) transgressivity on “[trespassing] on forbidden territory” and “attempt to think what should not be thought…” (p. 40), I would like to challenge the academia that often overlooks spirituality and regards it as a “forbidden territory” for intellectuality. Quite the reverse, Bakhtin’s (1981) heteroglossia allows spiritual voices (as “centrifugal forces” in view of the common academic world) and secular voices (as the “centripetal forces” to non-spiritually orientated scholars) to be equally and dialogically attended to.

2.8.3 Problematizing sectarian secularism and spiritualism

Let me now turn our attention to my personal contemplation: I know some spiritual insights that have influenced my life, but I do not (and certainly will never) know the totality of how being “critical” reflects spirituality.8

In a religiously affiliated educational institution in which I belong to at present, to be “critical” may be comprehended as putting “worldly” worldviews under the critical light of “heavenly” or “divine” dogmas. For religious people such as Christians, for example, the “truth” or “reality” that they believe in is that of “not [being] conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind, that [we] may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1, New King James Version [NKJV]; see Alkitab Holy Bible, 2005, italics original). In essence, for Christians the yardstick against which “truth” is measured is the Lord Jesus Christ who is believed to be “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, NKJV; see Alkitab Holy Bible, 2005).

And perhaps for some religious people who are often labeled as “fundamentalists”, democracy is not a truth but theocracy is. When every aspect in religious life must submit to the authority of the Divine Being, then democracy is not only “secular” but also scandalous, if not

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8 For simplicity’s sake, the notions of spirituality and religiosity are interchangeable here.
“adulterous”, because from-, for-, and by-the-people worldview puts people at the center of attention and the Divine Being at the periphery. Subtly and yet surely, nonetheless, a lot of scholars in social sciences and humanities oftentimes not only keep themselves at a distance from spiritual beliefs, but some even make religiosity or spirituality a scapegoat that disseminates allegedly unchallenged, monologic, or, in Bakhtin’s (1981) term, “authoritative discourse”. On the contrary, rejecting spiritual beliefs is an authoritative discourse of the current, modernistic academia that is susceptible to an epistemological fallacy.

As Taylor (2005) argues:

The postmodernist rejects modernism’s elevation of science above other possible perspective on the world. Western science, western religion, primitive magic, eastern mystical world views – each of these different systems of thought have their own, internal standards of what it is reasonable to believe. The modernist supposed that all belief systems should be measured against a single set of ‘rational’ standards, embodied in scientific method. The postmodernist allows that what is rational varies according to one’s perspective, and that Western science is simply one such perspective among many. …To the religious believer who feels the oppressive force of modernism’s rejection of the rationality of religious belief, this postmodern openness will come as a great relief…. (p. 70)

It is a great relief that postmodernism, in other words, makes it possible for spiritual insights such as that of Christianity, Islam, Hindu, or Buddha are accommodated in the academia, especially in foreign language education. More specifically, the religious worldview constitutes a yardstick for spiritual people against which other non-spiritual worldviews are critically discerned and measured.

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9 Epistemology: “theory of knowledge; the branch of philosophy that inquires into the nature and the possibility of knowledge. It deals also with the scope and limits of human knowledge, and with how it is acquired and possessed. It also investigates related notions, such as perception, memory, proof, evidence, belief and certainty” (Mautner, 2000, p. 174).
Thus, being spiritually critical means having spiritual discernment guided by the Divine Being. Nebulous as it may sound, the discernment has actually two edges: spiritual and humanistic. While the former remains largely within the scope of someone’s invisible “heart” or conscience, the latter can be perceived by written or spoken reflections and actions – both of which mirror again the spiritual values (e.g., love and compassion).

Luke (2004) contends that being critical “entails an epistemological Othering and ‘doubling’ of the world – a sense of being beside oneself or outside of oneself in another epistemological, discourse, and political space than one typically would inhabit”. This can be made sense of in at least two ways: “as an intellectual, deconstructive, textual, and cognitive analytic task and as a form of embodied political anger, alienation, and alterity” (p. 26). To be “Othered”, i.e., “object of racialized, colored and classed, and gendered and sexualized power” (p. 28), means to be marginalized from the mainstream or dominant society. By having the empathy toward the Other, critical educators and learners will have the opportunity to experience how it feels to be marginalized.

Spiritual people have in fact been “othered” by secular academia that regards spirituality as illogical, absurd, and irrelevant to the advancement of knowledge, science, and technology. On the other hand, those claiming to be spiritual have also marginalized themselves in that they feel reluctant (or “too holy”) to mingle with those considered non-spiritual. Even worse, some “spiritual” authorities have oppressed those of not the same degree or path of spirituality, including those in the academia. Galileo Galilei encountered vehement rejection from the Rome Catholic Church because he accepted Copernican heliocentric system – a system which believes that the earth and other planets revolve around the sun and criticizes the belief that the earth is the center of the universe (see Galileo, 2009). It is therefore desirable that CPs keep the balance between the secularism and spiritualism. That is, “doubling of the world” should be in critical educators’ spirit so even though they come from a certain religious inclination, be it spiritual or secular, they do not marginalize those from the “other(ed)” world(view). In chapter 8, some of spiritual issues in CPs will be addressed more fully.
A more complex way than “doubling of the world” beyond the secularism-spiritualism continuum is delving into one’s own epistemological stances, to which I will turn in the next section. In fact, such stances go beyond (or transgress) simplistic dichotomous models of understanding the world (e.g., recall again “good” vs. “bad” and “secular” vs. “spiritual”). They also enrich Bakhtin’s visionary view of heteroglossia that celebrates the multiplicity of voices, especially in one’s own mind.

2.8.4 Problematizing one’s own epistemological stances

Apart from Pennycook’s ideas, in my opinion, promoting the problematizing spirit can be done by identifying where we fit in these tentative four epistemological categories: (1) I know that I know; (2) I know that I don’t know; (3) I don’t know that I know; and (4) I don’t know that I don’t know. They are not necessarily sequenced as such. In fact, as the discussion unfolds, these four aspects can be made sense of variably with mine being one among other possibilities.

I know that I know. To illustrate, the trait of knowing what people have in mind is attributable exclusively with what religious people trust in: an all-knowing divine being such Allah in Islam or Jesus in Christianity. This stance may seem arrogant when people (not a God) claim to know that they know. Pedagogically, the arrogance may be seen when a teacher claims to know that he or she is the source of knowledge, thus positioning students as inferior and dependent on the teachers. This imbalanced power relation between teachers and students is also probably best encapsulated in the following category.

I don’t know that I don’t know. Sometime ago, my academic colleague, Purwanti Kusumaningtyas (personal communication, 27 July 2007), was furious when in an international conference EFL (English as a Foreign Language)/language teachers questioned her stance that she had trusted in her students. Purwanti believes that students may know things she may or may not know and therefore allow students to raise their voices. Furthermore, taking a poststructuralist position allows her to encourage students in her literature and popular culture classes to express their truths. The teachers participating in the conferences, however, vehemently opposed Purwanti’s stance. They believe
that they are the main authority and the students are subservient to them. Largely absent from such teachers are other truths that they do not regard as truths. Students’ truths are subordinate to their own authoritarian truth. At best, furthermore, the teachers may know there is post-structuralism but apparently they do not want such a school of thought to be followed by their students. At worst, they do not know such a philosophy at all and harshly criticize educators like Purwanti. In short, they don’t know that they don’t know.

_I don’t know that I know._ This is much “better” than the previous two, even though it is not free from problems. I believe there are committed educators who are putting much effort into transforming and becoming agents of change in their learning communities. Leaving from the academia (as pre- or in-service teachers), they will bring the remnants of enthusiasm and determination to apply some pedagogical options at their disposal. After some time apart from university life, however, they may not be as well informed academically as when they are under- or postgraduate students when they are forced to read extensively and the university library provides abundant references. In such a situation, it is possible that these teachers apply what they have already known without knowing the most cutting-edge research findings and newly coined terminologies on pedagogies. To some extent, what they apply may intersect with and support researchers’ findings, without these teachers knowing what the findings are. As such, these teachers may be euphoric if scholars say to them that although the teachers do not know the most recent findings, they are still in the state of knowing, albeit limited. This is mitigation leads to another meaning of danger. The teachers are in a critical situation, in that they are supposed to keep problematizing their pedagogical practices by reflections (i.e., _praxis_) in view of relevant and current literature. This notion of praxis will be addressed further under the Freirean analyses (see 4.2.9 below, for example).

_I know that I don’t (always) know._ This is perhaps the “humblest” stance. As Pennycook (1999) puts it,

[c]ritical approaches to TESOL, then, would do well to retain a constant skepticism, a constant questioning about the types of knowledge, theory, practice, or praxis they operate with, and an

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understanding that, as Spivak (1993) suggests, the notion of critical also needs to imply an awareness ‘of the limits of knowing’ (p. 25).

… [T]he relationship to theory must always be a questioning one, never settling too long on some domain as if the field had finally arrived at a ‘critical theory of everything’. (p. 345)

Critical educators should therefore be aware their limits of knowing and be too comfortable with their present stance, no matter how confidently articulated their critical arguments are.

2.9 So, what are Critical Pedagogies?

In line with Pennycook’s (1999) standpoint above regarding critical approaches to TESOL is that of Norton and Toohey (2004b) who argue that
critical pedagogy cannot be a unitary set of texts, beliefs, convictions, or assumptions. [Authors in ‘Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning’ book] describe local situations, problems, and issues and see responsiveness to the particularities of the local as important in the equitable and democratic approaches they are trying to develop. In seeking to resist totalizing discourses about critical teaching, subjects, and strategies for progressive action, we have used the term critical pedagogies…. (p. 2, italics in original)

Thus, a working definition of CPs in language pedagogy is, according to Norton and Toohey (2004b), pedagogies that aim at “[considering] how, in diverse sites of language education, practices might be modified, changed, developed, or abandoned in efforts to support learners, learning, and social change” (p. 2).

This, of course, may trigger multi-interpretations as well. For instance, when “equitable and democratic approaches” have been taken-for-granted constructs in present CPs, these run the risk of being authoritarian. Recall how the United States of America, commonly associated with the “West” (although the notions of West and East are now already obsolete), imposes democracy through tyrannies in Iraq, at least since 2001, led by the former President George W. Bush.
Such a paradox is even more obvious in educational contexts. To illustrate, initially motivated by her noble intention to introduce critical pedagogical practices in a Master of Arts in Teaching English as a second language (MATESL) to a group of in-service elementary and secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong, Angel Lin (2004) then lamented over her failure to notice her taken-for-granted “common sense” concerning “acceptable teaching styles” until one student raised up the issue to her. As she said:

I thanked Tammy for letting me know her classmates’ and her own feelings toward my teaching style, of which I was so uncritical all along… I had always expected every student… to live up to those norms of traditional Chinese teachers – that is, to be punctual, to do the assigned readings…, to answer the teacher’s questions about the readings… I had reproduced the traditional institutional forms of disciplinary power in my own “critical” classroom… Tammy and her classmates did have a valid point; they wanted to be treated as mature, responsible adults who were agents of their own learning and who could determine their own ways of learning. They had every right to resist being put into subject positions which were subordinate to my disciplinary power.... (pp. 283-284)

Lin’s confession reflects her humble attitude that encapsulates my understanding of the notion “I know that I don’t (or didn’t) (always) know” (see 2.8.4 above). This is certainly the value that critical educators need to develop if they want to implement constructive self-criticism (thus, self-problematization).

Regarding the scope of CPs particularly in foreign language education, CPs encourage both language educators and learners to help themselves uncover taken-for-granted oppressive realities, in its broadest sense of the phrase, as reflected in multimodal texts (spoken, written, non-verbal pictures, graffiti, videos, art works such as statues, music genres, song lyrics, etc.) within or across languages and find ways to resist subtle oppressions, multimodally, in the areas of culture, gender, language teaching and learning, language assessment, and
language teacher education, among others (see a collection of articles in Norton & Toohey, 2004a, that discuss these areas in further depth).

2.10 Final remarks

Nuanced interpretations of being “critical” have enriched (as well as complicated) our understanding of critical pedagogies. CPs encompasses interrelated dimensions such as cognitive, philosophical, sociocultural, political, ideological, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Critical thinking which pushes learners to think beyond depositing knowledge (see 2.2 above) and Hall’s (2001) critical literacies (see 2.3) may predominantly fit in the cognitive dimension. Critical reading (see 2.4), critical theory (see 2.5), and CDA (see 2.6) explore sociocultural, political, and ideological dimensions. They shed more light on issues such as power relations that often put those with less power at a disadvantage and allow those with more power to reproduce the status quo which only benefit them. Benevolent as it may sound, both critical reading and CDA are limited to interpretive/reflective/theoretical level and do not necessarily translate their interpretations to real actions in any society. The traditional Freirean critical pedagogy (see 2.7) compensates this limitation by its praxis: reflection and action. However, they often label a certain group of people (e.g., “landowners”) as malevolent (or “oppressors”) and another group of people (e.g., “peasants”) as being “oppressed”. Such monolithic categorizations are certainly subject to criticism within more transgressive pedagogy (see 2.8.1) espoused by Pennycook which puts emphasis on problematizing practices (see 2.8). My own personal way of understanding CPs attempts to problematize the secular academia which is reluctant to include (or prevent itself from) spirituality as a critical dimension in its own right (see 2.8.3 above and chapter 8 below).

Apart from concluding this chapter, it is also important to address unchallenged political vocabulary that at times positions CP proponents in “the moral high ground”. Such vocabulary considerably borrows from the language of “proletarian protest” such as “struggle, emancipation, … liberation, … revolutionary, radical…” (Johnston, 1999, p. 562, italics original) or “empowerment” (p. 559, italics original). While these words may at first show teachers’ or learners’ concern over, let’s
say, socio-economical injustice in a society, they are frequently either too abstract to implement or too elusive to achieve. As Johnston further contends,

I feel that critical pedagogy would do well to exercise moderation in its use of language. There will be no revolution – at least not one led by university professors; and I believe critical pedagogy would find a broader hearing if it did not require its adherents to dress themselves up linguistically as Che Guevara. (p. 563)

Moreover, with a problematizing spirit, a notion like “empowerment” needs to be dialogically made sense of and constructed by teachers and students alike. Otherwise, its senses may be limited to what is politically “correct” according to the teacher him-/herself.

I also agree with Johnston’s (1999) argument that “… teaching is about the moral relation between teacher and students; that is, the essence of teaching is moral, not political, in nature…” (p. 561, emphases added). If CPs are trapped into establishing political relations only, teachers will become compartmentalized or sectarians who show their favoritism toward students sharing the same “radical” political views such as a strong agreement with either homo-/bi-sexuality or pure heterosexuality. Therefore, according to Johnston, moral relation should be “of the juxtaposition of values” (p. 561).

From my perspective, this moral relation means finding universally ethical ways of how people in a community can live together (in juxtaposition) without too much friction despite their opposing political views (or values). To me, problematizing practices should not be casting more doubt on someone else’s views by bluntly attacking him/her personally. Instead, such practices should mean casting more doubt on one’s own view that always believes in expressing harsh criticism – no matter how “right” the message may be – to other people. When moral relation is more at stake, unnecessary hatred among members of a community should be avoided as much as possible.

Finally, it is probably moral relation that should bind all other dimensions in CPs. People may have various cognitive, philosophical, sociocultural, political, ideological, or spiritual inclinations but it is the
moral and ethical dimension (cf. Johnston, 1999) that attempts to find universal values to transcend animosity due to opposing views in other dimensions. The Freirean conscientization is the impetus for looking into one’s conscience – the internal source of people’s morality and ethics. That said, even conscience is in many ways very much influenced by one’s worldview(s) that is/are already internalized through extensive exposures to external sources (i.e., other people). This will be revisited in further depth in chapter 8.

In the following chapter, the spirit of CPs will be more specifically situated as a curriculum paradigm within EFL learning, teaching, and literacies, especially in Indonesia.