

THE COLLECTIVE SOCIAL DILEMMAS IN THE SONGS OF LAURA PAUSINI: CORPUS ANALYSIS AND THE USE POSSIBILITIES OF THE SONGS IN THE SPANISH CLASSES AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

*OS DILEMAS SOCIAIS COLETIVOS NAS CANÇÕES DE LAURA PAUSINI: ANÁLISE
DE CORPUS E POSSIBILIDADES DE USO NAS AULAS DE ESPANHOL COMO
LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA*

*LOS DILEMAS SOCIALES COLECTIVOS EN LAS CANCIONES DE LAURA
PAUSINI: ANÁLISIS DE CORPUS Y POSIBILIDADES DE USO EN LAS CLASES DE
ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA*



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ABSTRACT: This study analyzed the content of a corpus of songs in Spanish by the singer Laura Pausini to understand how Spanish as a foreign language/SFL teachers can engage their students in discussions about collective social dilemmas. Supported by Critical Pedagogy, the analysis of 140 songs revealed their didactic potential for SFL learning that advances linguistic competence toward critical learning. The dilemmas that can be used in the classroom include: alienation; friendship; conflicts; conquest; cooperation; environment; dignity; diversity; empathy; hope; wars; equality; social invisibility; justice; freedom; struggle; individual and collective change; an ideal world; peace; poverty; prejudice; racism; resistance; respect for differences; transformation; and unity. This study approaches critical pedagogy, foreign language teaching, and the textual genre of songs. In practice, it prioritizes pedagogical actions that involve sociocultural aspects of the language to develop the learner's critical awareness while simultaneously consolidating their linguistic knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Critical Pedagogy. Foreign Language Teaching. Songs. Laura Pausini. Collective Social Dilemmas.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisou o conteúdo do corpus das canções em espanhol da cantora Laura Pausini para compreender como o professor de espanhol como língua estrangeira/ELE pode engajar seus alunos na discussão sobre dilemas sociais coletivos. Apoiado na Pedagogia Crítica, a análise de 140 canções mostrou seu potencial didático para uma aprendizagem de ELE que avance a competência linguística em direção à aprendizagem crítica. Os dilemas que podem ser usados em sala de aula são: alienação; amizade; conflitos; conquista; cooperação; meio ambiente; dignidade; diversidade; empatia; esperança; guerras; igualdade; invisíveis sociais; justiça; liberdade; luta; mudança individual e coletiva; mundo ideal; paz; pobreza; preconceito; racismo; resistência; respeito às diferenças; transformação; união. Este estudo aproxima a pedagogia crítica, o ensino de idioma estrangeiro e o gênero textual das canções. Na prática, prioriza ações pedagógicas que envolvem aspectos socioculturais da linguagem para desenvolver a criticidade do indivíduo, concomitante à consolidação do seu conhecimento linguístico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Pedagogia crítica. Ensino de língua estrangeira. Canções. Laura Pausini. Dilemas sociais coletivos.

RESUMEN: Este estudio analizó el contenido del corpus de las canciones en español de la cantante Laura Pausini para comprender cómo el profesor de español como lengua extranjera/ELE puede involucrar a sus alumnos en la discusión sobre dilemas sociales colectivos. Apoyado en la Pedagogía Crítica, el análisis de 140 canciones mostró su potencial didáctico para un aprendizaje del ELE que avance desde la competencia lingüística hacia un aprendizaje crítico. Los dilemas que pueden ser utilizados en el aula son: alienación; amistad; conflictos; conquista; cooperación; medio ambiente; dignidad; diversidad; empatía; esperanza; guerras; igualdad; invisibles sociales; justicia; libertad; lucha; cambio colectivo; paz; pobreza; prejuicio; racismo; resistencia; respeto a diferencias; transformación; unión. Este estudio acerca la pedagogía crítica, la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y el género textual de las canciones. En la práctica, prioriza acciones pedagógicas que involucren aspectos socioculturales del lenguaje para desarrollar la criticidad del individuo, al mismo tiempo que consolida su conocimiento lingüístico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Pedagogía crítica. Enseñanza de lengua extranjera. Canciones. Laura Pausini. Dilemas sociales colectivos.

Introduction

Foreign language teaching grounded in the critical pedagogy approach is concerned with the relationship between language learning and social change (Norton; Toohey, 2004). In this perspective, learners cease to be merely passive recipients of a linguistic system and begin to question their assumptions regarding sensitive issues and realities that demand urgent change at the local or global level. Language classes thus become genuine spaces of communication in which learners engage with issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, and discourse (Pennycook, 2010). This approach is essential for the development of a critical learner capable of confronting the challenges imposed by the current sociohistorical context (Montemor, 2013).

In order for teachers to raise students' awareness of global issues, foster debate, and introduce new perspectives and knowledge, this study argues that songs have didactic potential to promote the teaching and learning of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL), advancing linguistic competence toward critical learning.

To support this argument, the study proposes a focused examination of the songs of the internationally renowned singer Laura Pausini, whose extensive Spanish-language repertoire is capable of engaging learners and encouraging reflection on social, historical, and political aspects of everyday life in the societies or countries where her songs are heard. Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: what readings do Laura Pausini's songs allow that can bring SFL learners closer to collective social dilemmas?

To answer this question, the general objective was defined as analyzing the content of a corpus composed of Laura Pausini's Spanish-language songs in order to understand how SFL teachers can engage students in discussions about collective social dilemmas. To achieve this general objective, the following specific objectives are proposed: (a) to describe how the teaching and learning process of SFL can serve as a space for reflection on collective social dilemmas; (b) to describe how songs can contribute to SFL teaching that moves beyond cumulative and conditioning learning toward critical learning; and (c) to present and describe how the classroom use of Laura Pausini's Spanish song repertoire enables exposure, interaction, and transformation of SFL learners in relation to collective social dilemmas.

As a research strategy, a qualitative data analysis adapted from Flores (1994) was adopted. Content analysis was initially conducted on a corpus composed of 140 Spanish-

language songs by the singer. The search for themes that evoked collective social dilemmas resulted in a final corpus of 20 songs.

This study is organized as follows: the theoretical framework discusses critical foreign language learning and the use of songs for this purpose. Next, the methodological pathway is presented, including the justification for selecting Laura Pausini's songs, the corpus used in the research, and the analytical procedures. Subsequently, the research findings are presented and discussed, followed by the final considerations.

It is believed that this study makes a theoretical contribution by bringing critical pedagogy closer to foreign language teaching and to the textual genre of songs. This articulation also offers a practical contribution by prioritizing pedagogical actions that involve sociocultural aspects of language, with the aim of fostering critical development—critical consciousness (Freire, 1996)—concomitantly with the consolidation of linguistic knowledge.

Critical foreign language learning

This study is based on the assumption that learning is a social process situated within specific cultural and historical contexts (Norton; Toohey, 2004, 2011). This approach represents a shift in perspective by viewing learners not merely as individuals who must internalize linguistic systems of knowledge, but as members differentially positioned within a historical and social collectivity who use language as a dynamic tool (Norton; Toohey, 2011).

More specifically, the critical pedagogy approach (Freire, 1996; Giroux, 1992) applied to foreign language teaching argues that second language education is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between language learning and social change (Norton; Toohey, 2004). Language, therefore, is not simply a means of expression, but a practice through which individuals construct new understandings of themselves, their surroundings, their history, and their possibilities for the future (Norton; Toohey, 2004).

Language teaching grounded in this approach proposes a process in which teachers and students are no longer seen as passive senders and receivers, but rather as co-constructors of a genuine space of communication (Pennycook, 2010). Within this space, the teacher should act as a facilitator or provocateur, helping learners become more aware of and critical toward their own assumptions (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 1998). The teacher's challenge is to ensure an environment that enables students' transformation—that is, one that changes their lives—and encourages them to discover a new and more elaborated reality (Bunduki; Higgs,



2017).

The language teacher brings a renewed way of thinking about language that moves away from a persistent emphasis on structure and system and instead embraces a notion of practice (Pennycook, 2010). Given that contemporary cultural, social, geopolitical, and linguistic thought is dominated by the celebration of multiplicity, hybridity, and diversity, teachers must be capable of developing classroom pedagogical practices that demand a critical problematization of applied linguistics and seek to connect learners to issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology, and discourse (Pennycook, 2010).

Critical pedagogy in language teaching can make a significant contribution to learners' critical development. Critical development is a necessary skill for addressing challenges such as globalization and the widespread presence of digital technology (Montemor, 2013). "A conscientized person has a different understanding of History and of their role within it. They refuse to accommodate, mobilize themselves, and organize to change the world" (Freire, 1996, p. 73, our translation). This perspective entails viewing learners not merely as objects of the educational process, but above all as subjects of it (Freire, 2006).

The process of critical learning is triggered by learners' contact with a disorienting dilemma. Such a dilemma must generate a significant level of unease and disturbance, sufficient for individuals to realize that their frame of reference is inadequate to explain what they have experienced (Howie; Bagnall, 2013).

In the context of experience development (Dewey, 1986), a disorienting dilemma represents a disruption of individuals' habitual actions and values caused by encounters with challenging situations—not only negative or painful ones, but those that allow investigation and the search for solutions, thereby opening pathways to new experiences and the construction of new knowledge (Dewey, 1986).

These dilemmas take on a social character when they are understood as collective concerns perceived by professionals who are more critical and attentive to issues that go beyond personal development and the fulfillment of the interests of prevailing social and economic systems (Brunstein; King, 2018; Gambrell, 2016). According to Simpson and Willer (2015), social dilemmas are situations in which individual behavior is oriented toward collective outcomes, whether in everyday contexts or in efforts aimed at global change.

Therefore, it is argued that language teaching is also a means through which individuals can be exposed to disorienting dilemmas and prepared for urgent social change.



O’Sullivan (2012) contends that the profound changes ahead require more than a thinking and responsible individual who transforms merely to become part of the workforce. A deep shift in worldview is necessary—one that prepares human beings for vulnerabilities that include the very survival of the species.

The next section addresses the use of songs in SFL classes and demonstrates how they can contribute to the critical development of learners.

Use of songs in SFL classe

The use of songs is a successful instructional resource for the teaching and learning of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) due to their broad communicative potential (Calvo; Romero, 2015; Fonseca-Mora; Villamarín; Grao, 2015; Gil Toresano, 2001; Hornillos; Roa, 2015; Jiménez; Martín; Puigdevall, 2009; López, 2005).

Beyond the development of listening comprehension skills, vocabulary expansion, and grammatical mastery, songs carry cultural and emotional elements that motivate learning, as they are capable of translating individuals’ realities and thus function as essential input in the process of meaningful learning (Calvo; Romero, 2015; Gil Toresano, 2001; Hornillos; Roa, 2015).

Current pedagogical proposals for SFL teaching confirm and emphasize the need to address sociocultural aspects in the classroom in order to achieve linguistic competence; however, many teaching materials restrict these aspects to ethnic stereotypes and fail to advance the promotion of intercultural dialogue (Pizarro, 2016).

Such dialogue is also essential for learners to become more aware of and critical toward their own assumptions—beliefs, values, and worldviews (Mezirow, 1997)—as they engage with themes related to their own reality and everyday life. In this process, learners move beyond being mere repositories of vocabulary and grammatical rules and become individuals concerned with global issues, capable of debating them and presenting new perspectives, thereby generating new knowledge.

Because song lyrics carry a valuable sociocultural informational load (Gil Toresano, 2001) and have the potential to foster environments of interaction among people (Fonseca-Mora; Villamarín; Grao, 2015), teachers can take advantage of this potential to reveal and stimulate discussions on socially reflective themes (López, 2005), whether of local or global

relevance, allowing SFL learners to reflect on language learning from a sociocultural perspective.

For critical learning to be possible, teachers must exercise care when selecting songs (Gil Toresano, 2001). In addition to pedagogical relevance and alignment with the lesson theme to arouse students' interest, teachers should consider the context in which both learners and the song are situated. They should also bring learners closer to the artist and the theme of the song by providing information about the musical genre, popularity, and representativeness of the song or the artist (Gil Toresano, 2001).

Information about the singer and the song can not only motivate learners but also facilitate their understanding of the themes addressed in the work. By activating stereotypes and background knowledge (Gil Toresano, 2001), songs allow learners' beliefs to be affected (Fonseca-Mora *et al.*, 2015). This process enables teachers to help SFL learners rethink and re-signify these beliefs, leading to contextualized and meaningful learning that is less conditioning and cumulative.

The next section presents the methodological pathway developed for conducting the research.

Methodological pathway

The first subsection of the methodological pathway provides a brief overview of the life and work of the Italian singer Laura Pausini, justifying the potential use of her songs in SFL classes from a critical perspective. The second subsection explains the corpus used in the research analysis, and the third subsection presents the procedures employed for corpus analysis.

Laura Pausini

The title of the film *A Star Is Born* could serve as a metaphor for the life of the Italian singer, songwriter, producer, and international television personality Laura Pausini. Laura was born on May 16, 1974, in the small commune of Faenza—although she was raised in the commune of Solarolo, both located in the province of Ravenna, Italy. From the age of eight,

she sang in bars accompanied by her father, also a singer, Fabrizio Pausini. At the age of 13, she recorded her first album, *I sogni di Laura*, and at 18, in 1993, she won the prestigious Sanremo Music Festival with the song *La Solitudine*, which propelled her to international fame. The peak of her career occurred in 2021 with an Academy Award nomination.

Numerically, by 2021, Laura Pausini had sold over 75 million copies worldwide and ranked among the top record holders for album sales. She has received numerous international sales certifications, including more than 170 platinum records, 50 gold records, and five diamond records. Among her most notable awards are: an Academy Award nomination (2021); a Golden Globe Award (2021); a Satellite Award (2021); a Grammy Award (2006); four Latin Grammy Awards (2005, 2007, 2009, 2018); and four World Music Awards (1995, 2003, 2007, 2014).

These figures reflect a high capacity for communication with her peers, as evidenced by her numerous collaborations with prominent figures in the Brazilian and international pop music scenes, such as Andrea Bocelli, Kylie Minogue, Ennio Morricone, Michael Bublé, James Blunt, Charles Aznavour, Alejandro Sanz, Pablo Alborán, Madonna, Diane Warren, Phil Collins, Ivete Sangalo, Gilberto Gil, Sandy, Simone and Simaria, among many others.

Laura Pausini is the only singer to release the same album in two languages: Italian and Spanish. She is fluent in five languages—Italian, Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French—which she uses both to compose the main songs of her albums and to communicate with her more than 3.7 million followers on Instagram. This communicative competence enhances the global reach and mobility of her work and demonstrates a high level of empathy. As Laura Pausini herself states (Araujo, 2021, n.p., our translation): “On social media, I like people to understand everything I write, because since I speak a lot, I also write a lot. I translate everything most of the time, and only when I cannot do so do I send screenshots of the caption to my team.”

Rohmanelli (2021, n.p.) explains that Laura Pausini’s success lies in her strong sense of empathy and her embodiment of “Italianity,” described as “those Italian values that are loved all over the world, spread by the millions of Italians who emigrated in search of work and survival, dissolving borders of all kinds: Italian melody, bel canto, friendliness, genuineness, family, and sincerity.” Moreover, contemporary criticism praises her simplicity, her sense of human responsibility within the global context, and her voice (Elías, 2018).

All of these attributes influence her work. At the beginning of her career, Laura Pausini sang about adolescent love and its disappointments (Elías, 2018). With a 28-year



career and a repertoire of 140 Spanish-language songs, her work continues to exalt love in its many forms, as well as themes such as human equality and freedom; courage and strength for individual and collective change; hope and struggle to transform the future; and individual and environmental concerns. These themes are particularly fruitful for the presentation and discussion of collective social dilemmas. Her new album is scheduled for release in October 2026.

As language and culture go hand in hand in songs (Navarro, 2020), the themes of her Spanish-language repertoire can be explored by SFL teachers to engage learners in discussions that go beyond linguistic knowledge, helping them reflect on the social, historical, and political dimensions of everyday life in the societies or countries where her songs are heard.

Corpus used in the research

A corpus is defined as the set of texts intended for analysis (Camargo; Justo, 2013). Accordingly, the corpus analyzed in this study consists of 140 Spanish-language songs released by Laura Pausini across 14 albums between 1994 and 2020.

The identification of the albums was carried out through the Discogs website² and cross-checked with the personal collection of the author of this research. The song titles and lyrics were copied from the Letras website³ and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document (.doc format). All lyrics were read carefully by the author in order to correct any potential spelling or accentuation errors. The original CD booklets were also used as supporting material.

All songs were read and selected according to the following criterion: the song should address a theme, conflict, or tension—in short, present a dilemma capable of guiding the individual toward personal transformation and transformation of the community in which they are embedded.

After two careful readings of the 140 songs, the analytical corpus was reduced to 20 songs that address themes capable of generating discussion of broader, collective, and social issues. The songs analyzed are presented in Table 1.

² See: <https://www.discogs.com>. Accessed on: Dec. 23, 2025.

³ Song lyrics website. Available at: <https://www.letras.mus.br>. Accessed on: Dec. 23, 2025.

Table 1 – Songs composing the research analytical corpus

Album	Album year	Songs analyzed
Laura Pausini	1994	<i>Gente; El valor que no se ve</i>
<i>Las Cosas Que Vives</i>	1996	<i>Las cosas que vives; Escucha a tu corazón; Que historia es; La voz; El mundo que soñé</i>
<i>Mi Respuesta</i>	1998	<i>Una gran verdad</i>
<i>Entre tú y mil mares</i>	2000	<i>Somos hoy; Fíate de mí; Viviré; Jenny</i>
<i>Escucha</i>	2004	<i>Donde el aire es ceniza</i>
<i>Yo Canto</i>	2006	<i>En los jardines donde nadie va</i>
<i>Primavera Anticipada</i>	2008	<i>La geografía de mi camino; Hermana Tierra</i>
<i>Similares</i>	2015	<i>Similares</i>
<i>Hazte Sentir</i>	2018	<i>Fantástico; El valor de seguir adelante</i>
<i>Yo sí</i>	2020	<i>Yo sí</i>

Source: Primary research data (2025).

It should be noted that Pausini is the author or co-author of all the songs listed, except for *Gente*, *El valor que no se ve*, and *En los jardines donde nadie va*.

The next subsection presents the strategies adopted for the analysis of the research corpus.

Corpus analysis procedures

Content analysis was selected as the method for examining the corpus. Data analysis is a process that involves identifying units of meaning within a text and examining the relationships among them and in relation to the whole (Flores, 1994). To guide this process, a qualitative data analysis strategy adapted from Flores (1994) was adopted.

Javier Gil Flores is a Spanish scholar and researcher in the field of Education at the Department of Research Methods and Educational Diagnosis at the University of Seville. The general qualitative data analysis process proposed by Flores (1994) consists of data reduction—through reading, segmentation of the text into units of meaning, and grouping—followed by data presentation and the formulation of conclusions.

The next subsection presents the results derived from the interpretative analysis of the content of the selected songs.

Which collective social dilemmas are evoked by Laura Pausini's songs?

As a reminder, social dilemmas are situations in which individual behavior is oriented toward collective outcomes, whether in everyday contexts or in actions aimed at global change (Simpson; Willer, 2015). It was observed that all of the artist's albums include at least one song that evokes such situations. Of the 14 albums analyzed, only four did not include such songs, as they consisted of greatest-hits compilations or were dedicated to specific themes, such as Christmas. Therefore, it can be concluded that this thematic concern is a consistent feature of the artist's work rather than an isolated manifestation at a particular moment in her career or an underrepresented aspect of her repertoire.

The first two songs analyzed, *Gente* and *El valor que no se ve*, evoke concern for the individual, for *people*—that is, ordinary individuals who must seek within themselves the strength to change something about themselves and about the world. Change is not portrayed as something ethereal, but as grounded and dependent on people (“No somos ángeles, no nos caímos del cielo / Gente que quiere un mundo sincero, la gente corriente de cualquier ciudad”). The awakening to transformation knows no limits and initially occurs within the individual, as they question their assumptions regarding a given dilemma (“Hay días en los que la vida se llena de porqués”; “Busca una salida”; “Busca en tu interior”), so that they may later act locally or globally (“De una nueva vida a todo el mundo”).

This orientation toward change takes place through unity among people, struggle, effort, risk-taking, achievement, and realization, with change itself as the desired outcome, always permeated by hope. This hope is represented by the repeated use of the verb *ver* in the future indicative (*verás*): “La gente que unida lo cambiará / Unida lo cambiará, lo verás / Gente que luchará / Unida lo intentará, lo verás / Gente que arriesgará / Unida lo logrará, lo verás / Gente que cambiará.”

The need for cooperation and collective action to promote change continues to be addressed in the songs *Las cosas que vives*, *La voz*, and *Yo sí*. Friendship and trust are portrayed as timeless values, regardless of whether we are “en la misma calle”—a reference to local action—because, in fact, we are “bajo el mismo cielo,” which implies the capacity to effect regional or global change. Socially invisible individuals—those whom no one sees, punished by the sun and located “en los campos de cultivo, de olivos y de espigas”—also possess a voice and must be given spaces in which their voices can be heard.

The songs *Escucha a tu corazón* and *En los jardines donde nadie va* revisit the themes



presented in *Gente* and *El valor que no se ve* and introduce a new and crucial element for critical development: empathy. Empathy is a prosocial and solidaristic emotion that explains phenomena such as altruism and engagement in social transformation (Thoits, 1989); for this reason, it deserves particular attention in language teaching practices. Specifically, the song *En los jardines donde nadie va* addresses the work of Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Up to this stage of her career, the songs address the importance of individuals perceiving themselves as agents of change, as exemplified in *La geografía de mi camino*. In the song *Qué historia es*, dilemmas emerge with greater intensity in verses such as “que las cosas no son fáciles en esta sociedad / todo tiene un límite que corta toda nuestra libertad, ¿quién nos soltará? / grito de rabia y pregunto por qué, nunca termina todo el dolor que se ve.” These lines express conflicts and tensions perceived by the individual, who nevertheless remains confused in the search for answers to newly emerging questions.

The cry of anger is part of a process of self-analysis, which belongs to the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1997). This answer has not yet come (“Mas la respuesta no sé”); it remains an unknown, and further questions arise that challenge the prevailing socio-historical-cultural model and disorient the individual: “No queda dignidad, el mal es cosa lógica por su normalidad,” leaving her without hope: “¿quién se salvará?”.

In the song *El mundo que soñé*, the artist makes explicit her idealized world and exposes all the disorienting dilemmas that have afflicted her thus far, while calling for engagement toward change. Lies, hypocrisy, suffering, death, prejudice, racism, and wars are presented as collective social dilemmas. The artist questions how such realities can be ignored, how one can remain indifferent and passive without being moved by these issues, and calls for greater justice, equity, love, and peace.

In *Una gran verdad*, the use of verbs in the future tense recovers a hope filled with uncertainty regarding an idealized world envisioned by the artist, in which there will be no wrongdoing. To achieve this, she calls for struggle, attempt, risk (“salta el foso y ven ya, tú salta ahora”), and resistance (“donde resistir es cosa de gigantes”). The reference to resistance also appears in the song *Viviré* (“No me rendiré nunca, no, mis cadenas romperé”) and in *Yo sí* (“lograrás resistir”) and is highly significant, as education for critical consciousness must privilege resistance to reference models crystallized by the industrial and scientifically modern worldview; to knowledge that renders individuals incapable of being conscious of whom and what this knowledge serves; and to patriarchy and imperialism (O’Sullivan, 2012).

Recognizing the power structures imposed by hegemonic social, economic, cultural,



and political systems in contemporary society requires individuals to have a liberating (Freire, 1996), transformative (Mezirow, 1997), and critical education (Gambrell, 2016). To this end, individuals must free themselves from the constraints of alienation—another key concept mentioned in the song *Fíate de mí*. In the song, it is stated that “te inculcarán en la mente un ‘yo mando’, para que no sepas nunca quién serás”; nevertheless, one must believe that there are ways out of these situations. Individuals come to view as normal and natural the act of thinking and behaving according to the beliefs, premises, and perspectives of that ideology (Cranton; Taylor, 2012).

In the same vein, in the song *Fantástico*, the individual is urged to remain alert to these alienating structures and discourses and not allow them to contaminate them (“Never allow them to lie to you, to inject you with poison; amid everything that is good, choose another path for the course of your story; you choose—you, and only you”). Only when the individual is able to recognize that these beliefs are oppressive and do not serve their best interests can they begin a process of transformative learning (Cranton; Taylor, 2012).

Once many key concepts of the critical approach to learning—such as the disorienting dilemma, self-analysis of feelings, revision of premises, alienation, and resistance—have been identified and analyzed, the remaining songs continue this trajectory by revisiting these concerns and presenting specific collective social dilemmas, including social poverty and drug use (*Viviré* and *Jenny*); wars (*Donde el aire es ceniza*); environmental concern, pollution, environmental degradation, and ecosystem conservation (*Hermana Tierra*); equality among individuals and peoples, and respect for differences (*Similares*).

The words found in the songs that became elements of meaning (Flores, 1994) for this analysis are presented in the word cloud shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – Word cloud generated from the analysis corpus



Source: Prepared by the author (2025).

Produced using the Wordcloud Generator webpage⁴, the word cloud groups and graphically organizes words according to their frequency in the analyzed corpus. This is a simple lexical analysis, yet visually informative, which can corroborate the findings of the analysis and suggest new possibilities for interpretation and classroom use.

Once the songs have been analyzed and themes identified that teachers can organize into pedagogical practices in SFL classes, the next subsection presents possibilities for using these songs.

Possibilities for using the songs in SFL classes from a critical pedagogical approach

This subsection aims to present a menu of options and to serve as a guide for thinking about the use of songs—whether by Laura Pausini or others—in SFL.

As the teacher is the professional who supports learners in rethinking and re-signifying their assumptions, they should act as a facilitator or provocateur, helping learners become more conscious and critical (Mezirow, 1997). Accordingly, the teacher may:

⁴ Available free of charge at: <https://www.wordclouds.com/>. Accessed on: Dec. 23, 2025.

- 1) Reflect on their own experiences to achieve a more critical worldview;
- 2) Create space for songs to play a central role in SFL teaching;
- 3) Rethink traditional, individualistic, and highly specialized language teaching;
- 4) Foster interdisciplinarity by adopting a sociocultural method; and
- 5) Support students in engaging in social action to address community problems through the adoption of project-based learning.

When working with a song, a teacher committed to a critical approach to language teaching should:

- 1) Seek to elicit learners' prior knowledge and understand the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which they are situated. This occurs throughout the teaching–learning process by engaging in dialogue with students and enabling them to assume an active role;
- 2) Bring learners closer to the artist and the song's theme by providing information about the musical genre, popularity, and representativeness of the song or artist (Gil Toresano, 2001). Updated audiovisual resources (e.g., online reports) are well suited to this purpose;
- 3) Analyze and study the song. Studies such as this one, and others available in databases, help teachers understand an artist's repertoire. Another suggestion is the use of word clouds, which can be generated free of charge on websites such as WordClouds Generator. When presented by the teacher, they can serve as triggers for learners to identify themes with which they have contact or prior knowledge;
- 4) Identify, in the selected song, important, sensitive, and disorienting themes that lead learners to rethink their assumptions;
- 5) Activate learners' stereotypes and world knowledge (Gil Toresano, 2001). The teacher must be prepared to expose learners to these themes. In this process, both teacher and learners should express their perspectives on the importance of these activities for themselves and for society (Brunstein; King, 2018);
- 6) Use the song with traditional activities—such as gap-filling or sentence ordering—while also considering the song as a guide for a change-oriented project. Learners identify a collective social dilemma in their local community and engage in proposing solutions. Project phases may be associated with the following scheme identified in



Laura Pausini's songs: Union → (hope) → Struggle → Attempt → Risk → Achievement → (hope) → Change;

- 7) Ensure interaction (Brunstein; King, 2018) among all participants, especially learner–learner interaction. Learners should report whether the learning experience through the song led to new ideas related to civic identity and possible solutions to social issues. At this point, the learner positions themselves as an agent of change;
- 8) Finally, the teacher may suggest that learners present their projects and explain the individual and collective transformations achieved (Brunstein; King, 2018). The objective is to verify whether the experience of using songs in SFL led to a significant attitudinal change or whether learners now view social action as a rewarding use of time for personal growth and/or for contributing to addressing community challenges.

Finally, a summary of themes in alphabetical order that can be addressed based on the analyzed corpus is presented: alienation; friendship; love—in the sense of universal respect—; conflicts; achievement; ecosystem conservation; cooperation; environmental degradation; dignity; diversity; empathy; hope; wars; equality; socially invisible groups; justice; freedom; struggle; change; ideal world; peace; individuals who are concerned with and engaged in social issues and change; poverty; pollution; peoples; prejudice; environmental concern; racism; fulfillment; resistance; respect for differences; transformation; and union.

The next section revisits the research objectives and presents a research agenda for future studies.

Final considerations

Grounded in the theoretical framework of Critical Pedagogy, this study analyzed a corpus composed of 20 Spanish-language songs by the singer Laura Pausini and concluded that they have didactic potential for SFL learning that moves linguistic competence toward critical learning. Moreover, these songs are relevant for engaging teachers and students in exposure to and interaction around collective social dilemmas.

The themes and dilemmas identified and analyzed are capable of transforming the classroom into a space for critical reflection, provided that both teachers and learners are open and willing to work with content that goes beyond that predefined in conventional foreign



language curricula and textbooks. Throughout the *SFL* teaching–learning process, both must continuously engage in self-reflection regarding their own ideas and beliefs and consider possibilities for participation and socially engaged practice.

In this way, learners cease to be mere repositories of a linguistic system and become subjects responsible for developing critical skills, whose knowledge—now reconstructed—is applied to the understanding of diverse social, historical, and cultural contexts. The goal is to become individuals who, in addition to linguistic proficiency, are inclusive, open, and receptive to new ideas—qualities required to confront future social challenges.

The theme of collective social dilemmas (Gambrell, 2016) represents an advancement of Transformative Learning Theory as initially proposed by Mezirow (1997). As it is concerned with educating more critical citizens oriented toward pursuing collective outcomes, whether in everyday contexts or in broader, global change initiatives, social dilemmas can be applied across any discipline and curriculum, from elementary education to *lato sensu* or *stricto sensu* graduate programs. They are particularly salient when aligned with undergraduate university extension projects and with the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations 2030 Agenda. The references used in this study point to multiple pathways in this direction.

As a research agenda, further studies are recommended to apply and demonstrate the outcomes of using Laura Pausini's songs through the proposals presented in this research.

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