



## Language Loss and Refugee Identity: A Pedagogical Reading of Jan Dost's *A Handful of Dirt*

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### Abstract

The short story *A Handful of Dirt* by Jan Dost vividly portrays the refugee experience, focusing on alienation, language loss, and the psychological burden of displacement. Refugees often struggle to adapt to new environments, and communication barriers intensify their sense of isolation. This study seeks to analyze how Dost's narrative reflects these linguistic and emotional challenges while drawing educational implications for language teaching. Employing a qualitative text-based method, the analysis explores the protagonist's inability to master the host country's language, his attempts to preserve his mother tongue, and his anthropomorphic conversations with inanimate objects as a coping strategy. These narrative elements reveal how language is inseparable from identity and belonging. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of refugee literature in language education. Dost's story underscores the need for culturally responsive teaching, mother-tongue maintenance, and empathy-driven curricula for refugee learners. By incorporating such narratives, educators can foster awareness, inclusivity, and emotional engagement in classrooms. In conclusion, *A Handful of Dirt* serves not only as a literary depiction of exile but also as a resource for understanding and improving language education practices in multicultural contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

The refugee crisis has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges in the twenty-first century. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 43 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced due to war, persecution, and political unrest (UNHCR, 2023). These individuals, often uprooted abruptly from their homelands, face immense challenges in adapting to foreign societies. Beyond physical displacement, the psychological burden of losing one's home, culture, and language profoundly affects their ability to survive and thrive in new environments (Marlowe, 2018). The loss of homeland also signifies the erosion of memory and identity, often accompanied by linguistic deprivation. For refugees, language is not merely a tool of communication but also a

marker of belonging and an anchor of cultural identity (De Fina, 2021). Without it, the exilic experience becomes one of silence and isolation.

Language plays a central role in shaping refugees' adaptation processes. Researchers argue that the inability to master a host country's language often leads to exclusion from education, employment, and community integration (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). Conversely, maintaining one's mother tongue fosters psychological resilience and cultural continuity, enabling refugees to preserve connections to their identities (Cummins, 2000). However, this balance between acquiring a new language and preserving the mother tongue is rarely achieved, resulting in what linguists describe as *language attrition* or *language loss*. The consequences extend beyond communication: linguistic deprivation amplifies feelings of alienation, loneliness, and self-fragmentation (Ana Heatley Tejada et al., 2017). For this reason, language education for refugees must address both the acquisition of new linguistic competencies and the preservation of cultural identity.

Literature offers a unique lens to explore these issues. Stories of exile and displacement not only provide testimony to lived experiences but also invite readers to empathize with refugees' struggles. Scholars of refugee education argue that literature functions as a "pedagogical tool" that cultivates empathy, intercultural awareness, and inclusive learning environments (Kramsch, 2013; Sun, 2023; Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Belarde et al., 2025). Through narrative engagement, students and educators can access the psychological and cultural dimensions of exile that statistics or policy documents cannot capture. This dual function of literature representation and pedagogy makes it an essential medium for refugee-related scholarship.

Jan Dost's short story *A Handful of Dirt* exemplifies this potential. Written by a Syrian Kurdish author in exile, the story portrays an unnamed refugee who grapples with the trauma of displacement, the alienation of living in a foreign land, and the inability to communicate due to linguistic barriers. His anthropomorphic dialogues with inanimate objects, particularly a bag of dirt brought from his homeland, symbolize his desperate attempt to preserve his mother tongue and cultural identity. The dirt, imbued with memory and nostalgia, becomes a substitute interlocutor in the absence of human communication. This imagery echoes anthropomorphic traditions in world literature, such as Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* or the symbolic companionship of "Wilson" in Zemeckis' film *Cast Away*. Yet in Dost's narrative, anthropomorphism becomes more than a literary device; it signifies the refugee's struggle against the silence imposed by linguistic and social exclusion (Dost, 2021).

From an educational standpoint, the story provides valuable insights into the intersection of language, identity, and pedagogy. First, it underscores the critical role of language in shaping one's sense of self and belonging. The protagonist's inability to acquire the host country's language leads not only to professional and social marginalization but also to psychological deterioration. Second, the story highlights the necessity of preserving the mother tongue as a source of resilience. His desperate efforts to "speak" to objects reflect a deep fear of losing his linguistic heritage, which mirrors real-world cases of language attrition among displaced populations (Capstick, 2020; Savsar, 2018). Third, the story demonstrates how literature can serve as an educational tool; to teach empathy, raise awareness, and foster inclusivity in multicultural classrooms. When incorporated into curricula, refugee narratives can help learners engage critically with issues of exile, displacement, and cultural hybridity (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Jarratt, 2020; Al-Zoubi et al., 2025).

Although the literary work on refugees is important, little has been done by scholars regarding its pedagogical use. Although the literature has paid much attention to

structural barriers that refugees encounter in the context of education, including the absence of access, discrimination, or limited resources, not many studies have analyzed how the exile narrative can be incorporated into the language education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). This lack puts the educators in the situation where they lack proper strategies to implement the voices of the refugees into their teaching methods and thus fail to ensure that they are in a position to establish more inclusive and understanding learning environments. This study will attempt to fill this gap by providing a pedagogical reading of Dost in his book *A Handful of Dirt*.

This research has three aims. First, it is going to examine the way in which the short story shows the linguistic and psychological conflicts of refugees, especially, the matters of language loss and fragmentation of identity. Second, it discusses the pedagogic consequences of these images on language teaching and the emphasis is on the ways in which literature could be employed to develop empathy and intercultural comprehension in a classroom setting. Lastly, the study suggests that integrating the narrative of refugees into the curriculum will help further cultural responsive pedagogy that appreciates the diversity of students in terms of their language and cultural backgrounds and helps to be more inclusive (Gay, 2018; Guberina, 2023; Kotluk & Aydin, 2021).

### **Literature Review**

The usages of anthropomorphism are all about in World Literature. One of the treacherous devices that can easily play with great psychological functioning is Anthropomorphism. In anthropomorphism, an author is safe because he or she does not directly interfere with a human being. And yet the message of the text is very obvious and clear. As an example, one can put such a work as “*Animal Farm*” George Orwell. In the novella the farm animals rose up against their farmers and landlords to establish a new order in the society where the animals would experience their freedom and equality. These animals were endowed with all human traits of characters and abilities: they could think critically, they were greedy, they could organize assembly etc.

The most outspoken anthropomorphism example is the *Metamorphosis* by Frantz Kafka, which reveals how the protagonist Gregor Samsa turns into a giant cockroach and, nevertheless, he retains all the human qualities, such as sadness, his duties at work, his sense of punctuality and responsibility toward his family etc.

In the *Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling can persuade the audience that the whole jungle animals can be full of human feelings. Kipling does not give the readers a normal human view but instead a new brand-new viewpoint. Using the anthropomorphism, the animals are not inferior in the sense of thoughts and feelings. The readers are first confronted with the element of feeling in the very first sentence of the work where the Father Wolf speaks- by the Law of the Jungle he should not alter his abode without any warning. and he will scare all the heads of game in ten miles, and I--I must kill two, these days” (Kipling 5).

### **METHODS**

The research design in this study is qualitative, namely, a text-based literature analysis combined with an educational viewpoint. The qualitative study proves to be the most applicable approach to investigation of complex human phenomena, including displacement, identity, and language loss, due to the focus on the depth of understanding instead of the generalization based on the statistical data (Levitt, 2021). Through the short story *A Handful of Dirt* by Jan Dost, this paper attempts to shed light on how literature is a pedagogical tool in language education especially when it comes to working with refugee students.

## **Research Approach**

This study relies on the methodological basis of qualitative content analysis that provides the researcher with the opportunity to interpret the textual data in a systematic way by revealing patterns, themes, and meanings (Schreier, 2012). Such a method is correct, since the narrative itself is a metaphorical interpretation of the refugee experience. Due to anthropomorphism and metaphor, Dost describes the psychological condition of the refugee, his problem in communication and the cultural consequences of losing language. The analysis is, hence, not restricted to narrative structure, but it goes to its pedagogical role in the education process.

Moreover, the work also uses the pedagogical approach to reading the text that adheres to the postulates of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018). That is, the struggle of the refugee is not only read as a literary motif, but also as a case study, which is a mirror of real-life educational problems. The narrative is therefore addressed as a cultural artifact and as a possible instructional tool.

## **Data Source**

The main basis of this work is the short story by Jan Dost *A Handful of Dirt* (n.d.), which is examined in its entirety. The secondary sources are scholarly texts on the topics of refugee education, language loss, identity and anthropomorphism, theoretical texts on pedagogy and literary analysis. The concepts of how to interpret the story and how these themes can be connected to the wider educational issues are found in these secondary sources.

## **Analytical Framework**

The analysis is guided by three interrelated frameworks:

### **Literary Analysis of Anthropomorphism**

The paper initially looks at the role of anthropomorphism in the text. One of the most popular literary and psychological phenomena has been anthropomorphism, or the projection of human traits on non-human things (Epley et al., 2007; Cadman, 2016; Simons, 2002). The refugee in *A Handful of Dirt* also talks as if to dirt, carpets, windows, and other lifeless structures, thus bringing his struggles to the outside world. The literary reading detects the areas where the anthropomorphism takes the most evident effect and deciphers their emotional and symbolic meaning.

### **Language and Identity Framework**

The second analysis lens is on language and identity. Researchers claim that the key to self-construction and cultural belonging is in language (Norton, 2013; De Fina, 2021). The protagonist fails to learn the language of the host country and fears to lose his mother tongue, which is an example of the twofold bind of the linguistic displacement. Such a framework allows the work to connect the experiences of the character with the actual issues in the life of refugee learners, including language attrition and communication issues.

### **Pedagogical Application**

The third framework puts the analysis into the spheres of education. The paper is based on the theories of critical pedagogy (Blake & Masschelein, 2003) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) to make sense of how the story by Dost can be applied as a teaching tool. It is aimed not only at examining the experience of the refugee, but also at discussing the ways in which such narratives may encourage empathy, intercultural empathy, and inclusiveness in language classrooms. The



strategy makes literature a mediator between the stories of individuals and professional learning.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The analysis was done in three steps. First, the reading of the text was done several times closely to recognize the recurring motifs, i.e. exile, silence, anthropomorphism and linguistic deprivation. Second, these motifs were coded and placed in thematic heads: (a) language loss, (b) identity and belonging, and (c) anthropomorphism as coping. Third, the themes were read in the context of the educative system, establishing links between the experience of the refugee in the narrative and the general implications in relation to language education.

An example is that the anthropomorphic conversation of the refugee with dirt was entered into the code of identity preservation and of coping mechanism. Literarily, it means loneliness and nostalgia. Educationally, it emphasises the need to protect the mother tongue as a source of identity among refugee learners. This two-layered interpretation depicts the approach to methodological synthesis of literary and educational approaches.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Summary of the text: The story starts in an airport with an unnamed individual waiting for his friend who is returning from their motherland. The person asked his friend to bring a handful of dirt. It has been three years the person had left his homeland and faced all sorts of challenges a refugee could have been encountered. The flashback of the story gave us a clear understanding:

*"He had spent an entire year in a shelter for refugees and the past two years in a house that felt more like a hovel." (Dost, A Handful Of Dirt).*

The social service office of the refuge country repeatedly asked him to get a job; but he had sought to learn the language of the foreign city before he secured any job so that he could communicate the people or simply could talk. The pain he bears is just like the poets' moment the time of delivering a piece of poetry. He just wants to talk. Though he is a free refugee, his suffocation is just like a prisoner who spends his time in a lonely cell. The local authority, however, asked him to get a job; not to learn the language. But he wanted to learn the language of the refuge land and took a crash programme; but gone in vain: The man, somehow, fails to be a mimic Caliban and even did not learn enough to curse like this:

*"You taught me language; and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!" (Shakespeare)*

He rather learnt few everyday sentences or phrases that was not enough to express his misery though everybody around him knew the process he passed through. He wanted to use his heart and mouth. The local authority did not leave any option for him. Thus, he had to take door to door advertising the thing he did not enjoy at all.

*"He spent hours walking through the desolate, graveyard-like streets handing out flyers for restaurants, barber shops, and even sex workers. On Wednesdays and Saturdays he distributed the classifieds section too." (Dost, A Handful Of Dirt)*

When he received the bag of dirt, he held it to his bosom such a way as if he got the Aladdin's Lamp. Over three years he became so lonely. Suddenly he got something with he could talk. The event makes us remember Robert Zemeckis' movie "Caste Away" starred by Tom Hanks. In the movie, Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks), a time-obsessed system engineer, crashed his plane under a violent storm into the Pacific.

He found himself on a populated island. The worst part was that he had lost his emergency locator transmitter. Thus starts the true adventure of his solitary voyage. There was no one he could talk to except Wilson the volleyball. He was desperate because he spent years living alone in a lonely island and made a raft to cross the ocean. His raft is almost swept away by a huge rush of the ocean and he sees Wilson floating off towards the ocean. Noland starts crying: "Wilson, where are you? Wilson! Wilson! Wilson! Wilson, I am sorry." Wilson the volleyball was something that was more than a ball to play with, to kick, or to throw. It has made the heart of the audience; produced no less influence than being parted with lovers (Zemeckis).

The man is also going to do this thing. It turns out that he had a significant issue, and it is not to speak with someone because he was not familiar with the widespread language. He was alone in the crowd, and speechless. The issue of Chuck Noland is romantic because he had no one with him; the issue of the refugee is rather modern because he is alone among the crowd.

Yet, what most troubled him was that he could not even speak his own language. You see; he was imagining he would be dumb. So he started talking to carpets, windows, mannequins, and even the clouds such as the Yaksha of Meghadutta composed by Kalidasa. Yaksha--Kubera had forgotten his duty. Yaksha was sent away on account of a year of punishment, and so he got to conversing with the clouds:

"O cloud, the parching spirit stirs thy pity;

My bride is far, through royal wrath and might;

Bring her my message to the Yaksha city, Rich-gardened Alaka, where radiance bright From Shiva's crescent bathes the palaces in light." (Kalidasa)

Here the Yaksha by Kalidasa and Chuck Noland by Robert Zemeckis are almost same. But they are divided by uncertainty. Yaksha knew he would go back within a year and Chuck Noland knew nothing.

While talking to the dirt, we come to know his past life. He had a girl friend who cheated him. He had a home. He was forcefully taken away from his land. So, losing his secured life he was alienated from his root. Thus, he finds his life just like the dirt of his land: helpless and passive. Thus, the asylum seeker allegorically feels like "All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." (Ecclesiastes 3:20)

### **Defining Refugee**

The plain definition of a "refugee (who) is a person who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (e.g., members of the LGBTQ community). The persecution a refugee experiences may include harassment, threats, abduction or torture. A refugee is often afforded some sort of legal protection, either by their host country's government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or both." (HIAS)

### **Defining anthropomorphism**

The simple definition may be "Giving human characteristics to animals, inanimate objects or natural phenomena is a human trait called "to anthropomorphize."

Anthropomorphism is "the tendency to imbue the real or imagined behavior of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, or emotions." (Nicholas Epley).

Anthropomorphism carries many important implications. For example, thinking of a nonhuman entity in human ways renders it worthy of moral care and consideration. In addition, anthropomorphized entities become responsible for their own actions that is, they become deserving of punishment and reward.

There are two types of anthropomorphism: one is talking to the objects and the other talking to the animals. Jan Dost prefers the first one.

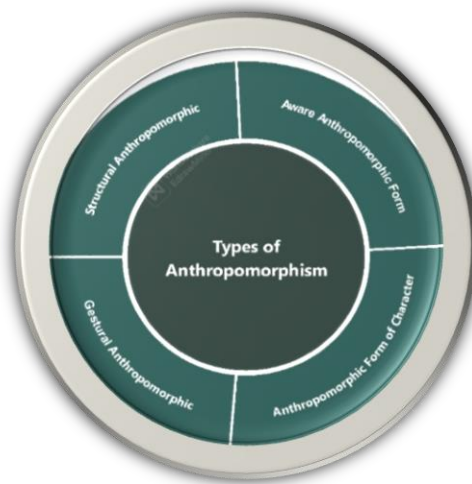


Figure 1. Wheel of Anthropomorphism

There are four types of anthropomorphism. They are given below in brief.



Figure 2. Structural Anthropomorphic

### **Structural Anthropomorphic**

Structural anthropomorphic is based on the structure and action of the human body with a focus on its materiality. There are some clues that bear the testimony of structural anthropomorphic form: the presence of shape, mechanisms, and volumes etc. that impersonate or function like the human organs. Mannequin is the perfect example of it. These mannequins possess though fixed some human attitudes.

### **Gestural Anthropomorphic**

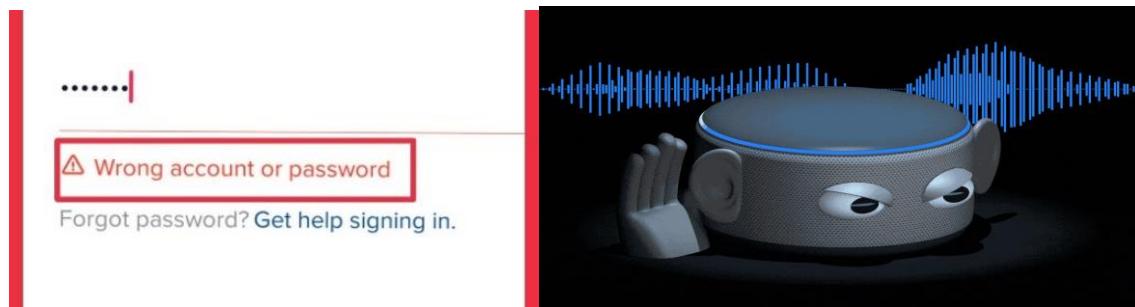


Figure 3. Gestural Anthropomorphic

Gestural anthropomorphism connects like human and uses the human-like movement that has meaning, suggestion, and instruction. While logging to any account, if we put wrong password the picture from the screen shakes its head side to side just like the reaction of a human being while saying “no”. Voice recognition technology like Alexa or Siri is the exact example of this kind.

### Anthropomorphic Form of Character



Figure 4. Anthropomorphic Form of Character

This type of anthropomorphism draws the character which imitates the traits, roles or functions of people and solely emphasizes the purpose of individual action. The demonstration of qualities or habits that express and label the individuals are evidence of the anthropomorphic form of character. It draws from knowledge of societal conventions and contexts and reflects the practices people engage in. An example of the anthropomorphic form of character is the Jean-Paul Gaultier “Le Male” perfume bottle. Although the bottle contains elements of structural and gestural anthropomorphic form, taken as a whole it is an anthropomorphic form of character. It is not only a man in a certain style of dress, it is a type of person with specific traits. The erotically charged form of the bottle depicts male sexuality, and captures one way male sexuality is socially construed.

### Aware Anthropomorphic Form



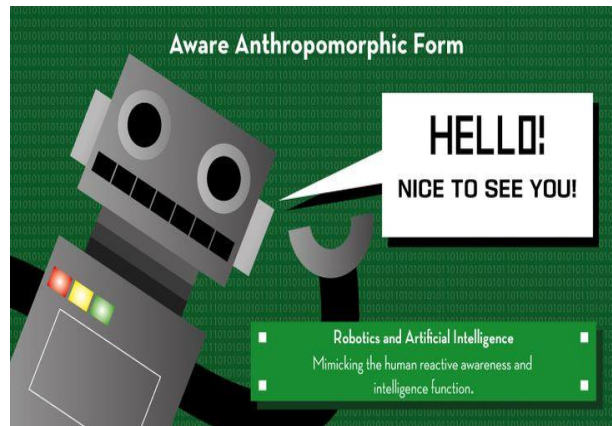


Figure 5. Aware Anthropomorphic Form

it asserts the resulting statement which has self-knowledge in relation to others, the ability to build or work with abstract ideas, or the ability to actively engage with others. It can give us the feelings of some human capacities: thought, purpose and investigation. In the fields of robotics and artificial intelligence many systems are being designed that imitate the form of being human through programmed abilities to learn, adapt, reason, or interact sociably (DiSalvo, Gemperle and Forlizzi).

We often mix personification with anthropomorphism. But they are not all the same. The sharp difference given below:

Table 1. Difference between anthropomorphism and personification (Your Dictionary's team)

Aspect	Personification	Anthropomorphism
Meaning	Has figurative meaning.	Ensures more literal meaning.
Function	Images visually.	Permits animals or objects to behave like human beings.
Synonym	Representation.	Humanization.

### Textual Anthropomorphism of Jan Dost

The reading of the short story written by Jan Dost gives us different types of emotions such as sympathy, empathetic pain, flashback, nostalgia, romance and betrayal, disgust, indignation etc. Here, the unknown refugee put all the human nature to a bag of dirt. The dirt has become his sole company.

After a long time when the unknown refugee received the bag of dirt, he was so overwhelmed as if he received the most desiring thing of his life. He could not resist his emotion. His sympathy for the dirt directly comes out when he touched the sack of dirt. He said "I'm sorry for making you leave our country, but I needed you." He feels sorry for the dirt.

The long frozen emotion of the refugee began to melt like the ice of the mountain. He finds the dirt very pathetic like himself. Both of them are the traveller of the same path. He feels the pain of the dirt or he thinks that the dirt bears the pain like him. Thus, the refugee became very empathetic and said "I smell the scent of destruction in you, the earth of home."

By his monologue, we also come to know that he has been in a refugee camp for three years. The cinematic flashback reveals that he had been kicked out of his country for three years. The moment becomes emotional when he repeatedly asks the question by saying "Do you remember?" So, the tendency of the refugee becomes

so anthropomorphic that he creates “Aware Anthropomorphic Form” tendency inside the dirt hoping that the dirt will answer his every question when he nostalgically asks it “Do you remember?” again and again.

The refugee had been cheated by his girlfriend and for this he also blamed the dirt as the dirt did not warn him. The refugee even begins to believe that a piece of land would speak for him to warn him, to guide him and to protect him. He says,

*“You never once said to me, “You fool! Don’t fall for a mirage. Your heart will die of thirst.” You never said, “Put an end to this game. Your heart will be crushed.” We were friends, Dirt. I wrote my best poems about you. I used to smell you as hard as I could. I used to leave your dust on my eyelashes and clothes for weeks at a time, never brushing you off. (Dost, A Handful Of Dirt)”*

Later, the refugee got angry and began to blame the dirt for its misdoings. Blame is something that can be put for living things. “Blame is a reaction to something of negative normative significance about someone or their behavior.” (Coates) So, it is very much understandable that the unnamed refugee who lost everything begins to talk to the dirt believing that it would listen to him. But the dirt remains silent and unmoved. It is as helpless as the refugee. The refugee believed the dirt of his land was very powerful. It can protect itself. That’s why; the refugee has no other option except blaming the dirt. He says,

*“Now I just drift from place to place. I carry my broken heart with me, but I still haven’t found anyone who can put it back together for me. You’ve seen me bewildered dozens of times if you can even see that is but you’ve never once broken your silence. Why didn’t you rise up from beneath my sad footsteps and fly into the sky to tell everyone in this criminal city of my heart’s pain? Why didn’t you warn me about all the traps that were laid out in front of me? I was the one who used to think of you as a mother, as more than a mother. (Dost, A Handful Of Dirt)”*

Humans are social being, and this is the major quality which can lead to anthropomorphizing non-humans (Lawrenz, 2022). The same thing also happened to the refugee. He has lost homeland, lost his language and moreover he lost his own identity. He cannot adopt to the new circumstances. For this reason, he fails to communicate with the new land he is loving in for certain periods. So, this paper proves that the refugee is anthropomorphic.

### **Language, Identity, and Pedagogy in A Handful of Dirt**

The results of this paper demonstrate that A Handful of Dirt by Jan Dost is not a literary account of exile but a multidimensional account of how immigrants can discuss identity, memory, and survival with the help of language. The repetitive anthropomorphism, in which the main character talks to dirt, carpets, window, and clouds, are more than displacement of imagination. It responds to the psychological desire to animate the inanimate to be able to avoid silence and save a sense of belonging. Theorists have postulated that anthropomorphism is a social-isolation coping strategy, allowing people to project their internal conflicts onto others in the case of a lack of interpersonal communication (Epley et al., 2007; Lawrenz, 2022). The lines of the refugee, in this case, talking to the bag of dirt, can be interpreted as a nostalgia to the motherland and a frantic effort to preserve his native language faced with the danger of being eroded.

It is also important that the protagonist unsuccessfully attempts to learn the language of the host country. Although the process of language acquisition is commonly conceived as a prerequisite of social integration, the narrative shows that such structural factors as the pressure exerted by local authorities on 1-changing

the focus on labor, rather than learning- can hinder the learning process. According to Koehler and Schneider (2019), educational barriers often impact refugees by reducing their agency, which only contributes to an additional marginalization. Inadequacy of survival-level language skills to express grief, memory and identity is highlighted through the partial learning of the main character, which has been reduced to several phrases per day. This echoes the case made by Cummins (2000) that language is not a mere communication instrument but that it is an asset of great importance to self-construction and empowerment.

The material and affective aspects of exile are highlighted in the bag of dirt, as a symbolic item. Its existence gives continuity with the homeland and becomes a proxy interlocutor, with its comfort and blame. Thus, the novel repeats the anthropological works on displaced people, which emphasize the role of material objects as memory and identity carriers within the community of the diaspora (Schmid, 2011; De Fina, 2021). The trait of the refugee going back and forth between endearing the dirt and then becoming furious at it reflects the twists and turns of the exile experience: it is a source of pride and simultaneously an unsolved wound.

Pedagogically, the story proves the importance of the refugee literature in the context of developing empathy and cultural responsiveness in language education. Introducing these narratives into the curricula enables students to be critically active about the cultural and emotional aspects of the displacement, which the statistics or the policy documents tend to hide, according to Kramsch (2013) and Gay (2018). *A Handful of Dirt* brings up the significance of pedagogical practices that not only impart the host-country languages, but also legitimize and even preserve the mother tongue of learners. This is in conformity to the cultural inclusivity in education reforms as advocated by McBrien (2017) and Dryden-Peterson (2016), which incorporate the voices of refugees in the teaching and learning processes.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Jan Dost's story, *A Handful of Dirt*, is not only a literary representation of a refugee's experience but also a profound reflection on the intimate connection between language, identity, and alienation. Language loss is not merely a communication barrier but also a form of loss of identity and cultural attachment, making refugees increasingly vulnerable to social and psychological isolation. Through the strategy of anthropomorphism, the main character conveys longing, pain, and the need for existence, while also demonstrating how the mother tongue functions as an anchor of identity. From a pedagogical perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of using refugee literature as a medium for language learning that is empathetic, inclusive, and centered on cultural diversity. By integrating refugee narratives into education, teachers can foster critical awareness, strengthen respect for students' linguistic identities, and build more humane classrooms. Therefore, *A Handful of Dirt* is not simply a story of alienation but also a valuable resource for formulating equitable and empathetic language education practices in multicultural contexts.

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