

# AAAL GRADS

## THE AAAL GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

### CONCORDANCE FOR A SEASON

DILAY CANDAN

The fall semester began on a high note.  
 ...collecting data this fall .  
 All things entail rising and falling timing.  
 We fell in love with the city!  
 They fell into step beside each other.  
 Anyone you fell back on during bad times?  
 Everything just seemed to fall into place.

CONCORDANCE LINES FROM SKELL (SKETCH ENGINE)

Run any corpus and *fall* refuses to mean just one thing: a season, a semester, a settling, a beginning. This term, we hope you meet them all. It can be a theory waiting for its data, or a reminder that everything rises and falls in its own time. It is also an invitation to look up from our readings, step beyond campus, and explore the city we call home, side by side. We might just fall in love with it. And on harder days, we have each other to fall back on. Somewhere along the way, things begin to fall into place.

*Keep good company this fall.*



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We are delighted to welcome you to the Fall 2026 issue of the AAALGrads Newsletter. Bringing together 18 contributions, this issue explores how language, learning, and scholarship take shape through our relationships with people, places, technologies, and communities. Across research articles, resource reviews, personal reflections, and creative work, contributors invite us to revisit familiar assumptions and consider what becomes possible when we attend more closely to the experiences around us.

Our nine **Feature Articles** address a wide range of topics, from language and meaning-making to teacher learning, identity, and linguistic justice. **Devin Johnson** explores ecological approaches to translanguaging meaning-making, while **Elizabeth Ayers** demonstrates how Deaf community expertise informs the development of ASL-mediated breast health resources. **Eunseo Park** examines teacher agreement in EFL classroom interaction, and **Lu Xi** explores how human and GenAI feedback jointly shape the L2 writing process. **Oluwabunmi Alao** highlights reflective practice as a bridge between professional learning and classroom practice, while **Vinita V.J. Abichandani** examines decolonial possibilities in everyday practices of chai and charcha. **Zhupeng Li** explores intercultural pragmatics in L2 Chinese instruction, **Surayia Mostafa** examines international graduate students' multilingual identities in Germany, and **Zeynep S. Sinan** positions telecollaboration as a space for developing language teachers' critical cultural consciousness.

In **Professional Development**, **HeeJoon Choi** shares her journey from uncertainty toward a developing identity as a teacher-researcher. Her reflection on research-practice partnerships offers encouragement to graduate students finding their own scholarly path.

In **Resource Reviews**, **Nowrin Akther Koly** reviews Deborah Dean's *What Works in Grammar Instruction*, highlighting grammar as a resource for inquiry and meaningful communication. **Oluwabunmi Alao** discusses Cynthia Ballenger's *Teaching Is Inquiry*, inviting educators to pause and reconsider assumptions about learners. **Unity Watts-Bailey** reflects on Loretta J. Ross's *Calling In*, considering how accountability can support dialogue and growth within professional communities.

The **Creative Corner** offers five perspectives on scholarly and personal experience. **Devin Johnson** reflects on research relationships and enduring responsibility; **Josephine Jee** connects footwear design with professional transition and city pride; and **Justice Plummer** explores doctoral uncertainty through a storm-filled story. **Najat Sghyar-Shulman** considers learning with AI while retaining her multilingual voice, while **Vinita V.J. Abichandani** brings scholarship and lived experience into conversation through a poetic literature review.

LETTER FROM THE CO-EDITORS

WITH WARM REGARDS,

**Dayoung Joo,**  
**Dilay Candan,**  
**Zhiying (Jenni) Li,**  
**Olessya Akimenko,**  
**Mobina Hosseini,**  
**and Adékúnmi Ọlátúnjí,**  
 Co-Editors,  
 AAALGrads Newsletter

These contributions remind us that becoming a scholar involves learning to notice, question, create, and remain accountable to others. We thank our authors, reviewers, and the AAAL Graduate Student Council for the care and work that made this issue possible. We hope these pages offer new ideas for your research and teaching, recognition of experiences you may share, and encouragement to bring your own voice to the conversation.

Thank you for reading and contributing to the AAALGrads community. We look forward to the conversations and future contributions this issue may inspire.



## Beyond Translanguaging? Toward an Ecological Account of Translingual Meaning-Making

BY DEVIN JOHNSON, THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, USA

*What is a communicative repertoire made of?*

Applied linguistics has increasingly complicated any easy answer to that question. Translanguaging scholarship has challenged the idea that multilingual speakers move between neatly bounded linguistic systems, instead directing attention to dynamic repertoires and situated processes of meaning-making (García & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2018). Work on *semiotic assemblages* has pushed further, asking us to attend not only to named languages but also to bodies, objects, technologies, places, and other resources involved in communication (Pennycook, 2017). The answer, then, has become increasingly expansive: communicative repertoires appear to involve far more than the languages conventionally attributed to a speaker.

**Devin Johnson** is a dual-title PhD student in Applied Linguistics and African Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. His research examines multilingualisms, ecolinguistics, environmental communication, language education, autoethnography, and decolonial approaches to applied linguistics and language instructional praxes. His recent work examines severe-weather communication among Sub-Saharan African migrants in the rural United States, with particular attention to ecological knowledge, multilingual meaning-making, community-engaged research, and relational approaches to applied linguistics.

*But where does that expansion stop? And is continuing to expand the inventory of what “counts” as a communicative resource enough?*

Imagine someone trying to understand an approaching severe-weather threat. Meaning may emerge through a smartphone alert, a conversation in Lingala or French, a radar image, an outdoor siren, the actions of people nearby, changing visibility, past storm experiences, and knowledge of the place itself. No single resource independently constitutes the communicative event. Understanding emerges through their relations. This raises a question I have increasingly found difficult to ignore: what happens if organism–environment relations are treated not simply as the surroundings of meaning-making, but as part of the relations through which meaning becomes possible?

By “beyond translanguaging?” I do not mean leaving translanguaging behind. Rather, I ask what becomes analytically possible when one of its most generative insights—the relational and unbounded character of communicative practice—is placed into fuller conversation with ecological accounts of organism, environment, materiality, and meaning.





### From Repertoire(s) to Relations

Translanguaging has been especially productive because it unsettles the assumption that named languages provide the natural boundaries of communicative practice. Yet once those boundaries are unsettled, another question follows: if meaning-making exceeds named languages, how should we determine what belongs inside the analysis?

Pennycook's (2017) notion of *semiotic assemblages* already offers a relational response, emphasizing connections among linguistic forms, bodies, objects, places, technologies, and histories. Jordan's (2015) concept of *material translingual ecologies* similarly complicates a human-centered account of translingual practice by foregrounding material conditions and distributed forms of agency.

The problem, then, is not that these approaches simply add more signs. Rather, a risk emerges when expanded repertoires are operationalized as inventories: language, gesture, image, phone, object, architecture, weather. The list grows, but the analytical logic can remain largely additive.

An ecological orientation suggests a different move. Rather than asking only which resources participate in meaning-making, it asks what relations make those resources meaningful, salient, and actionable in a particular moment. In the severe-weather example, a smartphone alert, a darkening sky, a conversation, or a radar image does not carry the same significance in every situation. What each can mean depends on its relation to prior experience, local knowledge, embodied perception, available technologies, other people, and the environment itself.

The shift, then, is not simply from fewer resources to more resources. It is from treating repertoire primarily as an inventory of communicative resources toward examining the relations through which meaning emerges.

### What Does the Ecological Add?

Recent work in ecolinguistics provides useful resources for pursuing this question. Steffensen, Cowley, and Döring (2024) foreground emplacement and organism–environment relations; Kravchenko (2025) conceptualizes language as part of an organism–environment system rather than as an autonomous symbolic code; and Bortoluzzi and Zurru's (2024) notion of *lifescape* draws attention to the interconnected relations through which people inhabit, experience, and interpret their worlds.

These perspectives do not require us to treat semiotic theory as if it had ignored context, materiality, or relations. Linguistic anthropological traditions have long understood text and context as dynamically and indexically constituted rather than neatly separable. Silverstein (2023), for example, describes communicative events as emerging through the reciprocal determination of text and context, while Wortham and Reyes (2015) emphasize that relevant context can extend indefinitely beyond a single speech event and must be traced through the relations that make particular signs consequential. The ecological question is therefore narrower: what becomes visible when organism–environment relations are deliberately foregrounded within an already relational account of semiosis?



I use *ecological translingual meaning-making* as a provisional term for this orientation. By it, I mean the relational emergence of meaning across linguistic, semiotic, social, technological, embodied, material, and environmental phenomena. The point is not to propose a realm of meaning outside semiosis. Rather, it asks how signification itself is situated within wider relations among and across organisms, environments, materials, technologies, histories, and other people.

The severe-weather example helps make this distinction concrete. A tornado warning may arrive through a smartphone alert, but its significance does not reside in the message alone. Whether it becomes meaningful or actionable can depend on what someone sees outside, what they have previously experienced, what local categories of danger they understand, who they can contact, what technologies are available, and what actions their immediate environment makes possible.

Three shifts follow from this orientation:

1. *From possession toward relationality.*

A phone, language, bodily sensation, map, or environmental cue does not carry a fixed communicative value that a speaker simply “uses.” Its significance emerges within a particular configuration of relations.

2. *From context as background toward context as constitutive.* Semiotic theory has already shown that context is not a passive container. An ecological orientation extends that insight by foregrounding how perceptual attunement, material affordances, infrastructures, embodied histories, and environmental conditions shape what can become salient, interpretable, and actionable.

3. *From transmission toward emergence.*

Meaning is not always adequately described as something one person encodes and another decodes. It may instead emerge through coordination among people, histories, technologies, bodies, signs, places, and environments.

### **A Problem Made Visible Through Severe Weather Experiences**

My interest in this problem sharpened through community-engaged research with Sub-Saharan African migrants in northeast Missouri. Participants described learning unfamiliar Midwestern weather hazards through forecasts and alerts, but also through conversations, observation, prior experience, social networks, visibility, road conditions, and repeated exposure to local weather and its impacts. What became analytically difficult was determining where “communication” ended.

Let’s consider prior environmental knowledge for a moment. Experiences with flooding, heavy rainfall, heat, and seasonal weather developed in places such as Kinshasa or Togo do not disappear when someone moves to Missouri. Yet the relationships among perceptual cues, environmental conditions, risk categories, and possible actions may change. A darkening sky or heavy rainfall may become meaningful differently within a Midwestern tornado ecology than within a previously inhabited environment.

A semiotic analysis can ask what a perceptible phenomenon comes to index for a person in a particular event. An ecological orientation adds another layer by asking how that person became attuned to the phenomenon, how the present environment differs from previously inhabited environments, and what possibilities for perception and action the current environment affords.

Institutional warning systems make this especially visible. National Weather Service (NWS) alerts remain linguistically uneven, even as multilingual translation initiatives expand (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2026). But the conceptual point extends beyond language access. Even a perfectly translated warning would not, by itself, constitute understanding. A warning becomes actionable through its relations with environmental knowledge, technologies, social networks, present conditions, prior experience, and material possibilities for response. Severe weather therefore makes unusually visible a broader applied-linguistic problem: where should we draw the analytical boundary(ies) around meaning-making?

### Rethinking Some Familiar Categories

Taking *ecological translingual meaning-making* seriously may make several familiar categories less stable.

- *Repertoire(s)* might be understood less as inventories that individuals possess and more as emergent, dynamic, and non-static configurations of relations among people, signs, technologies, places, histories, and environments. What matters, then, is not only which resources are available, but how those resources become meaningful through particular relations.
- *Context* becomes not merely what surrounds communication, but something dynamically constituted while also materially constraining and enabling what can occur. In a severe-weather event, for example, a warning does not enter a neutral background. Its significance may depend on where someone is, what they can perceive, what technologies are available, what they already know, and what actions the immediate environment makes possible.
- *Literacy* may similarly involve more than interpreting linguistic or visual signs in isolation. It can involve coordinating language with interfaces, visualizations, embodied experience, environmental cues, and socially distributed knowledge(s). Reading a radar image, interpreting an alert, noticing changing visibility, and knowing how those cues relate to one another may all participate in similar meaning-making processes.
- *Communicative competence* may likewise involve navigating relations across people, tools, spaces, memories, and environments rather than residing wholly within an individual. Competence, from this perspective, is not simply something a person possesses, but something that becomes visible through their coordination with particular people, resources, histories, and conditions.
- *Agency* becomes a question rather than an assumption. An ecological orientation does not require attributing human-like intentionality to inanimates or abstractions such as storms, roads, phones, or buildings. It does, however, require attention to how material and environmental conditions enable, constrain, and redirect what human actors can perceive and do.

A warning siren, for instance, can function conventionally and indexically as a sign of danger. A darkening sky has no comparable institutional communicative intention, though it may still become indexically meaningful to an observer. An ecological account does not erase that distinction. Rather, it asks how both phenomena enter a wider configuration of language, perception, prior experience, technology, social knowledge, and material conditions through which danger becomes interpretable and actionable.



### An Invitation Rather Than a Model

*Ecological translingual meaning-making* is not offered here as a completed theoretical model, nor as a replacement for translanguaging or semiotics. Rather, it invites us to extend conversations those traditions have already made possible. Its value may lie in drawing attention to relations that can recede from view when analysis begins with a speaker, a text, or an inventory of resources—how people become attuned to their environments, how places and prior experiences shape interpretation, and how material conditions enable or constrain what becomes meaningful and possible.

Such an orientation may open productive dialogue among scholars in/of translanguaging, ecolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, environmental communication, and material approaches to discourse. More importantly, it invites applied linguists to reconsider where we draw the boundaries around repertoire(s), context(s), competence(s), and communication itself.

Rather than asking only what resources people use to make meaning, perhaps we should also ask:

### What relations make meaning possible in the first place?

And, ultimately:

### What, and who, participates in making meaning possible?

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## ASL-Mediated Breast Health Literacy: Mixed-Methods Lessons from a Community-Engaged, Multimodal Research Project

BY ELIZABETH AYERS, ROCHESTER  
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Breast cancer affects approximately one in eight people with breasts in their lifetime (American Cancer Society, 2024), yet mainstream breast health materials rely heavily on spoken English explanations and dense medical terminology. For many Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) American Sign Language (ASL) users, the barrier is not medical complexity but a linguistic mismatch between English-based materials and a visually grounded language (DeBusschere et al., 2025). ASL has its own grammar, discourse structures, and cultural norms. When information is delivered only through spoken or written English, DHH individuals must navigate health decisions without linguistically equitable resources.

This project responds to that gap by developing multimodal, ASL-centered breast health materials in collaboration with DHH community members. Using a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach guided by Design-Based Research (DBR) cycles, participants interpreted breast health concepts, evaluated comic storyboards, and provided feedback on ASL video prototypes. These iterative cycles refined materials in ways aligned with ASL grammar and Deaf cultural norms.

The multidisciplinary research team reflected the project's community-engaged values. The researcher led as a Deaf educator and clinician. Two Deaf nurses facilitated the breast health module and guided hands-on interactions with silicone breast models. Three community members, including two breast cancer survivors, contributed perspectives grounded in lived experiences. A Deaf comic artist shaped the visual storytelling components, and two nondeaf partners from the Breast Cancer Coalition collaborated on adapting vetted web pages to enhance accessibility.

**Dr. Elizabeth Ayers** is a Deaf sonographer, Rochester Institute of Technology faculty member, and researcher whose work centers on multimodal health literacy, accessible healthcare communication and technology, and the experiences of Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners in STEM and health professions. With nearly three decades of clinical practice and extensive mentoring experience, she leads community-engaged projects that foreground ASL users and advance linguistic justice in health contexts. Liz directs healthcare mentoring initiatives supporting DHH students and recently completed her PhD in Curriculum, Instruction, and the Science of Learning, where her research included underrepresentation of DHH healthcare professionals and the design of community-based equitable, multimodal learning environments. Liz also serves on University of Rochester's Deaf Professional Advisory Council and is a Certified Emergency Response Team responder. Outside of work, she enjoys time with her partner, two children, and furbabies (one dog, five cats, and two house rabbits), along with reading, gardening, experimenting with recipes, traveling, photography, and scrapbooking. To learn more about Liz, visit her LinkedIn page.



This project shows how applied linguistics can meaningfully shape access to health information and how linguistic justice requires centering language users themselves. It also provides practical insights for graduate students interested in community-engaged, multimodal, justice-oriented research.

### **Linguistic Justice as a Health Equity Imperative**

Applied linguistics has long examined how language access shapes participation in education, civic life, and social systems (McDonough, 2017; Pennycook, 2015). Health communication, however, is often overlooked as a site where linguistic injustice produces real consequences. When health information is delivered in a modality that does not match the user's language, the result is not inconvenience. It is inequity.

Participants described mainstream health materials as inaccessible, with one noting, *"Wish in ASL. I wish there was something that was more accessible for all."* Many relied on family members, interpreters, or informal networks to make sense of medical terminology. Others missed key information because English-based discourse did not align with their linguistic repertoire, as one participant explained, *"I went to my doctor but it's always hard... communication errors, other things...I feel like I didn't get my answer."* These experiences show that modality shapes access, and English translation alone does not make health information accessible.

The Transformative Empowerer Framework positions linguistic justice as both an ethical responsibility and a mechanism for community empowerment (Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Mertens, 2007). Equitable communication enables individuals to participate fully, make informed decisions, and advocate for their own health.

When ASL users receive information in their own language and modality, they gain agency: the ability to understand, evaluate, and act on breast health knowledge without relying on intermediaries.

Linguistic justice requires designing materials that reflect community communicative practices (Aire, 2020). In ASL contexts, this means attending to spatial grammar, classifier constructions, affective expression, and visual sequencing, as well as recognizing how Deaf cultural norms shape interpretation and information sharing. When materials are created *with* Deaf communities rather than *for* them, comprehension improves and knowledge shifts toward those historically excluded from accessible health communication.

### **Design-Based Research with Deaf Communities**

DBR is well-suited for projects requiring iterative refinement and sustained community involvement (Barab, 2014). In this project, each cycle involved presenting materials to participants, gathering feedback, and revising artifacts based on insights grounded in Deaf ways of knowing and visual communication.

Participants evaluated comic-style storyboards introducing breast health concepts. Their feedback revealed features often overlooked in English-based materials, including motion indicators, hand location, and situational cues. These were not aesthetic comments; they reflected how ASL meaning is shaped through embodiment and visual attention.





**Figure 1.** Storyboard #1 Lump discovery



**Figure 3.** Storyboard #2 Waiting room



**Figure 2.** After focus group feedback



**Figure 4.** After focus group feedback

Storyboard #1 depicted lump discovery and care-seeking. Participants recommended adjusting finger position and rotating the silhouette to better match ASL-intuitive tactile classifiers.

Storyboard #2 depicted the mammogram process from check-in to completion. Feedback on the waiting room scene included adding a waving hand and footstep indicators to show movement, mirroring how Deaf individuals track activity in shared spaces.

The project also incorporated hands-on tools, including silicone breast models with lumps of varying sizes to support tactile learning. Vetted Breast Cancer Coalition web pages were adapted for ASL users, offering visually accessible navigation without relying on English-heavy text.

### Methods Overview

This DBR mixed-methods project recruited three focus groups for four iterative DBR cycles over a three-month period. Participants included Deaf young adults with breasts, ages 18–29 ( $n=11$ ), who engaged in pre-session questionnaires, ASL-mediated focus groups, and post-session reflections. The qualitative component guided the development and revision of materials, while quantitative summaries identified patterns in participant feedback. The Transformative Empowerer Framework shaped methodological choices by emphasizing agency, involvement, and equitable access. Rather than treating ASL data as text, the analysis respected its visually grounded structure and the cultural norms that guide meaning-making in Deaf communities. In practice, this meant coding directly from video to capture facial expressions and hand movement, and using ASL-specific notation for embodied features. These cycles demonstrate how DBR can support linguistic justice by centering community expertise and ensuring that materials are shaped by the people who will use them.

### Deaf Researchers Are Essential: AI Cannot Replace Them

Although AI tools were not used in this study, the project's ASL-mediated design raised an important methodological reflection: as AI become more common in research workflows, it is important to understand both its possibilities and its limits. AI can support tasks like formatting, synthesis, managing large amounts of English-based text, generating outlines, or refining prose. These functions are helpful for English language workflows, but they do not translate to ASL-centered research.

While early AI systems can translate ASL signs into English text, they cannot interpret ASL's embodied, spatial, and affective features. In ASL-mediated research, Deaf researchers are not optional. They are methodologically essential. Deaf researchers bring lived expertise in ASL grammar, cultural knowledge that shapes interpretation, embodied familiarity with how Deaf people communicate emotion and linguistic emphasis, and the ability to identify subtle linguistic features that AI cannot detect.

AI tools, by contrast, operate on text or video data without understanding how meaning is layered through facial expression, body movement, timing, or classifier constructions. They cannot determine whether an ASL explanation aligns with Deaf cultural expectations, nor can they recognize humor, sarcasm, or linguistic play. Most importantly, AI cannot replace the relational trust that Deaf researchers build with Deaf participants.

AI can support workflow, but it cannot replace Deaf researchers when ASL, Deaf cultural nuances, or community meaning-making are involved. This reflection grows directly out of the project's design-based research cycles and brings forth a central principle of linguistic justice: equitable research with minoritized language communities requires human expertise, not automated substitution.

### Transferable Lessons for Graduate Students

Although this project focuses on breast health literacy, the insights are broadly applicable to applied linguistics graduate students working with minority or multimodal language communities.

- Build trust before building materials. Community-engaged research requires inclusion, not just recruitment.



- Design for the language, not around it. Materials should reflect the linguistic practices of the community.
- Integrate theory with practice. Frameworks such as modality, access, and equity should guide design decisions.
- Expect logistical complexity. Community-based research involves ensuring complete accessibility and providing a safe space for sharing sensitive insights.
- Use AI responsibly. AI cannot interpret visually grounded language features or the layered nuances of Deaf humor, slang, or affect.

### Conclusion: Centering Community Voices and Linguistic Justice

This project demonstrates that health communication is not only a public health challenge but also an applied linguistics problem grounded in linguistic justice. By centering Deaf participants, collaborating with Deaf researchers, and designing multimodal materials that reflect ASL's visual and embodied structure, this work shows how community-engaged research can reshape access to health information.

Although AI tools can support English-based workflows, they cannot interpret ASL's spatial grammar, facial expression, timing, or cultural nuance. For ASL-mediated research, Deaf researchers remain essential for linguistic accuracy, cultural insight, and the relational trust that automated systems cannot replicate.

For AAALGrads readers, the takeaway is clear: equitable research with minoritized language communities requires designing for the community's language, modality, and lived experience. When research centers community voices and honors their communicative practices, linguistic justice becomes both a method and a commitment.

All materials are available on the BCCR website: <https://bccr.org/education/>

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## More than “Yes”: Teacher Agreement Among Pre-service Teachers in EFL Classrooms

BY EUNSEO PARK,  
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### Why does Classroom Discourse matter to pre-service teachers?

Classroom Discourse (CD) is a core concept for pre-service teachers to acquire, both to develop their classroom management and facilitate students' learning. However, Skinner (2016) argues that a common misconception among pre-service teachers is that effective CD is simply considered an area of teachers' professional aspects such as their speaking volume or their language proficiency per se. The seemingly simple CD was conceptually too difficult for them to link to pedagogical purposes (Skinner, 2016). Walsh (2006) argues that CD should have a specific purpose and meaning that naturally lead to learning, so it is thought to be important to dive deeper into how pre-service teachers keep CD effective and intentional for their intended educational purposes in communicative EFL classrooms and what areas need improvement.

To look into pre-service teachers' CD, this paper aims at one specific area of CD, pre-service teachers' expressions of agreement with their students, and explore how they function as interactional resources in communicative EFL classrooms. The reason for focusing on agreement expressions is that, although agreement may seem like a simple interactional feature, it can take different forms in classroom contexts.

With these objectives in mind, following are two overarching questions. (1) What interactional functions do pre-service teachers' agreement expressions serve in communicative English CD? (2) How do students respond to pre-service teachers' agreement expressions, and what implications do these responses have for the learning process?

### Method

To delve into pre-service teachers' CD and its alignment with communicative EFL classrooms, the inquiry was conducted with four pre-service teachers during a two-week international teaching practicum in Mexico where I served as a mentor teacher. I mentored four pre-service teachers as each of them taught about twenty EFL learners with different proficiency levels. During observations, I took written notes on 40 instances of teacher-student interaction.

**Eunseo Park** is an M.A. student in Applied Linguistics and ESL at Georgia State University. Her research interests include Second Language Acquisition, with a particular focus on L2 speaking and writing in adult ESL/EFL contexts. She is also interested in Task-Based Language Teaching and Teacher Education, particularly in how task design, classroom discourse, and teacher development can support meaningful and engaging language-learning experiences.



This study followed the naturalistic approach, which did not require any recording or additional work. The data set consists of four different pre-service teachers with varying teaching experiences, from none to about four years of teaching. Notably, three of them have not had any teaching experiences after getting their TEFL certificate. In terms of students' profiles, their ages ranged from first grade to ninth grade, which also implies that their English learning backgrounds could vary. Figure 1 shows information on all four pre-service teachers, including their teaching experiences and their classes they were in charge of.

### Data Analysis

What is noteworthy in this study is the way traditional Initiation—Response—Feedback (IRF) was adopted. Unlike the traditional IRF, which typically begins with teacher initiation, these data were gathered from student-initiated sequences in which students introduced a topic, received teacher responses, and continued with their own responses or reactions. The second part of this inverted IRF structure, teacher response, was analyzed deductively based on Walsh's (2006) interactional features, as discussed in more detail below. The final section, which corresponds to the teacher feedback in the traditional framework, was modified and renamed "student follow-up."

With this framework, this study focuses on how pre-service teachers guide student-initiated moves through agreement expressions and their subsequent interactional effects in students' learning. In this paper, teacher response and student follow-up will be discussed in detail below.

In the teacher response section, the following categories were adopted: teacher echo, direct repair, content feedback, positive feedback, scaffolding, confirmation check, classroom management, and evaluation. Teacher echo indicates the repetition of a student's statement. Direct repair indicates correcting an error students make directly. Content feedback is feedback focused on meaning, not grammar. Positive feedback indicates teachers' compliments and affective feedback on students' performance. Scaffolding, which Walsh (2006) divides into three parts—reformulation, extension, and modeling—indicates all efforts to help improve students' performance. Confirmation check indicates teachers' attempts to check if they understand students' message correctly. Lastly, evaluation includes teachers' statements to validate students' performance (Walsh, 2006).

**Figure 1.** Pre-service teachers' Teaching histories and their class profiles

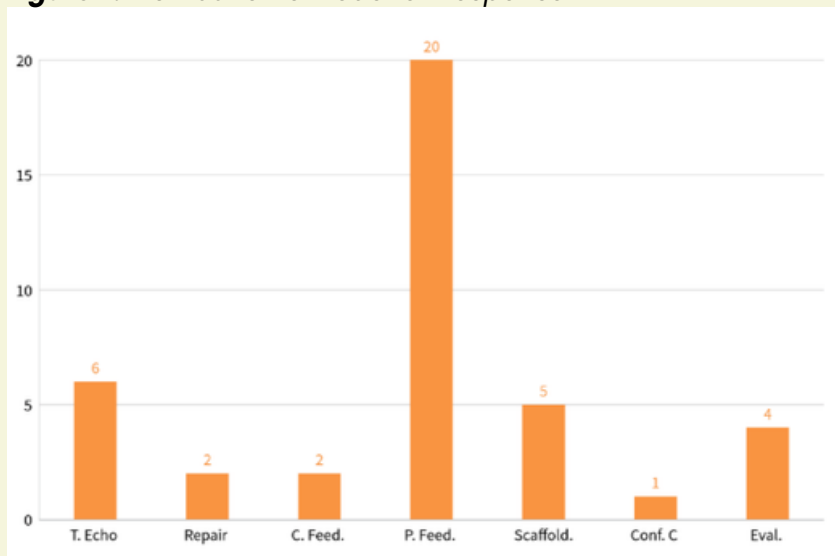
| Participant Information | Teaching experiences                | Students' Age  | Students' Proficiency Level |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| T1                      | Four years of teaching/sub-teaching | Rising 1st-2nd | Beginner to Intermediate    |
| T2                      | None                                | Rising 4th-5th | Beginner to Intermediate    |
| T3                      | None                                | Rising 5th-9th | Advanced & mixed            |
| T4                      | None                                | Rising 5th-9th | Advanced & mixed            |

In the student follow-up section, the following categories were identified: verbal continuation, task continuation, minimal acknowledgment, positive affect, and no observable response. Verbal continuation indicates when students continue talking about the content. Task continuation indicates when students keep working on their tasks without verbal responses. Minimal acknowledgement indicates when students show their understanding with minimal verbal or nonverbal cues, such as nodding or saying yes. Positive affect indicates when students show positive emotional engagement, such as smiling or fist bumps. Lastly, no observable response refers to responses that do not belong to any of the categories mentioned above.

## Results

The teacher response data (See Figure 2) show a wide range of categories, which will be discussed in more detail in the Discussion section. Positive feedback, including affective feedback, has the highest frequency, with 20 occurrences, while other categories reach an average of 3. In this study, as the focus was on agreement expressions in communicative English classrooms, I'll examine positive feedback, teacher echo and scaffolding closely in the Discussion section.

**Figure 2.** *Distribution of Teacher Response*



The student follow-up data (see Figure 3) show that positive affect was dominant, while no observable response accounts for about 27% of the data. In the Discussion section, task continuation and positive affect will be examined more closely.

## Discussion

### The multifaceted functions of teachers' agreement expressions

Regarding positive feedback, Extracts 1.1 to 1.3 show a variety of positive feedback from different classrooms. The first extract shows the basic form of agreement that validates a student's production. Seven more similar cases were found in the dataset. Extract 1.2 shows minimal verbal interruption, which seems to give more control to S2, as proven by S2's verbal continuation. What is noteworthy is Extract 1.3, where students were doing the 'Guess what it is' game. While S3 was actively participating in the activity with other students, T3's agreement expression showed a strong positive reaction to S3's interaction with other students. The primary goals of this positive feedback were (1) to elicit more responses and (2) to boost students' confidence in speaking, which can be a simple and doable technique for novice teachers.

#### Extract 1.1

S1 My partner is wearing yellow socks.  
T2 Yes, good.  
S1 (Silence)

#### Extract 1.2

S2 I had turtles when I was (inaudible) years old.  
T4 (Nod)  
S2 And he... (Verbal continuation)

#### Extract 1.3

S3 Is this papaya?  
T3 That was my question, Geez!  
S3 (Task continuation)



The teacher echo technique was observed six times, frequently in T4's class, which created a positive and non-judgmental classroom atmosphere. Teacher echo in Extract 1.5 was outstanding in that T4 shifted turn-taking again to S5 by repeating the student's contribution with a simple teacher echo technique.

#### Extract 1.4

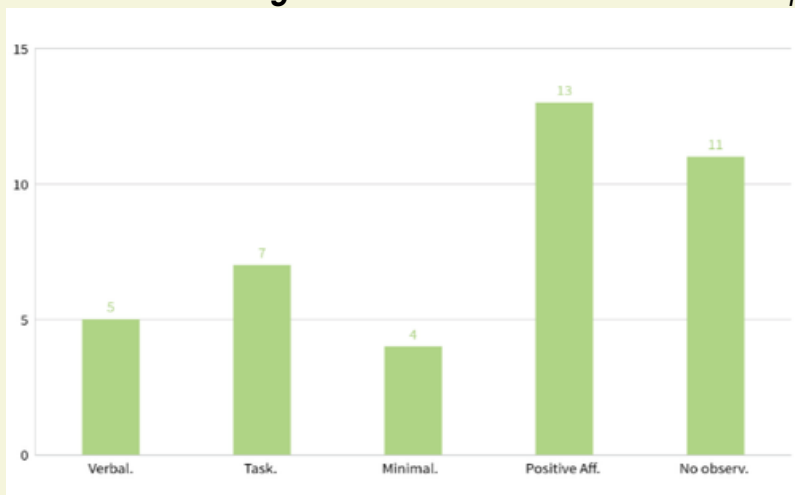
S4 I want three pets.  
T4 Ah, you want three!  
S4 Yes (Nod).

#### Extract 1.5

S5 They are the first creative pet. (rising intonation)  
T4 They are?  
S5 Yes, they are. (keep explaining the dog).

Lastly, scaffolding was shown five times in almost every teacher's classroom. Scaffolding served different roles: reformulating students' production and extending students' contributions (Walsh, 2006). In Extract 1.6, S6 was having a hard time finding the right word, and T4 provided a complete sentence. Moreover, in Extract 1.7, when S7 left a short answer, T3 intervened and extended the answer into a complete version. All these examples of scaffolding showed the importance of the right moment of intervention by the expert, the teacher, to shape the learners' output in a productive way (Walsh, 2006).

**Figure 3.** Distribution of Student Follow-up



#### Extract 1.6

S6 Because it was com...  
T4 Yes, it was a competition.  
S6 (Silence)

#### Extract 1.7

S7 Bakery aisle.  
T3 Bakery aisle. Perfect. You can find this in the bakery aisle.  
S7 (Silence)

#### Extract 1.8

S8 P(izza)  
T1 Pizza, do you like it? I like pizza!  
S8 Task continuation

Besides the top three categories, interestingly, content feedback and confirmation checks, which are the key components in communicative English classrooms, were found only in T1's class, who had about four years of teaching experience. I speculate that content feedback and confirmation checks require much higher cognitive abilities for novice teachers. In Extract 1.9, T1 was trying to let students guess what month it was. When S9 answered incorrectly, T1 gave an agreement expression with content feedback.



What is compelling is that there was no disagreement or negation, but correction content was provided. It is a short yet strong response as it functions as negotiation in the best possible indirect way for students (Ghajarieh et al., 2019). In Extract 2.0, T1 showed a higher concentration and control in class discourse, catching S10's Spanish words to create input opportunities. Based on T1's agreement expressions used as content feedback, some teacher talk techniques are likely to take time to develop after novice teachers go through numerous classroom scenarios and become accustomed to teaching itself.

### Extract 1.9

S9 June.

T1 Yes, it was June last month.

S9 Silence

### Extract 2.0

S10 Soccer (in Spanish)

T1 Football, soccer, right?

S10 Silence

### Teachers' agreement expressions as the driving force of learning

What can we say about the learners' actual learning processes after receiving teachers' responses? As positive affect accounted for about 32% of the data, teachers' agreement expressions appeared to be effective in encouraging students' engagement. In a limited 50-minute class period, it is nearly impossible for novice teachers to attend to every student's performance or provide individualized support. However, given that verbal and task continuation were dominant patterns in students' responses, I suggest that teachers' agreement expressions served as encouraging signals of students' performance, which helped maintain a positive classroom atmosphere.

### Conclusions

By the end of the paper, I came to understand how CD can unfold despite its complexity. First, although pre-service teachers employed a limited range of agreement expressions, these expressions could still create learning opportunities. I found that two important teacher responses in communicative English classrooms discussed by Lightbown and Spada (2021)—content feedback and confirmation checks—seemed to require more attention and practice from pre-service teachers. Second, through analyzing CD, which initially seemed too complex to interpret, I could grasp how CD reveals teachers' flexibility, classroom management, and decision-making in supporting learners' speaking agency. Lastly, the main takeaway for pre-service teachers is that agreement expressions do not simply serve to boost students' confidence or create a non-judgmental classroom atmosphere. Rather, different agreement expressions can serve different interactional functions, such as providing feedback, checking understanding, and encouraging further student participation. Therefore, developing a broader repertoire of agreement expressions may help pre-service teachers respond more flexibly to students' contributions in communicative classroom settings.

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# Reconceptualizing the L2 Writing Process: GenAI–Human–Mediated Feedback Through Ecological Language Competencies

BY LU XI,  
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## When GenAI Meets Human Assistant

The emergence of Generative AI (GenAI) holds immense implications across various fields in education, and a growing body of work has begun to establish what GenAI can reliably do for L2 writers. Extant studies have established GenAI as a flexible, increasingly normalized presence across L2 writing contexts (Chandel & Lim, 2024; Li, 2025; Zhai, 2025). However, research into how moment-to-moment human mediation operates alongside GenAI in situated, embodied contexts remains unclear, pointing towards the need to reframe the problem itself of not whether GenAI feedback is legitimate or helpful but how the roles of human and AI are enacted and structured together as a situated and interactional system.

**Lu Xi** is a doctoral student in Language and Literacy Education at the Mary Frances Early College of Education, University of Georgia. Her research examines L2 writing, GenAI-mediated language learning, multimodal storytelling, multilingual and multicultural education, and arts-based research methodologies from a critical perspective. An L1 Mandarin speaker, fluent in Cantonese and English and proficient in Japanese and Portuguese, Lu draws on her own multilingual trajectory to interrogate how transnational experiences shape agency and identity across language learning contexts. Her scholarship uses arts-based, multimodal approaches to disrupt monolingual and deficit-oriented norms, opening up new possibilities for multilingual learners by challenging what counts as language-learning data, knowledge production, and epistemic legitimacy.

## Ecological Language Competencies (ELC)

Ecological Language Competencies (ELC) is premised on interpreting language as a verb-like term. Through the process of languaging, people participate in embodied and distributed biosocial person–environment cognitive–semiotic dynamics (Thibault, 2011). In plain terms, making meaning involves the whole body (embodied), is spread across people, tools, and settings rather than located in one mind (distributed), and unfolds as living, social beings interact with their surroundings (biosocial, person–environment), thinking and making meaning at once (cognitive–semiotic). The plural form of competency, competencies, transcends single, fixed, rule-based linguistic knowledge, foregrounding the emergent individual's engagement in practices embodied in specific tasks (The New Territories Group, forthcoming). The concept of ELC regards human languaging as whole-body dynamics that integrate persons and their activities with aspects of the environment and their worlds.

Central to ELC is the distributed language view that includes first-order languaging and second-order language (Thibault & Lin, 2025). First-order languaging refers to real-time engagement, such as gestures, movements, texts, and dialogs, in the immediate environment.





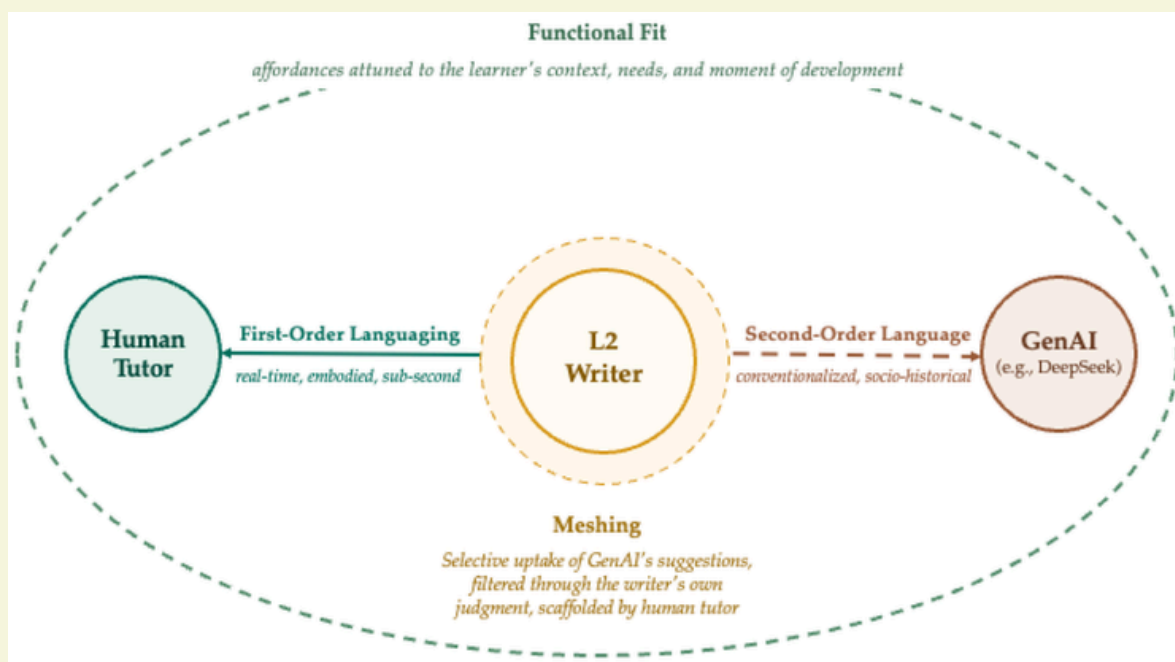
It is a whole-body sense-making activity that involves “synchronized interindividual bodily dynamics on very short, rapid timescales of the order of fractions of seconds to milliseconds” (Thibault, 2011, p. 214). Second-order language draws on more abstract patterns that are conventionalized under long social, cultural, and historical timescales as part of the community traditions that people utilize when engaging in languaging activities. However, in language education and particularly in L2 writing, the interaction between these two systems remains largely underexplored. This study foregrounds the fundamental role of human feedback by examining it through this research question: How does the meshing of first-order languaging and second-order language unfold as tertiary L2 writers draw on human and GenAI feedback together, and how do their complementary ecological affordances shape writers’ agency?

**Figure 1.** A provisional heuristic visualization of ELC in GenAI–human–mediated L2 writing. The L2 writer sits at the center, connected to the human assistant through first-order languaging and to GenAI through second-order language. The dashed inner boundary marks where the writer meshes the two, and the outer boundary marks the broader ecology of affordances in which both operate.

### Context and Methodology

This study was conducted in Spring 2025 at a Hong Kong university, where the I (first author) was a teaching assistant for Classroom Discourse Analysis, a course on discourse features in second/foreign language classrooms. In Week 12, three weeks before the final assignment deadline, a Moodle announcement invited students to volunteer for Zoom tutorials offering feedback on their drafts. Two students, Aron and Jenny, volunteered. Aron is a Cantonese–English bilingual with Mandarin proficiency, educated at international schools in Hong Kong. Jenny completed her secondary education in Mainland China before pursuing her undergraduate degree in Hong Kong. The primary data comprised recordings of the tutorial sessions and the participants’ ongoing paper drafts.

Data analysis followed a combined inductive–deductive (abductive) approach. Data sources were open coded inductively, without reference to the ELC framework, and recurring moments where participants engaged with human or GenAI feedback were identified, such as instances of accepting, rejecting, or negotiating a suggestion.



The inductively generated codes were reviewed deductively against ELC constructs, including first-order languaging and second-order resources, whole-body sense-making, and environmental affordances/functional fit, to identify where the codes (mis)aligned or complicated the existing framework.

### Findings

Aron shared his use of DeepSeek chatbot for grammar and coherence checking during his writing process. He accepted most of its suggestions while also selectively retaining his own phrasing. For instance, he used his own “put students in the driving seat” rather than accepting AI’s suggestion, “return agency to students.” Aron also expressed uncertainty about the phrase “hesitation of epistemic stance.” Although he had included this term in the paper, he was also skeptical about its appropriateness because he could not provide a compelling justification. When I asked him: “Can you define this term?” He replied hesitantly: “I find it hard to define it myself as well.” Unable to provide rationales upon my probing, Aron removed the “hesitation of epistemic stance” in his draft.

Jenny consulted DeepSeek for guidance before resorting to my assistance. DeepSeek’s response included a suggestion to incorporate gamification into her analysis. Jenny said that she would only partially agree on what DeepSeek suggested: “The feedback is way too broad and can be applied to almost anything.” She highlighted her critique with a vivid Chinese phrase “扯蛋” (chě dàn), which means nonsense or bullshit to express her visible frustration. “It even proposed gamification, which is way too broad and has zero relevance to CDA.” When I asked Jenny whether she was concerned about being accused of stealing GenAI’s answers, she responded with a firm denial:

“I don’t think the copying process should be equated with stealing. I provided the prompts, and GenAI simply generates new content based on my input. These ideas are MINE! Who copies whose ideas?”

### Discussion

#### Whole-Body Sense-Making

The instance of Aron’s incorporation of the term “hesitation of epistemic stance” presented in the Findings section captures the meshing of first-order languaging and second-order resources. Following Thibault (2011), first-order languaging is not only verbal exchange but real-time, embodied activity in which perception, feeling, and action are coordinated with others; sense-making is therefore “whole-body” because it draws on the person’s lived, situated experience rather than on verbal cues alone. The question for him to define this phrase served as a first-order prompt that challenged his decision in citing this phrase. Our interaction exposed a gap between the second-order term and his first-order understanding of it, evidenced by Aron’s serious reflection on the appropriateness of adopting the term without genuinely integrating into his own understanding. His felt hesitation became the motive for his subsequent action, reflecting what Young (2013) described as the perception-action cycle. The decision to remove the term consequently reflects the primacy of first-order understanding when second-order language remains unmeshed or ungrounded.

#### Individual Languaging within a Distributed Ecosystem

The Zoom session with Jenny functioned as a network of affordances, people, technology, and artifact, together scaffolding her attunement towards completing the writing task. Jenny’s viewpoint on GenAI plagiarism challenged the conventional understanding rooted in academic misconduct frameworks (e.g., Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025; Bjelobaba et al., 2025).

Jenny grounded her ownership claim in the origin of the ideas: because she supplied the prompts and the ideas were hers, GenAI's contribution lay in rendering them into language rather than in originating them. By characterizing GenAI primarily as a language-polishing tool, Jenny articulated a more nuanced positioning of GenAI's role in her writing process, moving beyond "don't cheat" epistemic stance to a distributed yet agentic model of co-authorship. This suggests a promising avenue for responsible AI integration in L2 writing. Jenny positioned herself as the co-orchestrator of her L2 writing within a GenAI-human ecosystem. This reframes GenAI ethics discourse under the broader understanding of GenAI's role in distributed GenAI-human L2 writing processes (Wang et al., 2025).

### Environmental Affordances and Agency

In the cases of Aron and Jenny, both GenAI and the human teaching assistant functioned as environmental affordances within this network, yet their functional fit differed fundamentally. GenAI offered broad, on-demand linguistic resources that operated from outside the course ecology, while the human TA brought insider knowledge of the specific course context. It is this difference in ecological embeddedness (Thibault & King, 2016), rather than any simple hierarchy of human over machine or vice versa, that explains the differential roles of GenAI and human assistance in both cases.

Environmental agency proved effective for Aron and Jenny when it was situated and context-sensitive, a fit that GenAI, operating from outside the course ecology, could not fully replicate. The findings do not negate the value of GenAI's assistance but further affirm it by highlighting the significant work that all ecological affordances (Van Lier, 2000), including human assistants, can achieve together.

### Conclusions

This study explored the dynamics of GenAI-human mediated feedback in tertiary L2 writing through an ELC framework. It reveals that the two are not competing alternatives but ecologically compatible affordances within the learner's distributed socio-ecological system. The GenAI-human ecological system carries implications for L2 writing revolving around whole-body sense-making, environmental affordances, and the meshing of first-order languaging and second-order language, opening new possibilities for the roles of GenAI tools, human assistants, and academic ethics, gesturing future directions for different forms of GenAI-human-mediated L2 writing.

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# Beyond the Workshop: Why Professional Development Does Not Always Change Teaching – and What Actually Does

BY OLUWABUNMI ALAO,  
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I remember leaving a professional development session feeling excited about the strategies I had learned and ready to try them in my classroom. But when I returned to teaching, I quickly realized that what sounded straightforward during the session did not always translate easily to my classroom context. I had to think about what would work, what needed to be adjusted, and what my students actually needed. This reflects a broader challenge in professional development. Learning a strategy is one thing but making it meaningful in practice is another. This experience may be familiar to many teachers, especially those working with multilingual learners. Professional development (PD) often introduces useful strategies, but applying those strategies in real classrooms, with real students, is not always straightforward.

**Oluwabunmi Alao** is a doctoral student in Language Education and Multilingualism at the University at Buffalo. Her research interests include teacher learning, reflective practice, technology-enhanced professional development, multilingual education, and equitable instruction for multilingual learners. She has experience teaching English and supporting teacher learning across different educational contexts. Her current work explores how reflective practice can support teachers in adapting professional learning to the realities of their classrooms. She is also interested in the role of technology and collaboration in creating more responsive and sustainable forms of professional development.

Desimone (2009) highlights the importance of sustained, active professional learning, while Schön (1983) examines how practitioners reflect when they face complex situations. How can teachers use reflection to adapt what they learn in PD for multilingual learners?

## The Gap Between Event and Process

Professional development is often designed as an event rather than an ongoing process. Desimone (2009) identifies sustained duration, coherence, and active learning as features of effective professional development. When teachers are introduced to strategies without structured opportunities to revisit and make sense of them in their own contexts, implementation becomes difficult.

This is especially true for teachers of multilingual learners, where instructional decisions must account for language development, content learning, and student participation all at once. Without space to reflect on these complexities, even a well-designed PD can fall short of its intended impact.

*Reflection shifts the role of the teacher from simply implementing strategies to making informed instructional decisions.*





### **From Theory to Practice: The Role of Reflective Practice**

Classrooms are complex. Multilingual learners bring diverse linguistic backgrounds, varying levels of proficiency, and different learning needs. A strategy that works in theory may not work in practice without adaptation, and reflective practice helps teachers make those adjustments.

Reflective practice is more than simply “thinking about a lesson.” It involves intentionally examining what happened during instruction, why it happened, and how teaching decisions can be adjusted (Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021). Reflection allows teachers to connect strategies from PD to the specific needs of their students. Reflection, however, takes time and support. A journal completed only to satisfy a requirement may do little to change instruction, and reflection alone cannot make a strategy suitable for every classroom. Teachers also need to question and adapt what PD offers.

### **A Real Classroom Moment**

During my classroom observations, I noticed that some multilingual students became more expressive when they interacted with instructors who shared or showed interest in their languages and cultural backgrounds. Students moved more freely between their home languages and English and became more willing to ask questions. The experience made me reflect on how easily quietness can be interpreted as disengagement when participation may also depend on whether students feel that their linguistic resources are recognized and welcomed. Teachers might ask:

- What forms of participation am I noticing or overlooking?
- Are students able to draw on their linguistic resources?
- What changes in the learning environment might help them participate more fully?

Through reflection, this observation becomes an opportunity to reconsider how participation and linguistic resources are recognized in the classroom.

### **Making Professional Learning Sustainable**

Desimone (2009) emphasizes sustained professional learning, while Farrell and Macapinlac (2021) provide a structured framework for teachers’ reflection. This means that reflection should not be left to chance or occur only occasionally. Instead, it should be supported through tools such as reflective journals, guided questions, collaborative discussions, or coaching. Reflection can be individual or collaborative. Individual reflection can help teachers examine their own decisions, while discussion with a colleague or instructional coach can surface perspectives they might not notice on their own. Without these kinds of support, PD risks becoming something teachers attend rather than something that transforms practice. For teachers of multilingual learners, this is particularly important. Instruction often requires ongoing adjustment based on students’ language use, participation, and comprehension. Reflection helps teachers notice these moments and respond more effectively.

### **Implications for Practice**

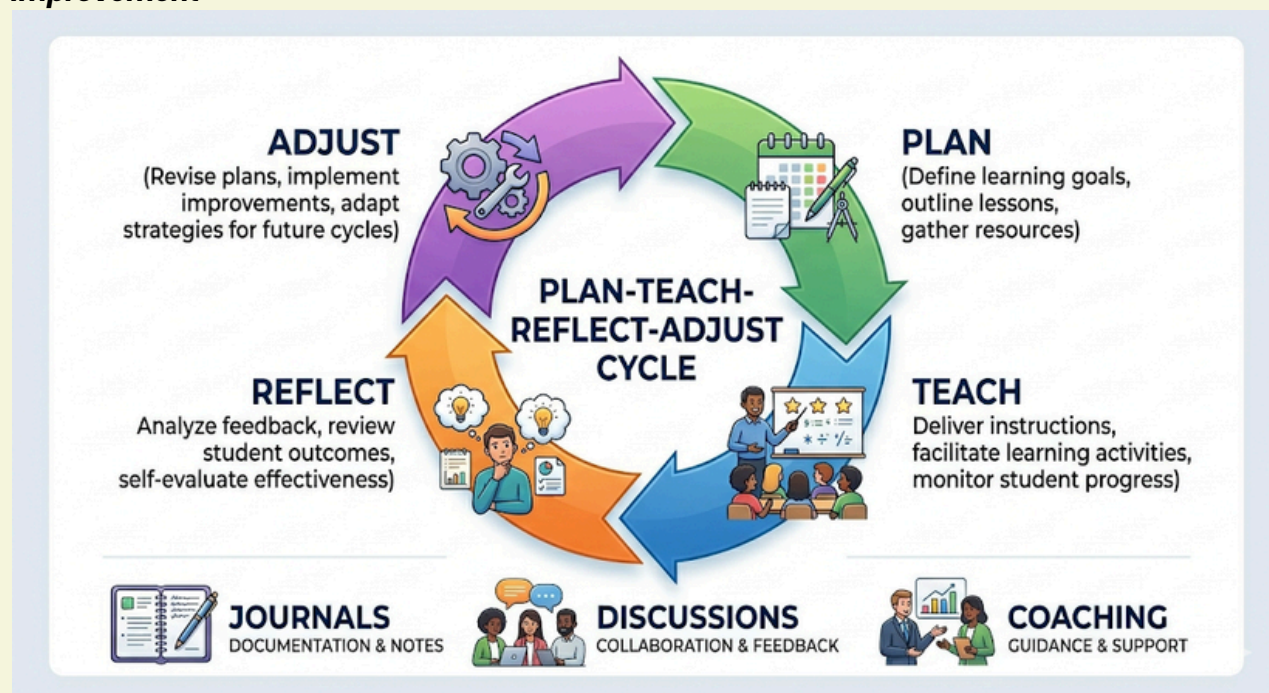
First, PD should not end when the session is over. Teachers need opportunities to revisit, question, and adapt what they have learned.

Second, reflection should be intentional. Asking specific questions after a lesson can make a significant difference:

- What worked for my multilingual learners today?
- What did not work, and why?
- What will I try differently next time?



**Figure 1. The reflective cycle that supports sustained teacher learning and instructional improvement**



Finally, reflection should be ongoing. Growth does not come from a single moment of insight, but from repeated cycles of trying, reflecting, and adjusting. Professional development has the potential to improve teaching, but only when it is connected to what teachers actually do in their classrooms. Reflective practice is what makes that connection possible.

At the center of effective professional learning is a continuous cycle that connects planning, teaching, reflection, and adjustment.

*The next time you walk out of a PD session feeling inspired, don't just file the handouts. Grab a notebook and ask yourself one question: How will I make this mine? That single act of reflection might be the difference between another forgotten strategy and a genuine shift in your teaching.*

### Key Takeaways

- Professional development can fall short when teachers lack support to adapt what they learn to their classrooms.
- Teachers need structured opportunities to revisit and adapt what they learn.
- Reflective practice connects professional learning to real classroom decisions.
- For teachers of multilingual learners, reflection is essential because instruction requires constant adjustment.
- Growth happens through a continuous cycle: plan, teach, reflect, and adjust.

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## Finding Decolonial Translingualism in चर्चा and चाय

BY VINITA V.J. ABICHANDANI, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY, USA

The sensory warmth of the cup of चाय (chai) on the book cover of Sohanthie Motha's *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching* (2014) instantly meant more to me than my staple Indian beverage, चाय. Chai was integral to my early-morning study hours, before I began engaging with the study content, its authors, and my scribbled notes for self-teaching. In the busy, noisy, and often loud city of Mumbai, chai offered me a caffeinated critical eye in the dawning hours of silence. It initiated a kind of healthy चर्चा (*charcha*), deep, reflective conversations with myself about the happenings around me, my engagements with them, and the questions they stirred.

As the image of chai became entangled with racialization in English language teaching (ELT) on Motha's book cover and with my reading of it as a transnational translingual doctoral student in the United States, it became a critical point of departure to retrospectively reflect on my lived experiences of chai-fuelled *charcha*.

These experiences unfolded across my shifting positionalities as an English learner, teacher, teacher educator, and researcher in postcolonial India. As चर्चा and चाय intertwined with English, they became critical sites for examining how language, identity, and power were negotiated through everyday interactions. These reflections examine how offering chai and participating in *charcha* mediated power relations, shaping who could speak, whose knowledge about ELT was legitimized, and whose voices were marginalized.

### Decoloniality in translingual चर्चा and चाय

Translingualism holds decolonial potential by transcending the fixity of language and land, problematizing the presumed compartmentalization of languages, people, and territories as disconnected entities. It foregrounds the fluid, situated, and negotiated practices through which meaning emerges across, in between, liminal linguistic and geopolitical spaces. As a practice, translingualism involves "generating new forms and meanings in synergy" (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 42), wherein words, expressions, and grammatical resources acquire meanings beyond the boundaries of any single, fully-proficiently-used language. It disrupts colonial constructions of language as a bounded, homogeneous whole.

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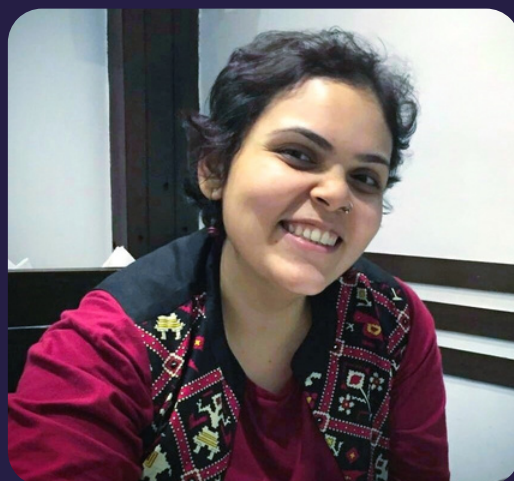






**Figure 1.** From left to right: The cover of Motha (2014), which brings together an image of chai and decolonizing terms such as responsible, ethical, and anti-racist in conversations about race, empire, and English language teaching; chai being prepared in the early morning on a stove in my Mumbai home, using a steel utensil specifically used for making chai, photographed and shared by my mother, Varsha J. Abichandani; and me drinking chai served in a paper cup at India Bazaar, a popular Indian grocery store in Fairfax, Virginia, USA.

Chai, as a translingual practice, has taken shape not only through its inclusion in the Oxford and other mainstream English dictionaries, but also through its consequential global circulation and popularity as a hot beverage, including in street-side cafés. Yet, the institutional recognition of चाय (chai) in English dictionaries can also be read as an act of linguistic appropriation, detaching it from the histories, meanings, and relations from which it emerged. Dictionaries, particularly those positioned as authoritative arbiters of “standard” English, are not neutral repositories of language; they participate in determining which words are legitimized, standardized, and circulated as acceptable within English.

चर्चा (charcha) evokes a culturally situated practice of talking, debating, reflecting, gossiping, and collectively making meaning in informal and relational ways. Literal English equivalents such as “discussion,” “conversation,” or “deliberation” cannot fully capture its community-oriented meanings. Charcha thus speaks to my postcolonial-transnational positionality as an English practitioner, whose engagements with

English have continually unfolded across standardized and localized Englishes, formal and informal registers, and linguistic and semiotic resources that move across state-sanctioned linguistic boundaries. As I naturally and unpredictably translanguage in different *charchas*, my positionality in relation to others shaped and was shaped by the messy interplay of people, languages, experiences, objects, and other resources that each of us brought to the table, collectively enabling the interaction.

Translingually practising language, then, becomes expansive, encompassing not only human linguistic engagements but also the non-human materialities, spatial arrangements, embodied actions, and affective relations that shape the communicative act. Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) draw attention to language as situated practice, where meaning is not simply possessed or deployed but emerges through the intertwining of people, places, objects, and sensory dimensions of interaction. The visuals, smells, sounds, textures, and tactilities, across time and space become entangled with linguistic and embodied resources in the making of meaning (Finnegan, 2015).



The decolonial potential of चाय (chai) and चर्चा (charcha) as translingual practices is in making visible the power dynamics, privileges, and constraints through which language is practised and valued (Canagarajah, 2022; Pennycook, 2017).

### **Reflective instances from the field**

From my positionality as a researcher in English language teacher education, I retrospectively reflect on three deliberately selected and narratively arranged instances drawn from my shifting positionalities as an English teacher and teacher educator in India. These instances are analytically significant moments through which I trace my identity negotiation as an English educator in the postcolonial Global South, where chai and charcha as translingual practices intersect with my engagements with English. Furthermore, these instances are interconnected moments drawn from everyday happenings and should be understood as commonplace practices through which the inside and outside of schools interact over चर्चा and चाय.

### ***Teacher(ing) in a college, Mumbai, India***

I was employed at a renowned college in Mumbai whose Gothic, British-era architecture and institutional practices echoed through English reverberating through its corridors without air conditioning or elevators. As a young, junior English teacher, I joined the staff room where teachers, leaders, and the principal gathered between lectures over chai, while a peon routinely carried चाय and snacks from the canteen up the stairs.

My heavy body and junior status often positioned me as the recipient of unsolicited advice, framed as care, around the large wooden table. My fatigue and panting after climbing the stairs elicited sympathy-driven cups of chai, which also became invitations to charcha around help and advice with teachers across subjects and levels of seniority.

Yet chai was not equally accessible to everyone. For senior teachers, asking the peon to bring chai was an unquestioned practice. English-inflected exchanges through which it was ordered subtly marked their seniority and authority in relation to him. I became part of this everyday arrangement only when another junior teacher joined the staff.

With teachers across subjects, our charcha over चाय allowed us to slip naturally and unpredictably between English, Hindi, and other familiar languages. However, the smaller gatherings with senior English teachers were different. There, English proficiency and knowledge of ELT carried greater weight. Conversations about grammar teaching, stricter assessment, and becoming a more assertive teacher positioned me as a junior-to-them as sipped more chai than contribute to the charcha. चर्चा and चाय, thus, became everyday sites where linguistic practices intersected with hierarchies of seniority, expertise, and authority.



**Figure 2.** Chai being made and served by male servers and peons at a popular college in Mumbai, India

**Figure 3.** Chai served in a cup made by female kitchen workers, referred to affectionately as *rasoia* –a term that conveys warmth and familiarity for the women who prepare and serve food. This photo was taken in a short break time during training sessions when I worked as a teacher educator/ trainer in Chhattisgarh, India.



### **Teacher educator inside schools, Chhattisgarh, India**

As a teacher educator of English from the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai, and having recently returned from London, I entered government-run schools in the districts of Chhattisgarh positioned as an external expert. My ELT knowledge was unquestioned as teachers welcomed me with chai in small, dark staff rooms with limited electricity and infrastructure.

The chai made of strong tea leaves and sugar boiled in water, without milk was often prepared and served by girl students at female teachers' direction, making the act of hospitality itself part of the school's social hierarchy. As an outsider, being served chai seemed to affirm my authority as someone who was presumed to know more about English. I spoke over *charcha* and chai while the teachers listened and noted my words,

with my English positioned as the language of expertise. The proficiency levels and grammatical errors in my English went unchecked while the teachers having the same chai tried hard to switch from their home languages and mend their accents to match mine. Here, chai marked a space where gendered labor, outsider status, and linguistic authority converged.

### **Discussion**

Chai and *charcha* embedded conversations in and about English in these instances reveal a sense of non-stasis and fluidity, where multiple spatio-temporal elements come together to shape meaning. English was not encountered as a stable, bounded linguistic system but its understanding emerged and changed through interactions among people, languages, bodies, institutional spaces, material objects, and memories of place and time.

Within a large staffroom and a diverse teacher population in Mumbai, my limited experience and the age- and body-based assumptions attached to me diminished the authority associated with being an English teacher. Here, *chai* and *charcha* became everyday means through which I and consequently my knowledge of ELT, was positioned three-times subordinate to the others, as young, heavy-bodied, and junior. However, *chai* offered in the small staffrooms in Chhattisgarh meant my leading the ELT *charcha*. Interestingly, here my identity as an English teacher was weighed based on my association with urbanized and international educational experiences of English in Mumbai and London. Additionally, the spatiality of the large, diverse college staffroom versus the small, dimly lit government school staffroom shaped the inflation and deflation of my identity as an English teacher.

Furthermore, *chai* brought gender, labor, English, and institutional hierarchy into the *charcha* in different configurations. In the Mumbai staffroom, predominantly English-speaking women educators could direct an outsider male peon to serve *chai*, making the English-mediated

act of ordering a performance of professional authority. While the Chhattisgarh encounter positioned English and my Mumbai and London credentials as a form of expertise that could authorize my outsider female teacher educator voice while simultaneously drawing women into the gendered labor of hospitality.

These moments reflect the coloniality embedded in everyday understandings of English in the Global South. Colonial hierarchies are reproduced through urban and international references that become markers of educational privilege. The intersections of age, body, gender, and English proficiency reveal coloniality operating through everyday institutional relations, where particular practices are accorded greater authority. These hierarchies as remnants of colonialism are continually reproduced through neoliberal notions of professionalism, expertise, and linguistic capital.



**Figure 4.** From left to right: *Charcha* with the teachers at a teacher training session in a small district in Chhattisgarh. *Chai* served in small paper cups to the local parents and teachers during our *charcha* at a government school in Chhattisgarh. *Chai* would be served to the teachers in intervals during training. The conversations would slip into and blend different languages and linguistic practices as we dealt with the teachers' challenges and engagements with teaching English at their schools.



Together, *chai* and *charcha* form a material-semiotic assemblage in which bodies, objects, spaces, and languages entangle to make communication in English and about ELT a translingual practice involving everyone and everything in the communicative encounter. Its decolonial potential lies in attending to the tensions, negotiations, and power relations through which meaning, authority, and identity are continually produced.

### Implications and conclusion

Food has been integral to decolonial and Indigenous research frameworks, offering possibilities for relational, embodied, and situated knowledge-making (Ortega, 2024; Storch, 2026). Yet food does not become decolonial simply through its presence in a research encounter. Differences between what researchers and participants eat, prefer, or consider familiar can reproduce the researcher as an outside, authoritative figure and reduce food to a tool for a one-time, extractive engagement (Minoia et al., 2026). This is particularly significant within doctoral research, where methodological encounters can easily become instrumentalized toward producing data, completing a dissertation, and advancing a professional career.

Moreover, when research is conducted in English, its colonial legacy can add another layer of distance between those involved in the research process. The reflective accounts in this article show how sharing local food during discussions and conversations can both reproduce and unsettle these hierarchical distances. *Chai*, for instance, can carry cultural meanings, histories, relations of hospitality, and hierarchies that cannot be fully captured when it is treated simply as a refreshment accompanying an interview. Attending to such practices can

therefore open possibilities for rethinking Western-derived research methodologies such as interviews and focus groups during ethnographies and case studies (Datta & Starlight, 2024). The implication for ELT research is particularly significant: if English itself carries histories of colonial authority, then creating more culturally situated and relational research encounters becomes part of questioning the very power relations through which knowledge about English teaching and learning is produced.

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# Beyond Grammar: Teaching Intercultural Pragmatics in an L2 Chinese Classroom

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Second or foreign language learning involves more than acquiring vocabulary and grammatical structures (Thomas, 1983). Learners also need to understand how their language use is shaped by social relationships, cultural expectations, and communicative contexts. This ability, known as pragmatic competence, plays an essential role in successful intercultural communication (Taguchi, 2015).

This dimension of language learning can become particularly visible through seemingly simple communicative acts such as refusals. Language learners who have received prior classroom instruction may already possess the grammatical and lexical resources needed to say “no,” but they may still face questions which such linguistic resources cannot easily answer: How direct should a refusal be in another language? When might an apology or explanation be appropriate? How does the relationship between speakers affect what sounds appropriate?

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Such questions informed a small classroom-based project involving five intermediate learners of Chinese. The project explored how refusal strategies in Chinese could be taught through awareness-raising activities, guided writing, and reflection. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of a particular intervention, the project aimed to illustrate how intercultural pragmatics can be incorporated into an L2 Chinese classroom and how structured activities can cultivate learners’ social and cultural awareness of language use.

## Background and Key Concepts: Refusals and Intercultural Pragmatics

**Pragmatic Competence.** Pragmatic competence refers broadly to the ability to use and interpret language appropriately in social contexts (Thomas, 1983; Taguchi, 2015). It involves sensitivity to contextual factors such as status, power, and social distance; consequently, a grammatically accurate utterance may still communicate an unintended interpersonal meaning.

From an intercultural perspective, pragmatic competence also involves recognizing that communicative appropriateness is not determined by fixed cultural rules. Rather, meanings and expectations are negotiated across speakers with different linguistic, cultural, and individual backgrounds (Kecskes, 2014).



Research suggests that pragmatics instruction can help learners notice pragmatic features that might otherwise receive limited attention in language classrooms (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Taguchi, 2015). Pragmatics instruction, therefore, involves more than learning additional expressions; it requires opportunities for learners to consider and practice how linguistic choices function within particular social situations.

**Refusal Strategies.** Refusals, one of the most widely studied speech acts, provide a useful context for exploring pragmatic competence because saying “no” requires speakers to balance their own intentions with interpersonal considerations (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Gass & Houck, 1999). Beebe et al. (1990) categorized refusals into direct strategies (e.g., saying I can’t), indirect strategies (e.g., excuses or hedging), and adjuncts (e.g., apologies or gratitude). Successful refusals often combine these resources to balance honesty and politeness.

Cross-cultural research has documented variation in how refusals are performed and interpreted across linguistic and cultural contexts (Bresnahan & Cai, 1994; Gass & Houck, 1999). Beyond L1 transfer, pragmatic choices are also shaped by individual identities, social experiences, relationships, and specific communicative contexts (Ishihara, 2006). Accordingly, intercultural pragmatics instruction is less about teaching learners a single “correct” way to communicate and more about helping them notice how linguistic choices interact with relationships, identities, and communicative contexts.

### **Why Pragmatics Matters in L2 Chinese Classrooms**

Pragmatic competence deserves particular attention in Less Commonly Taught Language (LCTL) classrooms. For many LCTL learners, opportunities to observe everyday target-language interactions outside the classroom may

be limited, making classroom attention to pragmatic competence particularly valuable.

Importantly, pragmatics does not necessarily require a separate unit in an already crowded language curriculum. Everyday speech acts, such as requests, apologies, compliments, and refusals, can provide manageable opportunities for learners to consider not only *what* an expression means but also *what it does* in a particular social context.

Refusals, among other speech acts, are especially complex because they inherently contradict the interlocutor’s expectations. Learners may already know linguistic forms for expressing inability or unwillingness. The pedagogical challenge, therefore, is to move beyond simply teaching learners how to linguistically say “no” and encourage them to consider the interpersonal meanings associated with different ways of saying it.

### **Bringing Refusals into the Classroom**

The project involved five intermediate-level, non-heritage learners at a U.S. university who had completed at least one year of college Chinese. Instruction consisted of three stages: awareness-raising, guided writing, and post-task reflection.

During the awareness-raising stage, participants completed a questionnaire presenting English and Chinese refusals in situations ranging from declining a close friend’s birthday invitation to turning down a job offer. They considered which responses sounded most natural and whether refusal practices differed across the two languages.

Three of the five participants already demonstrated a general awareness that cultural differences could influence politeness. However, none explicitly identified differences in directness between English and Chinese refusals,



and their responses suggested some uncertainty about how to formulate appropriate refusals in Chinese. This suggests that knowing “culture matters” does not necessarily mean understanding how culture and context shape specific language choices.

During the second stage, participants examined examples of refusal strategies and discussed linguistic resources such as apologies, explanations, hedging, and other forms of mitigation. They then completed a guided writing task based on a familiar situation: a close friend invites them to a birthday party, but they cannot attend. Participants were asked to compose a brief email declining the invitation, first in English and then in Chinese, while considering tone, politeness, and contextual appropriateness.

Finally, participants completed reflection questions asking them to identify differences they had noticed, challenges they had experienced, and possible applications of pragmatic knowledge to communication beyond the classroom.

### **What Participants Noticed**

In their Chinese responses, all five participants used more indirect and mitigated expressions than in their English responses. For example, rather than using an unmitigated refusal, they produced expressions such as “我可能来不了” (“I may not be able to come”). They also incorporated expressions such as “真的很抱歉” (“I am truly very sorry”) and “非常遗憾” (“It is a great pity”), demonstrating attention to linguistic resources for mitigating refusals.

The post-task reflections provided further insight into how participants interpreted these choices. Four of the five participants explicitly commented on differences in directness between their English and Chinese refusals. One participant memorably described Chinese refusals as

“dancing around the details,” indicating an emerging awareness of indirectness and mitigation.

Participants also recognized that pragmatic choices involve challenges rather than simple formulas. Three described difficulty balancing clarity and politeness. A refusal needed to communicate the intended message clearly while avoiding a response that might be perceived as overly abrupt. Four reported greater confidence in formulating refusals, with one commenting, “Now I know how to say no in Chinese without sounding rude.”

All five participants also identified relevance beyond the classroom, including study abroad, professional contexts, and interpersonal communication. Given the small sample and reliance on written production and self-reflection, these observations do not demonstrate lasting instructional effects. Rather, they illustrate how classroom activities can make less visible dimensions of communication available for learner reflection.

### **Practical Suggestions for Graduate Instructors**

Integrating intercultural pragmatics into language instruction does not require redesigning an entire course. Graduate student instructors, particularly those who are working in LCTL contexts, can incorporate pragmatic awareness into existing classroom activities through several strategies:

1. Start with familiar speech acts: Use everyday situations such as refusing an invitation or responding to a compliment to make pragmatic choices concrete and accessible.

2. Begin with noticing: Before explicitly teaching pragmatic strategies, present learners with several possible responses and ask what differences they notice. Learners' existing intuitions can provide a starting point for discussion.
3. Compare without creating cultural rules: Cross-linguistic comparison can promote intercultural awareness, but tendencies should not be presented as fixed national characteristics. Encourage learners to consider relationships, power, social distance, individual preferences, and communicative context.
4. Connect linguistic forms to social meanings: Rather than teaching apologies, hedges, explanations, and other expressions only as vocabulary, discuss how these linguistic choices may shape interpersonal meanings.
5. Build in reflection: After a communicative task, ask learners what they noticed, what they found challenging, and why they made particular choices. Reflection can make the reasoning behind language use more visible.

Together, these practices shift pragmatics instruction away from memorizing a supposedly "correct" way of communicating and toward developing learners' ability to observe, interpret, and make context-sensitive choices.

### Conclusion

Teaching pragmatics highlights the distinction between linguistic knowledge and communicative ability: learners may construct grammatically accurate sentences while remaining uncertain about their interpersonal meanings. Refusal activities offer one way to make these less visible dimensions of communication visible.

For graduate instructors, incorporating intercultural pragmatics can begin with one speech act, communicative scenario, or reflective question. Rather than prescribing fixed formulas for "culturally appropriate" behavior, instruction can equip learners to observe, compare, question, and make context-sensitive communicative choices. Moving beyond grammar thus expands language learning to include the relationships, expectations, and social meanings accompanying linguistic choices.

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# Beyond English: Negotiating Multilingual Identities among Bangladeshi Students in Germany

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"When I communicated with people at a German office using simple German, I was able to explain my needs and understand their response. I felt confident and happy because I could handle the situation independently." This is how one Bangladeshi student described the feeling when they could communicate in German. I have had similar experiences: sometimes I could confidently handle a difficult situation, and at other times I felt disappointed when English was barely enough. When new students arrive in Germany, they may instantly realize that English is not enough and start wondering what to do to overcome the language shock. Drawing on Darvin and Norton's (2015) concepts of identity and investment, I conducted a short survey (N=18) on how Bangladeshi multilingual students deal with languages in academic and social life. I used thematic analysis to investigate the data. Almost all participants identified as multilingual. They reported switching to German, using translation tools when English felt insufficient, and investing in learning

German to get better job opportunities and gain confidence in everyday life.

## Multilingual Identity

Research on multilingual identity negotiation is now well-established. Multilingual identity refers to an umbrella identity through which individuals identify as multilingual based on their language repertoire (Fisher et al., 2020).

## Academic and Social Domain

The academic domain refers to communication with professors and peers primarily in the classroom and on campus. The social domain comprises the broader aspects of everyday life beyond academic life. It includes communicating with friends and family, visiting a doctor, going to stores and restaurants, using public transportation, and communicating with administrative staff in government offices. Additionally, international students can work part-time alongside their studies in Germany; therefore, "at work" falls under the social domain since they are not working professionals yet.

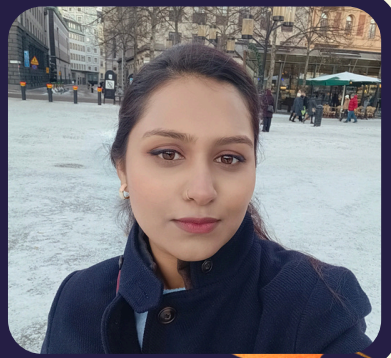
## Research Questions

In which contexts Bangladeshi students find English insufficient, how do they negotiate their multilingual identity, and why do they invest in learning German?

## Methodology

I adapted interview-style questions into a questionnaire and distributed it through a Google Form. Language proficiency level and multilingual identity were self-reported.

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The questionnaire had three parts: (1) demographic information (age, gender, program of study); (2) multilingual identity ("Do you consider yourself multilingual?"); and (3) open-ended questions about communication practices, motivation, and feelings (e.g., "Can you describe a situation where speaking English was not enough?").

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). I knew most of them personally; others were unfamiliar to me and received the link to the Google Form through other participants. Participation was voluntary, and data were anonymized.

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) to identify themes addressing the research questions on the adequacy of English, feelings associated with different languages, and the negotiation of identity and investment. I read the responses, identified key words and phrases, and grouped them under specific themes. After analyzing words and phrases such as "awkward," "misunderstood," "marginalized," "I tried," and "living in Germany," in different contexts, I drew three themes: "English is not enough," "negotiating multilingual identity," and "investment in German."

The limitations of this study are the sample size and the data collection method. The results are not representative of all Bangladeshi students in Germany, and interviews would have allowed a deeper exploration of identity development and negotiation.

## Results and Discussion

### Participant Profile

Participants self-reported that they spoke Bengali, English, and German, and all except one stated that they were multilingual. Their English proficiency was evenly distributed from B1 to C1, whereas their German proficiency was mostly A2 to B1.

### English is not enough

The participants were asked whether they felt that English was not enough in any situation and what they felt and did in that situation. The answers revealed that most of them had dealt with situations where their English was insufficient. One participant wrote, "I felt awkward," and then tried to use "German key words," while another felt "worried" when visiting a doctor. One participant, recalling their early days in Germany, wrote, "I was feeling a bit marginalized." The situations in which English was not enough also varied: one participant said that at the city registration office, "They told me they only spoke German, so I was a bit confused and worried." One participant also revealed that talking about complex ideas in English was difficult, so they avoided deep conversations altogether. One participant gave a detailed account of why they used German; they said, "English alone was not always sufficient for handling everyday situations." These accounts suggest that participants struggled to communicate only in English and felt worried or frustrated when they were unable to put across their ideas in English. These responses suggest that English-medium study in Germany does not necessarily provide linguistic access to life beyond the university.

### Negotiating Multilingual Identity

Describing situations in which English was challenging, one participant said, "it's better to switch to German." Some resorted to Google Translate in inconvenient and uncomfortable situations. Participants also felt confident when they could use German at work and in restaurants. One participant said, "I ordered food in German at a restaurant and understood everything without trouble," while another explained how they used German when grocery shopping: "... I switched to German, and it feels great."

Although they acknowledged that German is difficult, they felt “happy” and “proud” when they switched from English to German. One participant said, “I think I use German more often when I am at work, and it is still difficult for me, but I handle it so well and every time I speak German it makes me feel good.” The feelings associated with using both English and German, switching to German, and using Google Translate seem to shape how the participants see themselves as multilingual.

### Investment in German

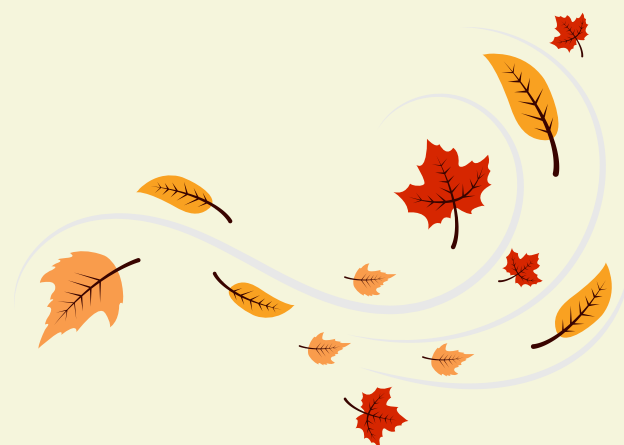
Investment and motivation are distinct but complementary (Darvin & Norton, 2023). Although participants were asked, “What motivates you to learn and improve your German language?”, motivation is not the only reason students learn German. According to Darvin and Norton (2023), investment in learning a language is linked with identities, access to valued resources, and social conditions. One participant expressed concern about the job market and noted that although A2 German is sufficient for everyday life, at least B2 is required to get a job since “the job sector is getting competitive.” However, investment goes beyond job opportunities, echoing “learners invest because there is something that they want for themselves” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 46). Many participants emphasized that they wanted to communicate more easily in everyday situations and said they “want to feel more independent and confident.” Others said, “I’m motivated to learn German because I need it for everyday life in Germany,” and “I want to live long-term here.” These responses indicate that participants not only seek future job security and better career prospects; they also want social recognition in their present situation. Most importantly, investment is associated with their sense of self-esteem, confidence, and comfort.

### Closing Remarks

From the students’ responses, it can be concluded that in some situations they found English insufficient and thus faced confusion and frustration. They switched to German and used translation apps. Moreover, they invested in learning German for social, professional, and personal gains. In Germany, English-medium programs may provide academic access to international students, but they need to negotiate their multilingual identity to get social access.

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## Telecollaboration as a Means of Emancipation in Language Teacher Education: Empowering L2 Teachers with Critical Consciousness

BY ZEYNEP S. SINAN, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, USA

### Conceptualizing Telecollaboration

Being a participant in a telecollaboration project for L2 teachers organized by Dr. Sadler and Dr. Dooly between the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona taught me many cultural aspects about Spain that I would not otherwise know, even though I had not been there before. By definition, telecollaboration, or virtual exchange, brings participants from different cultures together to negotiate meaning in their second language (L2) about specific themes in a multicultural digital context through computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools (Akiyama & Cunningham, 2018; O'Dowd, 2018). As its name suggests, it is typically a partnership between two or more educational institutions from different countries, mediated by language teachers or professors. Given this, the goals of telecollaboration projects can be

tailored based on the needs of the target group, such as language learning or language teacher training. In terms of length, virtual exchange projects range from a month to several months, and mainly involve regular synchronous videoconference meetings and asynchronous task completion to achieve pedagogical goals set by the mediators based on a plan.

### Telecollaboration in Language Teacher Education

Telecollaboration in L2 teacher education has evolved into a tool for cultural emancipation, meaning that participants can liberate themselves with praxis in a counter-hegemonic space, deconstructing culturally oppressive norms that dictate the schooling systems bound to language education by developing critical consciousness (Giroux, 1985; Freire, 2005). Sociocultural discussions are at the heart of virtual exchange, as it promotes a culturally rich digital setting that enhances interlocutors' intercultural competence by augmenting traditional language teacher education (Wu, 2023). Indeed, telecollaboration is multidimensional because it develops participants' digital literacy and language proficiency in addition to intercultural competence, familiarizing them with the discourse of both real-world and digital cross-cultural communication (Çiftçi & Savaş, 2018; Guth & Helm, 2012).

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Essentially, interculturality in virtual exchange contexts not only comprises an increase in L2 proficiency and cross-cultural knowledge but also a discussion of topics that make participants revisit their assumptions about others' or their own cultures, ideologies, and social norms. Therefore, telecollaboration can be a means of social transformation thanks to its dialogic nature (Dooly, 2017; Emir & Yangın-Ekşi, 2024; Sadler & Dooly, 2016).

Virtual exchange is not without challenges. Cultural clashes (Keleş et al., 2024a; Keleş et al., 2024b), foreign language anxiety (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2019), time zone differences (Yang, 2023), and technological issues (O'Dowd et al., 2020) can impede this process. Indeed, cultural conflicts do happen frequently, but they are useful for bringing problems to the surface and for being used as a source of critical consciousness with experiential learning (O'Dowd et al., 2020), which does not happen overnight, but at least sparks a fire in participants (Üzüm et al., 2020). Thus, language teachers' role is critical to having successful virtual exchange without being hindered by such problems, as they lead this process (Emir & Ekşi, 2024; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Sadler & Dooly, 2016), adopting the roles of a facilitator, an organizer, an intercultural partner, a model, a coach, and a source of information (O'Dowd, 2015; O'Dowd & Dooly, 2020). This adds to pedagogical responsibilities; therefore, it is necessary to integrate telecollaboration into both pre-service and in-service L2 teacher education programs systematically to enhance their lingua-technocultural competence, which represents their digital literacy and cultural competence that would prepare them for innovating their future classrooms with telecollaboration (Pfingsthorn et al., 2021; Sauro & Chappelle, 2017).

### **Reconstructing Language Teachers' Cultural Identity with Telecollaboration**

As noted by Varghese et al. (2005), language teacher identity fluctuates based on the social, cultural, and political discourse an individual is included in. Considering this, through dialogic tasks in telecollaboration that create a space for discussions, pre-service L2 teachers can negotiate and reconstruct their identities as teachers by exploring, reflecting on, and comparing sociocultural similarities and differences in their discourse (Dietrich, 2022; Ekin et al., 2024; Eren, 2023b; Keleş et al., 2024a; O'Dowd et al., 2020). In this vein, Üzüm et al. (2020) demonstrated that "through intercultural telecollaborative projects, trainees can cross national and cultural borders through concrete encounters with the other and renegotiate their identities as intercultural speakers" (p. 15). This indicates that virtual exchange provides prospective language teachers with an opportunity to challenge cultural stereotypes through co-construction of meaning in a digital environment. As an illustration, telecollaboration can help teacher candidates dispel the native-speakerism fallacy (González, 2020). Besides, student teachers can broaden their understanding of social justice by creating a space for dialogue about sociocultural themes concerning gender, race, ethnicity, and disability (Eren, 2023a; Eren, 2023b; Keleş et al., 2024a; Keleş et al., 2024b; Üzüm, Yazan, Akayoğlu et al., 2023; Üzüm, Yazan, Mary et al., 2023; Yazan et al., 2023). Moreover, according to Dietrich (2022), telecollaboration between US-based student teachers and Afghan English learners promoted empathy among the participants, led them to see cultural differences as a source of richness, and increased their awareness of trauma-informed pedagogy in extreme cases like war. With this in mind, virtual exchange serves as a means of promoting equity and inclusivity, contributing to the deconstruction, problematization, and eradication of

heteronormativity, gender discrimination, racism, and cultural stereotypes in language classrooms starting as early as pre-service teacher education.

### Concluding Remarks

To summarize, telecollaboration plays an important role in the cultural identity formation of pre-service language teachers, since it introduces them to a wide range of critical sociocultural topics that would determine the climate in language classrooms, prompting them to reevaluate their stance toward interculturality. By fostering critical pedagogy, virtual exchange can better equip prospective L2 teachers with critical consciousness because it allows them to negotiate the roles that power dynamics and ideologies play in the status quo in multilingual classrooms. As an emancipatory act, this serves as an important component of language teacher professional development for sustaining intercultural sensitivity within L2 pedagogy. To this end, the number of future virtual exchange practices in both pre- and in-service language teacher education practices should be increased, along with scholarly research on it, for its systematic integration into language teacher education, as the current practices fall short of this. As an AAALGrads member, if you are interested in attending a virtual exchange project and opportunities are not available to you in your current institution, you can look out for calls for participants from researchers on online platforms. If you are considering organizing one, you can start by finding a partner teacher through projects like UNICollaboration or eTwinning.



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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Finding My Way as a Teacher–Researcher**

BY HEEJOON CHOI,  
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Graduate students enter their programs for many different reasons. When I applied to a doctoral program, I had some language teaching experience but not much experience in research. My path began with my experience teaching the Korean language as a teaching assistant (TA) at a university in the United States. While working as a Korean TA, I became interested in pursuing teaching opportunities in higher education. It led me then to complete an MA in the US, where I first learned about research. By the time I was finishing up my master's, I was curious about what research was and whether it might be something I could pursue, but to be honest, I cared more about learning about language teaching and expanding my opportunities as a second language (L2) teaching expert. In 2023, I was fortunate to begin my PhD in Applied Linguistics. Starting a PhD, however, did not automatically give me a sense of myself as a researcher.

**When I did not see myself as a researcher**

In my first year, I often compared myself with peers early in the PhD program. Some had substantial research skills and experiences (like publications or major conference presentations), while others didn't have much experience but seemed to have a strong passion for research. I felt I had neither. This was partly a confidence issue: "Can I do this?", and "Could I actually learn to do research well?" but also an identity issue: "Did I see myself as a researcher, or was I a teacher who happened to be in a PhD program?" I often felt "lucky" to have received a PhD offer, and I experienced what felt like a

classic form of imposter syndrome. I struggled enough that I even considered quitting because I worried that I would never develop the confidence or ability to become a researcher.

Interestingly, teaching was what sort of helped me maintain a sense of accomplishment during this period. I continued teaching as an instructor of record/TA, and teaching gave me something I could recognize as a strength. At the time, however, I saw teaching and research as separate parts of my graduate experience. Teaching was something I already knew; research was something I was still trying to figure out.

**A turning point: From working with teachers to seeing research differently**

My shift toward seeing research as something personally meaningful began in my second year, through a project for a coursework final paper. At the time, I planned a study that examined students' work and perceptions, along with an interview with their teacher. Although I had a solid plan for my study, I was struggling to find a site to conduct my project. I remember walking around the department cubicles and knocking on instructors' office doors asking whether anyone could help me find students for the project. I was fortunate to connect with an amazing classroom teacher who was willing to work with me and her students. At that time, I primarily understood the project as a study of student outcomes and teacher perceptions.

It was only later, during my third year, that I began to see that project differently. A particularly important moment came when I learned about research–practice partnerships (RPPs) at a conference. RPPs bring researchers and practitioners together to investigate questions relevant to educational practice, drawing on their different forms of knowledge to inform teaching and learning. I realized that the

project I had conducted the year before could be viewed through an RPP lens. It was an “aha” moment for me. What I had initially viewed as a classroom project could also be understood as a collaboration among a teacher, students, and a researcher. This was more than simply putting a new label on an old project. RPPs gave me a new way to think about what I had been doing and what I wanted research to accomplish.

I returned to the existing data and revisited the project from the RPP framework. Rather than focusing primarily on a teacher and students’ perspective, I reframed the study around the collaboration between the teacher and me as a researcher, while considering how that collaboration could benefit students’ learning. I revisited the data I had collected—planning notes, observations, and the teacher interview—to see how the partnership shaped the design and implementation of the classroom task. At the time, I remember feeling slightly unfamiliar with formally calling myself a “researcher.” I had been conducting a research project, but I was still learning to see myself as someone who could legitimately claim that identity. However, I recall writing this paper was a rewarding experience than other projects I had done before.

During my third year, I had more opportunities to work with more classroom teachers on projects connecting theories with instructional practices and students’ learning. Through these experiences, I became increasingly interested not only in the research questions themselves, but also in what I could learn from teachers and how research could connect with classroom practice. I became more intentional about viewing teachers and students not simply as participants or sources of data, but as collaborators whose knowledge and experiences could shape the research process. I began to realize that I was most

interested in research when it allowed me to connect the things I already cared about: teaching, learning, and collaboration.

### **Connecting teaching and research**

My experiences as a language teacher gave me questions I cared about, and research gave me a way to explore those questions and learn more about L2 teaching and learning. In some ways, I came back to my original motivation for graduate school: becoming a language teaching expert. The difference is that I now see research as part of that identity rather than something separate from it.

I am still learning, and I still have moments when I question whether I am doing research well. I see developing research confidence and identity as an ongoing process, with its own ups and downs. But I now have a better sense of why I want to do research and what role I want it to play in my work. For me, developing a research identity did not simply mean becoming more confident in my research skills. It meant understanding how research fits into the kind of teacher and scholar I want to become.

### **For Fellow Graduate Students Finding Their Way**

Looking back, I wish I had understood sooner that teaching and research do not have to be separate parts of an applied linguistics academic career. I thought of teaching as something I was familiar with and research as something I needed to learn how to do. Working with classroom teachers and learning about the RPP framework helped me connect these two parts of my identity. At the same time, I want to note that my experience is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and I do not mean to suggest that applied linguistics graduate students should pursue RPPs. This is simply one path that worked for me, shaped by my experiences as a teacher and my opportunities to work with classroom teachers.

What I also wish I had known earlier is that entering a PhD program without a fully formed research identity does not mean that you will never develop one. Research confidence and research identity can emerge at different times and through different pathways. For some of us, curiosity may be enough to start, and experiences along the way may help us discover where that curiosity can lead.

I remember hearing that everyone develops at a different pace in graduate school. When I struggled during my first year, I understood this idea merely inside my head. Now, I understand it much more personally. I hope this reflection can offer encouragement to fellow graduate students navigating uncertainty about their research abilities, interests, or identities. We do not have to have everything figured out when we begin. Sometimes, the experiences we already value can become the foundation through which we discover what kind of researcher we want to be. Perhaps our different pathways are also what shape the unique scholarship we ultimately bring to our fields.



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RESOURCE REVIEW OF  
**Dean, D. (2022). *What works in grammar instruction*. National Council of Teachers of English**

BY NOWRIN AKTHER KOLY,  
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There has long been debate about how grammar should be taught that can support students' language acquisition. In traditional approaches, grammatical rules and formulas are usually taught as isolated constructs through drills, memorization, and handouts. For many language learners, this approach can create anxiety around making mistakes and leave them unsure about how to use grammar in meaningful communication, particularly in speaking and writing. In response to these challenges, teachers may feel tempted to minimize or even abandon grammar instruction altogether. However, abandoning grammar is not an answer because grammar is all around us. In this resource review, I highlight key takeaways from Deborah Deans' book "What Works in Grammar Instruction". My professor, Dr. Kris Lewis, had recommended this book for my Assessment and Testing in English as a Second Language class during my first-year doctoral coursework. As an Applied Linguistics and TESOL graduate student, I came across several ideas worth documenting and sharing with TESOL teachers to revisit effective ways of teaching grammar in contexts. I hope AAAL grad students working as graduate teaching assistants or planning to teach ESL or native English-speaking students in the future will similarly find this review useful to try some of strategies I have referenced from the book.

### Teaching Grammar as a Tool for Inquiry:

*"When we engage with grammar as art, we allow ourselves to wonder, surrender, be tempted and overcome."*

—Mary Ehrenworth and Vicki Vinton.

Veteran teacher educator Deborah Dean opens her book "What Works in Grammar Instruction" with this line that reflects her stance toward grammar: grammar is more like an art than a set of rules. The book has strengthened my pedagogical stance in favour of teaching grammar in context rather than as a set of isolated formulas. It has made me reconsider the connection between philosophical understanding and the practical choices we make as language teachers when teaching grammar. What I appreciated most about the book is Dean's pragmatic and balanced approach to grammar as she strives to bridge the theory and praxis by highlighting the idea that rethinking grammar instruction does not mean abandoning grammar at any cost, but rather being strategic in pedagogical choices about when, why, and how we draw students' attention to the language embedded in texts they read and write.

Despite her critique of traditional grammar instruction, Dean does not dismiss the value of grammar terminology altogether. Nevertheless, she suggests using grammatical terms as a shared language for noticing and discussing language while remaining cautious about asking students to learn textbook definitions by heart. Alternatively, for instance, we can guide students to identify the verbs in the texts they read and discuss the role they play. Having the concept clear, the students can come up with their own simple definitions before the textbook one can be provided to compare and elaborate. In this approach, terminology becomes a tool for inquiry rather than a definition to memorize without knowing the function and application.

### Teaching grammar as a Resource rather than a template

In terms of teaching grammar for writing, Dean's recommends using mentor texts. The author is, however, intentional about using the term "mentor" instead of "model" texts, as she highlights the role of a mentor as a guide, advisor, and supporter who opens opportunities, as opposed to a model, which suggests a likeness or a pattern to copy. She suggests that teachers remain intentional in using mentor texts to teach language at multiple levels, rather than bringing them to the classroom to show an ideal model for students to reproduce. Wearing the hat of a detective, students can investigate how writers make choices about vocabulary, sentence starters, variations, tense, tone, format, punctuation, genre conventions, and other aspects of language and discuss how those choices contribute to meaning and effects. Similarly, Dean suggests using different genres to understand how grammar functions for different purposes, audiences, and contexts. For instance, using cinquain and diamante poems as genres, teachers can teach parts of speech as well as the denotative, connotative, metaphorical, and symbolic uses of language common in poetry. The book includes more examples of genres to demonstrate how to teach grammar in contexts: writing letters for different audiences, analysing grammar rants, creating advertisements, and writing dialogue to conceptualize how language choices change across genres.

While students' autonomy is what we should aim for, teachers' mentorship is equally crucial in this process. The author warns us not to assume that students automatically transfer their grammar knowledge from one context to another. As teachers, our role is to guide students as mentors and know what kinds of support our students need so they can gradually develop the awareness and resources to write their own texts to the best of their abilities. Grammar, then, becomes a tool for learning how to communicate effectively and be creative rather than a set of formulas to plug and play.

### Moving from textbook prescription to dialogic grammar instruction

Throughout the book, Dean uses classroom vignettes and conversations to illustrate what teaching grammar in context looks like in practice for both English language learners and native speakers in an accessible and applicable way. Instead of simply describing what contextualized grammar instruction should look like, she shows the ways grammar teaching can emerge through interactions between teachers and students. In many of these examples, the teacher does not explicitly announce that the class is "learning grammar." Instead, students talk about language, notice patterns, ask questions, and make choices with the teacher's guidance. Through dialogue, teachers can respond to what students understand and produce and adjust the language and support they provide.

What I take away from Dean's book is that contextualized grammar instruction does not mean ignoring grammatical forms, terminology, accuracy, or assessment. It means teaching these elements in ways that connect them to what students read, write, and communicate. The resource review hopes to help TESOL teachers and AAAL grad students rethink their relationship with grammar and reconsider what counts as teaching grammar in context.



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## RESOURCE REVIEW

**Teaching Is Inquiry as  
a Resource for  
Rethinking What We  
See in Classrooms**

BY OLUWABUNMI ALAO,  
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Ballenger, C. (2025). *Teaching Is Inquiry: Observation and Reflection as the Heart of Practice*. Teachers College Press.

My interest in Cynthia Ballenger's *Teaching Is Inquiry* grew out of my experience as an ESL teacher. I once noticed that some students who were active and expressive outside the classroom became noticeably quiet during lessons. At the time, I interpreted their silence as a lack of engagement and, in some cases, as evidence that they were less academically capable. With more experience and exposure to research on teaching and learning, I began to recognize how much those interpretations were shaped by narrow assumptions about what participation and understanding should look like. Ballenger's book gave me a language for reconsidering those moments.

The book is organized into three parts across nine chapters. It begins with the foundations of teaching as inquiry, then uses classroom narratives about reading instruction and children with special needs to show what inquiry looks like in practice. It is written primarily for teachers interested in using observation and reflection to better understand their students and improve their practice.

The core of the book is the argument that teachers should become curious about what students say, do, and understand

before rushing to evaluate them. Rather than treating teaching as the straightforward application of strategies, Ballenger presents it as an interpretive practice grounded in observation, questioning, reflection, and a willingness to revise one's assumptions. Students, in this view, are not problems to be diagnosed. They are thinkers whose ideas deserve careful attention.

One of the most useful concepts in the book is what Ballenger calls "stopping time" (p. 20). Teachers document classroom moments, revisit them later, and consider alternative interpretations of what they observed. This practice challenges the speed with which teachers often move from observation to judgment. A student gives an unexpected answer, remains silent, or approaches a task differently, and it is easy to conclude that the student does not understand. Ballenger asks teachers to pause before making that leap.

Closely related are what she describes as "puzzling moments" (pp. 17, 19, 74), occasions when students respond in ways that do not match teachers' expectations. Instead of treating these moments as evidence of confusion or inability, Ballenger encourages teachers to use them as entry points for investigation. This idea is particularly relevant for educators working with multilingual learners. Students may draw on linguistic, cultural, and experiential resources that are not immediately visible through conventional classroom participation or assessment. An inquiry stance encourages teachers to ask what a student's response might reveal before deciding what it lacks.

Another strength of the book is that Ballenger does not leave inquiry at the level of theory. Through detailed classroom narratives, she shows teachers taking notes, discussing observations with colleagues, questioning earlier interpretations, and making different instructional decisions as a result. For graduate students in applied linguistics, TESOL, language education, or teacher education, this makes the book especially useful.



Graduate coursework often introduces sophisticated theories about language, identity, culture, and learning, but the challenge is understanding what those ideas mean during the ordinary, messy moments of classroom life. Ballenger offers a bridge between the two.

These narratives also make teacher thinking visible. Rather than presenting successful teaching as a collection of polished techniques, Ballenger reveals the uncertainty, interpretation, questioning, and revision that precede instructional decisions. Her examples suggest that becoming a better teacher is not simply a matter of accumulating more strategies. It also requires developing a disciplined habit of noticing.

There are, however, limitations. Much of the evidence comes from small-scale classroom cases of reading instruction and work with children with special needs, often connected to Ballenger's own practice, which raises questions about how readily the examples transfer across educational contexts. The book also gives relatively limited attention to the constraints teachers face when attempting this kind of sustained inquiry, including standardized curricula, accountability demands, and limited time. In addition, while Ballenger challenges deficit perspectives, the book gives limited attention to newer asset-based scholarship, and more explicit engagement with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) would have strengthened the discussion.

These limitations do not diminish the book's practical value. Instead, they create opportunities for graduate students to read it alongside more contemporary scholarship and to ask how an inquiry stance might be adapted to their own educational settings.

For graduate students preparing to teach, studying classroom interaction, conducting practitioner research, or supporting teachers through professional development, *Teaching Is Inquiry* offers an important reminder: what

we first notice about students is not necessarily what is actually happening. Good teaching requires the willingness to slow down, look again, and question the assumptions behind our interpretations. Returning to the students I described at the outset, an inquiry stance would have led me to ask what their quietness was doing rather than what it lacked. I might have documented those moments, revisited them, and considered what linguistic and cultural resources lay behind their silence. Ballenger ultimately invites educators to replace premature judgment with curiosity, a practice worth carrying into both classrooms and research.

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**Oluwabunmi Alao** is a doctoral student in Language Education and Multilingualism at the University at Buffalo. Her research interests include teacher learning, reflective practice, technology-enhanced professional development, multilingual education, and equitable instruction for multilingual learners. She has experience teaching English and supporting teacher learning across different educational contexts. Her current work explores how reflective practice can support teachers in adapting professional learning to the realities of their classrooms. She is also interested in the role of technology and collaboration in creating more responsive and sustainable forms of professional development.

## RESOURCE REVIEW OF

**Ross, L. J. (2025).  
*Calling in: How to start  
making change with  
those you'd rather  
cancel*. Simon &  
Schuster.**

BY UNITY WATTS-BAILEY,  
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, USA

When I first picked up *Calling In*, I expected another book about social justice, accountability, and activism. Instead, I found myself slowing down and reflecting on my own leadership, communication, and assumptions about what accountability can look like. As a doctoral student in a program that examines learning and teaching through social contexts, I spend much of my professional life navigating conversations about identity, belonging, conflict, and community. Because of that, Loretta J. Ross's message felt especially relevant. I found myself reading not only as a scholar, but also as a practitioner, continually asking how her ideas might shape the way I lead, teach, and build community. Loretta J. Ross is a nationally recognized activist, educator, and one of the founders of the reproductive justice movement. Throughout her career, she has worked at the intersection of feminism, human rights, racial justice, and community organizing. Rather than approaching these issues solely through theory, Ross draws from decades of lived experience, making *Calling In* feel both deeply personal and grounded in practice. Her experiences with activism and coalition-building are especially important to the book because they allow her to explore what happens when people committed to justice disagree, cause harm, make mistakes, or struggle to remain in community with one another.

The central premise of the book is simple but powerful. Ross asks readers to reconsider our tendency to "call people out" through public criticism, shame, or exclusion, even when the intended goal is accountability. She does not argue that harmful behavior should be ignored or that every situation deserves the same response. Instead, calling in asks us to consider whether there is an opportunity to address harm while leaving room for conversation, reflection, and growth. Throughout the book, Ross develops this idea through personal experiences, examples from movement work, and reflections on how people communicate across differences. In this way, calling in becomes less of a scripted technique and more of an intentional practice of deciding how we want to engage others and what we hope that engagement will accomplish. One aspect of the book that resonated with me was Ross's discussion of fear. She considers what happens when people become so afraid of saying the wrong thing that they stop engaging in difficult conversations altogether. I immediately connected this idea to college campuses, where students, faculty, and staff regularly navigate conversations about identity, equity, and justice. Learning requires some willingness to ask questions, admit what we do not know, and sometimes get things wrong. Ross's framework made me think about how we can create environments where accountability remains important without making fear the primary way people learn.

Ross also gives readers room to recognize that calling in will not be appropriate in every situation. This distinction matters. Calling in does not require someone who has experienced harm to repeatedly educate another person, nor does it eliminate the need for other forms of accountability. Instead, Ross asks readers to make more thoughtful choices about how they respond. I found this particularly useful because it prevents the framework from becoming another rigid rule about the "right" way to handle conflict.

Her larger challenge is for readers to become more intentional about whether their response creates an opportunity for change or simply ends the conversation. Another strength of *Calling In* is its accessibility. Ross tackles complex issues without requiring readers to have an extensive background in feminist theory or social justice scholarship. Those familiar with intersectional feminist scholarship will recognize themes of lived experience, power, coalition-building, and the complexity of identity, but Ross makes those ideas understandable through stories and examples rather than overly academic language. For graduate students in particular, this makes the book useful across disciplines. It invites readers to consider not only what they believe about justice and accountability, but also how those beliefs show up in their interactions with classmates, colleagues, students, mentors, and the communities in which they work.

While I found the book incredibly valuable, I wanted more discussion about how calling in functions within larger organizations and institutions. Ross's examples are especially effective for understanding interpersonal relationships and movement spaces, but I often wondered how the framework translates into environments shaped by formal policies, legal responsibilities, organizational hierarchies, and unequal power. In colleges and universities, for example, some conflicts cannot be addressed only through conversation because institutions have responsibilities to multiple people and communities. More examples addressing these organizational realities would have strengthened the book's usefulness for readers preparing to lead within complex institutions. Even with that limitation, *Calling In* is a resource I would recommend to graduate students and emerging professionals. Graduate education involves more than developing expertise in a discipline. It also requires learning how to receive criticism, work with people whose perspectives differ from our own, participate in difficult conversations, and contribute to professional communities.

Because my own research explores belonging and organizational culture, Ross's ideas also pushed me to consider how educational communities might hold people accountable while still creating opportunities for learning, repair, and connection.

Overall, *Calling In* is one of the more meaningful books I have encountered during my doctoral journey because it left me with questions that extend beyond the final page. Ross does not provide an easy formula for resolving conflict, and I do not think that is the point. Instead, she asks readers to think more carefully about what we are trying to accomplish when we hold someone accountable. For graduate students preparing to teach, lead, research, mentor, or work in community with others, that is a question worth carrying forward. *Calling In* ultimately reminds us that how we engage people during difficult moments can be just as important as the position we are trying to defend.



**Unity Watts-Bailey** is a doctoral candidate in the Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts EdD program at the University at Buffalo and serves as Director of Residential Education for Apartments, Suites, and Southampton Campus at Stony Brook University. Her professional and scholarly interests center on belonging, inclusive leadership, organizational culture, and the experiences of professionals of color in higher education. Her doctoral research examines how employee resource groups influence the belonging, retention, and professional experiences of professionals of color at predominantly white institutions. She regularly presents at regional and national conferences on leadership, belonging, professional development, and the role of affinity and employee resource groups in higher education. Across her scholarship and professional practice, Unity is particularly interested in how relationships, community, and intentional leadership can create environments where people feel valued, supported, and able to grow.



## CREATIVE CORNER

***“Likambo nayo eza  
likambo nanga”***  
**Notes Toward a  
Relational Applied  
Linguistics**

BY DEVIN JOHNSON, THE PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE UNIVERSITY, USA

Likambo nayo eza likambo nanga.  
“Your problem is my problem.”

A participant shared this Lingala expression, and its translation, with me during my master’s thesis research with Sub-Saharan African migrants in northeast Missouri. I later placed it as a preface to my third thesis chapter because it seemed to animate what kept surfacing throughout the project: problems were rarely treated as belonging to one person alone. People checked on one another, interpreted for one another, explained and elaborated things to one another. One participant summarized it simply: “we help each other.”

At first, I heard *Likambo nayo eza likambo nanga* as a description of the community I was studying. I am less certain now that it was merely a *description* of them.

Returning to northeast Missouri for the first time since completing my BA at Truman State University, I carried a research plan, but I was also returning to a place I already knew intimately in many ways. Before “recruitment” or interviews began, I started attending Sunday services and midweek prayer gatherings at a church where many members of the local Congolese and broader Sub-Saharan African community worshipped.

What began with a simple yet profound question—“May I pray with you?”—catalyzed conversation, listening, singing, dancing, and shared time.

But my relationships with people did not divide neatly nor segment into “before research” and “during research.” On paper, I could call this “relationship-building before recruitment.” That is true. It is also too neat. Too procedural.

The church was not simply a “field site.” The people I met there did not remain easily separable into participants and nonparticipants, research encounters and ordinary ones. Informants and friends. The pastor’s introduction of me situated the project within an existing network of trust. Recruitment materials circulated through WhatsApp. English shifted into French; Lingala mediated greetings, recruitment materials, and conversations around the interviews.

Those shifts exceeded translation. They made me increasingly aware that relationship-building was not merely something that happened so research could begin. Language was not simply a medium through which I gathered insights (“data”). It was part of how trust, familiarity, and participation became possible.

An interview has a fixed ending time. A relationship does not necessarily have one.

The interviews themselves were bounded events: time, place, recorder, transcript. What was shared, however, did not arrive as detached material waiting to become “data.” It came through a kaleidoscopic blend of particular relationships, languages, histories, and decisions about whether I could be trusted. Knowledge was relational from the beginning.

Ari Sherris's (2022) "heuristics of the heart" helps me conceptualize these experiences: some forms of knowing emerge through affective, embodied, and relational encounter(s) rather than detached observation(s) alone. Some of what I learned arrived not simply as findings, but as trust.

And trust changes the ethical question.

Before arriving, I worried about the slippery slope of *extraction*: asking people for their time and stories, then carrying those stories back to a university where they could become transcripts, themes, citations, and eventually a degree. Methodology and approach mattered. Consent mattered. Reflexivity mattered. But none erased the fact that I would eventually leave with the recordings.

What happens when responsibility refuses a project's timeline?

That is partially why *Likambo nayo eza likambo nanga* began to sound different to me.

I could not hear it as permission to speak for others or make someone else's experience my own. Those who spoke with me had their own entanglements of lives, histories, obligations, and difficulties that did not become mine simply because I listened and recorded. I was still the researcher. I could leave northeast Missouri again, return to my university, write my thesis, and complete my degree.

But listening had changed the distance I could comfortably place between myself and what I had heard.

The phrases came to me from particular persons, in a particular community, through particular relationships. I do not want to describe nor prescribe a universal principle. What remains with me is the question it opened: once someone has trusted me enough to let me know

something about the conditions of their life, can I still treat that knowledge as though it belongs only to the project?

I am increasingly certain that finishing the research does not answer that question. To *know* because someone has trusted me is different from simply *knowing* about them. The recorder stops. The transcript closes. The degree is awarded. Yet the relationships through which that knowledge emerges do not necessarily end at the same moment.

In my thesis acknowledgments, I wrote that what began as a research project metamorphosed into a dynamic experience of building relationships and better understanding community, solidarity, and mutual care. At the time, I meant it primarily as gratitude. But I read it differently now.

*Likambo nayo eza likambo nanga.*

I used to hear the phrase as solidarity. Now I also hear responsibility.

Not an obligation to speak *for* others. Not permission to *erase* the distinction between researcher and participant. Not a claim that another person's problem has *become* my own experience. Something more difficult: the possibility that relationships through which knowledge surfaces and evolves also create responsibilities that outlive the project.

I have begun to wonder whether a relational applied linguistics might begin there; not simply with the idea that relationships enrich research, but with the recognition that they can make us answerable beyond recruitment, analysis, publication, or "completion."

The interview can end. The project can end. The degree can be completed. But if knowledge was made possible through relationship, what happens to responsibility when the study is “over”?

*Likambo nayo eza likambo nanga.*  
If you have entrusted me with your problem, in what ways am I now, and remain, answerable to it?

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**Devin Johnson** is a dual-title PhD student in Applied Linguistics and African Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. His research examines multilingualisms, ecolinguistics, environmental communication, language education, autoethnography, and decolonial approaches to applied linguistics and language instructional praxes. His recent work examines severe-weather communication among Sub-Saharan African migrants in the rural United States, with particular attention to ecological knowledge, multilingual meaning-making, community-engaged research, and relational approaches to applied linguistics.





## When the City Believed Again – Tenure, Doctoral Study, and a Knicks-Inspired Footwear Collection

BY JOSEPHINE JEE, FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, SUNY, USA

*How an unconventional path through design and higher education became a visual language for celebration.*

*Original design concepts by the author. Not affiliated with the New York Knicks, the NBA, or any related organization.*

*Production note: Visuals were developed using a combination of non-AI-assisted and AI-assisted tools based on original footwear concepts and creative direction by the author.*



**Figure 1. Opening spread**

Top row, left to right: Net Stiletto Sandal; Lace-Up Metallic Wedge; Transparent PVC Courtside Wedge.

Middle row: Lowrider Hoop Bootie; Flame Neoprene Sandal; Net Heel Sandal.

Bottom row: Trophy Heel; City Pride Square Toe Pump; Basketball Wedge Sandal.

During one extraordinary stretch of spring, the Knicks' championship season unfolded just blocks from my campus as I received tenure, continued my doctoral studies, and found myself returning to footwear design. The visual essay explores how those parts of my life came together through a collection of women's dress shoes inspired by celebration, transition, and New York.

A Josh Hart player-edition sneaker splashed with orange-and-blue "Heart of the City" graphics would have been the obvious move. My imagination went somewhere else.

I wanted to explore how the feeling of the Knicks winning this year's championship could translate into women's dress shoes as cultural objects, such as a netted stiletto sandal, a transparent courtside wedge, a trophy heel, a basketball-textured sandal, and other editorial concept pieces. The series explores wearable, sculptural, and slightly surreal forms through a lens of excitement and joy.

This project also arrived at a pivotal professional moment for me. At the time, I had been working full time as a career and internship counselor, teaching footwear design, and pursuing a doctoral degree, a multi-genre mixtape of roles that came together as I pivoted from industry into academia. Receiving tenure at the close of this spring semester felt especially significant within that trajectory.

The Knicks kept winning just blocks from my campus, and I wanted to make something that felt bold, celebratory, and alive. With orange and blue everywhere in the city, their color story became a visual language for that transition. Contrast and movement, optimism and grit, all carry the unmistakable attitude of New York.

The collection mirrors the season's excitement, the anticipation surrounding each win, and the emotional charge of watching a city believe again. The Knicks clinched the championship soon after my tenure became official. The two milestones belong to very different worlds, yet hearing Brunson speak at the City Hall celebration felt oddly karmic.

In many ways, the collection brought several parts of my professional life into the same frame. After a decade in commercial footwear design, I entered higher education and gradually built a second career across advising, teaching, and doctoral study. What once felt disparate has begun to feel connected through the ways I observe, interpret, experiment, and make meaning visible.

As I continue my doctoral studies in Learning and Teaching at the University at Buffalo, returning to footwear has become a way to bring these experiences into the same conversation. Designing the collection allowed me to reflect on the moment through color, form, material, and proportion, and to mark it in the language I knew first.

**Figure 2. Net Stiletto Sandal**



*A commemorative stiletto sandal that turns the basketball net into both ankle support and ornament. Inspired by a championship more than fifty years in the making, and by New York's iconic ticker-tape parades along Broadway's Canyon of Heroes, the design captures the excitement of an impromptu citywide celebration, with Broadway momentarily christened as Champions Way.*

**Figure 3. Transparent PVC Courtside Wedge**

An elevated sport-streetwear concept that plays with the optical illusion of a clear PVC upper. The transparent upper creates a feeling of openness, visibility, and exposure, while the wide ankle band, back zip, court-inspired wedge, and mid-heel height give the shoe a sturdy, grounded presence suited to New York's walking culture.

**Figure 6. Lowrider Hoop Bootie**

A lowrider bootie that reimagines the basketball hoop as the shoe itself. Responding to the current wide-mesh-flat trend, the piece also reflects the overlap between World Cup fervor in New Jersey and Madison Square Garden's basketball-season commotion, turning sport culture into a surreal, lightweight object.

**Figure 4. Trophy Heel**

A sculptural peep-toe platform that renders victory as a wearable object. While much of the series carries the vibrant color and movement of the game, this piece is restrained and ceremonial. It captures the symbolic moment when messy, sweaty, unseen work becomes institutional recognition.

**Figure 7. City Pride Square Toe Pump**

A city-pride pump that translates New York fan energy through color blocking, dark-wash denim, charms, and a sport-coded novelty heel. Bridging masculine and feminine codes, the design pairs a bold square toe with ankle jewelry and sculptural hardware, inviting the high heel into a wider expression of masculinity, femininity, celebration, and city pride.

**Figure 5. Basketball Wedge Sandal**

A graphic wedge with exaggerated proportions that turns the basketball's texture and surface lines into the form of the shoe. The design approaches basketball as a larger-than-life cultural symbol, translating it almost literally into a feminine object of spectacle.



**Josephine Jee** is a tenured Assistant Professor and Career and Internship Counselor at the Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, where she also teaches footwear design. Before entering higher education, she spent a decade working in fashion and footwear design, including as creative director of an inclusive, patented footwear label in New York City. She is currently pursuing an Ed.D. in Learning and Teaching at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. Her work brings together design, career development, and higher education, with a focus on pathways into the creative industries.



# As It Rains, Pours, and Thunders

BY JUSTICE PLUMMER,  
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, USA

*"As it rains, pours, and thunders" is a short story about an online EdD student who is racing to finish her qualifying paper before the deadline, amidst a late summer downpour that causes her electricity to go out. Through the course of the thunderstorm, the student begins to question undertaking a doctoral program and her motivations in pursuing the degree. One of the themes to emerge, as presented in three acts - rains, pours, and thunders- is that growth comes in stages, and even in your rainiest, loudest thunderstorm, there is a chance for you to learn and do it all better. This story is loosely based on my own doctoral journey and my lived experiences. I was inspired to write this story because I have learned that being in a doctoral program is no joke, and that it requires a certain level of focus, dedication, and clarity about your motivations. I came up with the name "As it rains, pours, and thunders" because some of my most peaceful moments come when it rains or from listening to rain sounds. Additionally, I was inspired by Bruce Lee's quote about being like water. He says, "...If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle, and it becomes the bottle...." This inspired me to write a character who is a doctoral student and who one day must become like water or essentially adapt to what is required of her at the moment. Overall, "As it rains, pours, and thunders" speaks to how we must all adapt throughout our graduate studies and how, though it may seem daunting at first, it leads to positive results.*

## Act 1 – Rains

There I was again. Doing that thing that I love. Writing. It was the one constant in a life growing up, the daughter of a U.S. Navy Sailor. While my sailor father took to drawing in his spare time, I took after my mother and took to the written word. I loved playing with words. Creative, academic, scientific, you name it, I have written it. But as I continued typing on my MacBook, I heard a light tap at my window. It made me think of Edgar Allan Poe's poem, "The Raven." I looked up and saw a drop of water on my window. Raining. Oh, what is a little rain to set the mood as I write my qualifying paper (QP) for my dissertation? Or, well, so I thought? For see, it started with rain - a light tap, rap, at my door. Yet, I knew it would be something more.

## Act 2 – Pours

Somewhere between synthesizing and adding in-text citations from Zotero, I was startled by a loud, screeching storm alert on my iPhone. I had the impending dread that this was going to be a long day for me. I checked my laptop battery just to be on the safe side and saw I was nearing 5%. The paper was due tonight, and it would be just my luck if my electricity went out before I finished the paper. Outside looked like a scene out of a movie. It had gone from day to night within the span of 30 minutes. As it poured down raining, I reflected on how they say work early, work ahead, and work swiftly, though I do not believe they were talking to doctoral students, because it seemed no matter how early I started my work, I always had more work due to edits, new research, and simply the day-to-day flow between work and school.

### Act 3 – Thunders

Feeling too antsy, I knew I had to put some music on. I decided on Olivia Dean's album *The Art of Loving*. I knew her British soulful voice would ease my nerves and make me feel okay. The music started the second the thunder hit the sky. The rain picked up faster, before everything shut off in my apartment. Sheesh, the electricity just went out. And as I had predicted, my laptop died on me. Looking at the skies, I knew that the libraries and cafes would be closed by this time. I would have to finish typing this paper via my Google Docs app on my phone. How was this going to work, I thought?

As I had quick decisions to make, I kept hearing the thunderstorm. It was a reminder that maybe I was in over my head with this doctoral program. I wondered: should I heed the sign and quit? Feeling frustrated, I changed into my loungewear and sat on my bed. Resting against my soft, fluffy pillow, I looked straight ahead out of my window, watching the thunderstorm. In the darkness, I surprisingly found a new solitude as I typed my paper on my phone, hoping and praying that my phone battery would last until my electricity came back on.

Admittedly, I had been in this race to get my EdD, to get hired for that administrator role. You could be the youngest Assistant Principal we have ever had at this school, my principal told me about 2 years ago, when I decided to follow through on my plan to get my doctoral degree. Now I was wondering, in my quest to flex my power to my LinkedIn network and at my job, had I lost sight of what it really meant to undertake a problem of practice? As it kept thundering, I channeled my frustrations into making my paper mean more than just another trophy on my shelf.

### Conclusion

It was as the seconds turned into minutes, which turned into hours of me typing on my phone in complete darkness. Somewhere between me highlighting the text and adding the last in-text citation, I realized that my lights must have come back on, and that I needed to call my best friend, Zara, in Harlem to talk about my motivations for this EdD. After a quick cup of ginger chamomile tea, I plugged in my computer and called Zara via FaceTime. On the second ring, she answered. "You will never guess the type of storm I have been through," I said as she chuckled to herself, while I began discussing my day and reflecting on where I would need to go.

### THE END



Born in Chicago, Illinois, and raised throughout the Chicagoland area, **Justice Plummer** has always had a love and natural skill for writing, creative arts, and history. These passions allowed her to find success in numerous other areas and led to her graduating early with a Bachelor of Science from North Carolina A&T State University. After her undergraduate work, she earned a Master of Professional Science from Unity Environmental University, completed a 10-month AmeriCorps program with Public Allies Chicago, where she won Ally of the Year 24', and was elected to her Local School Council (LSC) as a Community Representative with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Currently, Justice is in the 2nd year of her doctoral studies at the University at Buffalo, where she works as a Graduate School of Education Student Ambassador; additionally, she is serving her second LSC term, where, in addition to being a community representative, she will also serve as secretary. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music, reading, watching movies/tv series, and cooking.

## From Studying AI to Learning with It: A Multilingual Scholar's Reflection

BY NAJAT SGHYAR-SHULMAN,  
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO

When I began my doctoral studies, my greatest concern was not learning how to conduct research. It was learning how to conduct it in English. I had received a French education from kindergarten through my master's degree and had never used English to produce academic knowledge. English had entered my life as a fourth language, although I speak six others and am currently learning Russian as my eighth. As we say in my home country of Morocco where speaking multiple languages is common: "*What you speak I speak.*" But there I was, suddenly thrust into the world of English-dominated academia, far from the fluency and ease I had once taken for granted. I felt deeply insecure, expected to perform at the highest intellectual level in an English that was advanced but still imperfect. I was never entirely sure which preposition belonged where or which sentence structure would make an idea sound properly academic. English valued directness, so different from the elaborate style of French, the lyricism of Arabic, the harmony of Turkish, and the creativity of Darija. English academia seemed to ask me to compress all these expressions into one acceptable scholarly voice. Yet one part of me still protested: *Yallah! Come on!* Was sounding sober and serious really the price of being published?

Around the same time, generative AI arrived, offering the fluency I craved on demand. At first, I told no one I was using it. I let it handle the writing that made me feel most exposed. *Oh là là*, how smart I suddenly sounded!

My emails, essays, and notes became native-like. Even my spelling seemed to acquire a Midwestern accent. I finally tamed those pesky prepositions and could focus on ideas instead of editing every sentence for hours. But something was wrong. My ideas began to sound generic. AI flattened theoretical complexity, missed contextual meaning, and never got things entirely right. I spent more time revising its work than writing my own. Worst of all, I was handing my multilingual and multicultural voice to a robot that sounded like everyone except me. Eventually, AI faked information, threatened my academic integrity, and even helped me earn a C in a literacy course.

For my research component, I conducted a study in an adult ESL classroom to explore how AI could support translanguaging among emerging bilinguals. When I invited the learners to introduce themselves, they were hesitant to say that they spoke English. I had to remind them that they were not people who lacked English, but multilinguals adding another language to their rich repertoire. The mood shifted when they realized, with some amusement, that the only monolingual person in the room was their teacher. Yet when it came to my own use of AI, I judged myself against an imagined ideal of the independent, effortlessly fluent English-speaking scholar. Why was I denying myself the grace I gave my participants? I may be an advanced English speaker, but I remain an English learner. As an international student, I am simultaneously discovering new content, learning the unfamiliar work of research in another language, developing academic English, and navigating the conventions of academia. Despite all my languages and efforts, I still felt less intelligent, less original, and less deserving of belonging or even building a career in academia. I was insecure with or without AI. I needed to change something in me first.



I began approaching AI as a *chavruta*, a study partner in the Jewish tradition of learning through questioning and disagreement. A *chavruta* does not think for you; he challenges your interpretations and helps understanding emerge through dialogue. I began requesting alternatives, questioning assumptions, rejecting suggestions, and testing claims against the literature. Most importantly, I reversed our roles: I would no longer edit AI's words. AI would edit mine. That shift allowed me to benefit from its apparent fluency without surrendering my voice.

A Turkish saying holds that "*Bir dil bir insan, iki dil iki insan*": one language, one person; two languages, two people. My languages connect me to different communities, emotions, and ways of knowing. No AI can write like me because only I have lived my life through them. Becoming an English-speaking scholar therefore means letting those voices speak through English, not abandoning them.

I would not let AI's polished transitions, balanced sentences, and cautious conclusions take over my work. Apparent fluency cannot compensate for the absence of an original idea. The more I accepted AI's voice, the less certain I became of my own. But each time I rejected a sentence that did not sound like me, defended an unusual phrase, or restored a complexity AI had erased, I understood my voice more clearly. Sometimes I deleted everything and left the thought in my imperfect English, as if proving to the reader that I was real.

But whom was I trying to convince? Students, teachers, researchers, professors, and even journal editors use AI, while the technology is changing so quickly that none of us fully knows what we are doing. I might as well find my own way of working with it. I cannot separate AI's contribution to my scholarly development from reading, mentorship, revision, and years of living across languages. AI gave me speed, access, and a tireless interlocutor. It may also have taken

away some productive struggle and nearly erased the imperfections that made my writing mine.

In my own research, I have seen AI bridge learners' native and target languages, expand linguistic access, and create opportunities for practice. However, it can also misinterpret input and provide decontextualized answers, and students continue to see the teacher as the ultimate authority. Practicing what I study means neither hiding my AI use nor surrendering my agency to it. It means benefiting from what AI offers while retaining human judgment and control.

I became a multilingual scholar during a transition whose meaning none of us fully understands. AI is now part of how I learn, but it is not the author of who I am becoming. I am a language educator who now speaks AI as an additional language and hopes to help the next generation of AI natives learn to speak it critically, assuming, of course, that humanity is neither enslaved nor exterminated first.



**Najat Sghyar Shulman** is a doctoral student in Language Education and Multilingualism at the University at Buffalo. Her research focuses on second language acquisition, translanguaging, and teacher development, with her dissertation exploring durable AI-assisted learning for adult immigrants. Holding a master's degree in French didactics from Sorbonne University, Najat has taught French across Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. True to her academic passions, she is also raising a multilingual child who hears five languages at home.

## I Could See Them Talk

BY VINITA V.J. ABICHANDANI, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY, USA

Walking up hill 15 minutes to Lidl  
 After a long day of doctoral eating and munching and drinking and ballooning  
 over sit-sedentary-sitting,  
 reading and listening and thinking into messy nothingness,  
 That Chipotle bowl became more visible  
 backgrounding them veggie grocer(ing) into the now belittled Lidl.  
 There! The new cilantro lime sauce caught my now *kinda* American eye  
 But its newness dulled down in my Indian memories of ग्रीन chutney  
 Oh green (let me explain) ग्रीन, green chutney, an aromatic condiment  
 of chopped churned and machined fresh cilantro and chilies and all that ग्रीन.



**Figure 1.** Cilantro Lime Sauce at a Chipotle in the city of Baltimore, USA and a packet of green cilantro-chilli chutney packaged by a popular USA desi brand, 'Deep' usually found in Indian stores like Patel Brothers and India Bazaar. In the left bottom are varieties of chutneys- garlic powdered chutney, green cilantro-chilli chutney and tamarind sweet tangy chutney served at a restaurant in Mumbai, India with popular street food called Vada pav.

Well, they called it a sauce...My Bombay chutney was a cilantro sauce or sometimes also showed through the green(ing) guacamole and in that mix of American-Spanish Like Salman Rushdie's (1981) "chutnification" of British English, English(ing) among Indians and Pakistanis and more partitioned borders...

I SAW THEM TALK

through

these Englishes which tracked-traced-traveled the histories and geographies  
 these Englishes, which I carried in my bags and my books and my bragging  
 as an English educator in my (post)colonial self.

Post whatever was colonial, I juggled with Englishes held through the unseen,  
 unmarked, English, one something unattainable English,  
 PPTing, bugging-struggling, scribbling, xeroxing,  
 hours of nouns-verbs-comprehending-structuring...  
 modeling and moulding, that *one something* English  
 while changing and exchanging old-colonial shoes in my preachings of  
 CLT, TPR, Task-based, textbook based, Project-based  
 Un-equalizing their multi-lingualing

I SAW ME TALK

through

IELTSing, ToefLing, GREs and Degreeefying my Englishes Up  
 Now seated in the US in a fancied immigrant garb.

And there I instantly identified my chutney(fication) in Garcia's (2019)  
 Translanguaging  
 In English that was named foreign, second, new, owned by the colonizer  
 And in English with "red x's" in Seltzer (2020, p. 304)  
 And then in "peripheralized Englishes" (p.46) on t-shirts in Won Lee's (2016) calling out  
 To the English's marginalizing and minoritizing scout.  
 I WANTED TO TALK  
 Metrolingualize it all...disinventing and disrupting and decolonizing and Pennycook(ing)  
 My Language.

Then hickering-bickering in applying linguistics  
 Some South Asian commonplace names gave me kicks!  
 In "worry paNNuriinkaLoo?" (Canagarajah, 2013, p.4)  
 Suresh showed the switching and swishing of English and Sri Lankan Tamil  
 Sangeeta displayed नो पार्किंग meaning NO PARKING as नौ पार्किंग (Bagga-Gupta, 2022, p. 68)  
 a road-side warning board in Mumbai, to drill  
 what language was this? English, Hindi, Hinglish or Anglo-Hindi?  
 Kakali's stories narrated instances of *Addas* and "Time Pass" (Bhattacharya, 2009, p.128)  
 So you know, in English there was always some *desi* grass  
 I knew it then that Anzaldúa's (2021) *La Frontera*  
 read through the borders of Amitav Ghosh's (1988) *Shadow Lines*  
 and was more Homi Bhabha (1994) for my hybridized self  
 because borders are blurred across lands and languages and my transnational  
 bookshelf.

As I ChipotleD the cilantro chutney that night  
 And cited their names in my heavily worded doctoral text  
 under bright eye-troubling laptop light  
 I COULD SEE THEM TALK...  
 through me.

**Figure 2.** My conversing with scholars, authors, their books and their words through my lived experiences as a translingual-transnational practitioner of English. It represents how we as students, learners, and emerging scholars 'talk' with the others in our field while we are pursuing our studies and making meaning of our scholarship.





**Description**

*'I Could See Them Talk'* reflects my interpretation and navigation of readings assigned in the doctoral coursework in the United States. The poem offers a poetic literature review, bringing together readings that are foundational to my work as a transnational-translingual scholar. It foregrounds linguistic equity by conceptualizing language as fluid, situated, and continually negotiated, while normalizing the meshing and mashing of linguistic patterns and semiotic resources through practices such as capitalization, shifts between languages, and the use of italics and parentheses to reflect diverse ways of meaning-making. This poetic review of the literature is my way of refuting and revolting against the text-heavy, prosaic, and conventional forms of academic writing prevalent in mainstream publishing and scholarly work. It offers a creative form of resistance while still fulfilling the purpose of a literature review by weaving together critical quotations, conceptualizations, and theorizations. Moreso, poetry here is the medium that makes space for my ways of languaging even as I review other, scholarly work. Additionally, my positionality as an international student is foregrounded as I bring these readings into conversation with my prior learning and experiences across English literature, *Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)*, and public policy, highlighting the value of interdisciplinary knowledge and lived experiences in shaping understandings within applied linguistics.

Salman Rushdie's "chutneyfication" speaks to translanguaging and localized Englishes in countries with colonial histories such as India and Pakistan, while "America-Spanish" foregrounds linguistic hybridity across borders. Anzaldúa's *La Frontera/Borderlands* resonates with Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of hybrid identities in postcolonial Indian literature.

Meanwhile, the standardization of English through high-stakes tests such as IELTS and TOEFL and Western-modelled teaching in India exists in continuous tension with Englishes that have "travelled the histories and geographies," acquiring localized forms, meanings, and practices.

The poem begins with everyday intersections of culture in street food across India and the US, juxtaposing Chipotle's cilantro-lime sauce with Indian cilantro chutney. Green chutney, one of the many varieties of chutneys found across Indian states, and cilantro-lime sauce are brought into conversation through a play of words, registers, and scripts. This playful linguistic encounter sets the stage for exchanges across and in between nation-state borders, where culture, bodies, and identities intersect, shift, and are continually (re)negotiated.

Throughout the poem, this orientation is made visible through the chained transliteration of words such as "green" and "ग्रीन," and "नो पार्किंग," and "NO PARKING" and "नो पार्किंग," and random capitalization of final letters in words such as "belittleD" and "machineD," which draws attention to the sound "d" as a more localized Indian pronunciation. The repeated use of English suffixes, namely "-ing" and "-fication," either in parentheses or italics foreground processes of putting into action and verbifying canonized terms in English. Such linguistic play seeks to strip writing in English off its standardization and interrogate the colonial histories embedded within the language. This is further enacted through ironic engagements with postcoloniality in lines such as "my bragging as an English educator," "Post whatever was colonial," and "bugging-struggling...hours of nouns-verbs." The speaker's struggle to attain "one something unattainable English" points to the persistent traces of coloniality within so-called postcolonial settings, where standardized and idealized forms of English continue to inform linguistic aspirations and practices. Overall, the poem is a critical reflection of my development from when "I SAW THEM TALK" to when "I COULD SEE THEM TALK through me".

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Seltzer, K. (2020). "My English is its own rule": Voicing a translingual sensibility through poetry. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 19(5), 297–311



**Vinita V.J. Abichandani** is a doctoral candidate at George Mason University, USA. Vinita has completed her graduate studies in English literature from the University of Mumbai and in Public Policy from University College London (UCL). She also holds a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from Canada. Her scholarship critically examines the intersections of language, identity, and power in English language teaching. She challenges the dominance of standardized English and advocates for more equitable, decolonial, and contextually grounded approaches to language education.



# 2026 JEDI REPORT

## A Report on the AAAL Graduate Student Council's JEDI Survey Findings

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 Bolaji Bamidele (Utah State University)  
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### I. Introduction

The 2026 Graduate Student Council (GSC) justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) Survey was conducted to better understand the experiences and priorities of graduate students within AAAL. This year's survey was designed to generate more actionable feedback about how students engage with GSC initiatives and how well those efforts align with JEDI goals.

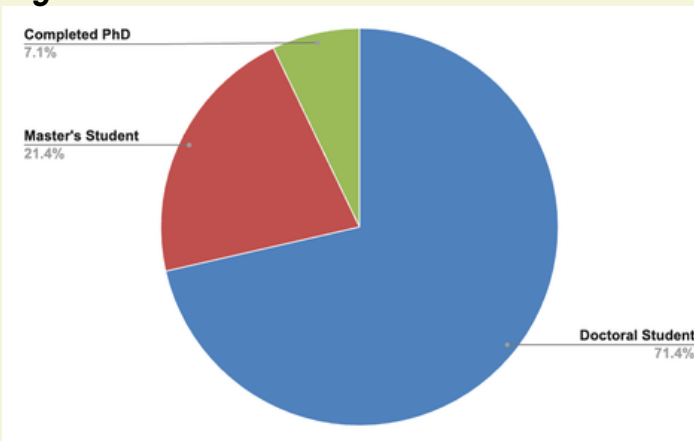
Some instruments were updated from last year's to reflect several important shifts in focus. For instance, demographic items were expanded and refined to better capture the range of identities and circumstances represented in the graduate student membership, including variation in educational stage, country of university affiliation, international status, gender identity, gender modality, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and caregiving responsibilities.

On top of that, the survey moved beyond demographic description alone by asking respondents about their awareness of GSC programming, participation, and interests in future web/seminars. As such, the revisions were intended to produce clearer, more useful data that could directly inform GSC decision-making. By listening to their experiences and perspectives, the GSC can continue to improve its efforts to create a more inclusive and supportive community within AAAL.

### II. Demographic Landscape

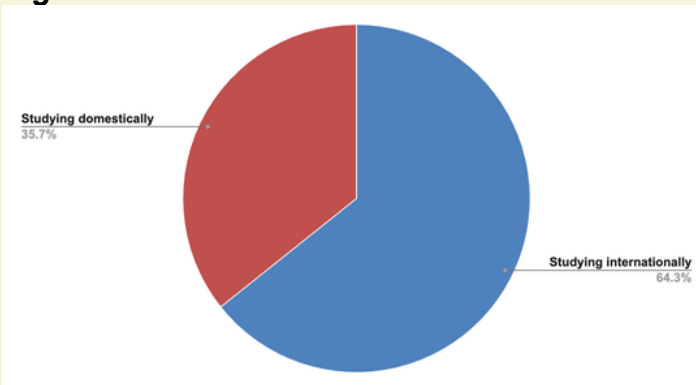
A total of 14 graduate students responded to the survey. Of these, 10 participants (71.4%) are doctoral students, three (21.4%) are master's students, and one participant has completed their PhD (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Current education level



Nine participants (64.3%) are international students, including eight studying in the United States (see Figure 2). Overall, 10 participants (71.4%) are based in the U.S., while four (28.6%) are based in three other countries (n = 2 in the U.K., 1 in Canada, and 1 in Japan).

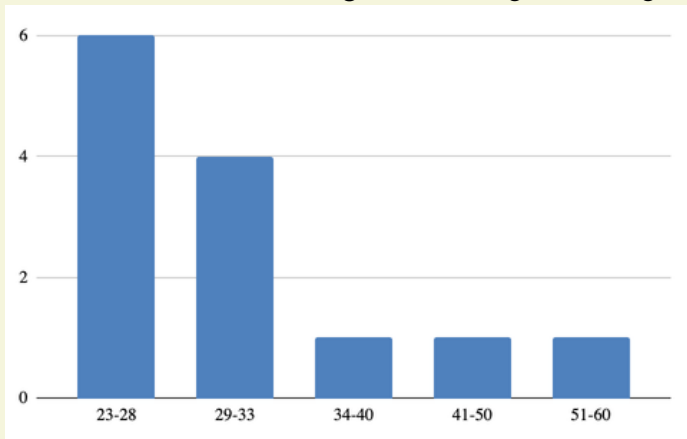
**Figure 2.** International and domestic students



In terms of age, six participants (43%) are between 23 and 28 years old, five (36%) are between 29 and 40, and two (14%) are between 41 and 60 (one participant preferred not to answer) (see Figure 3).

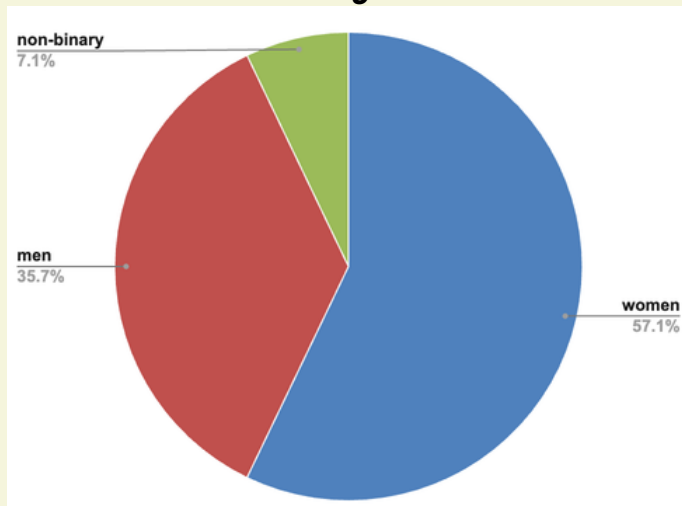


**Figure 3. Histogram of ages**



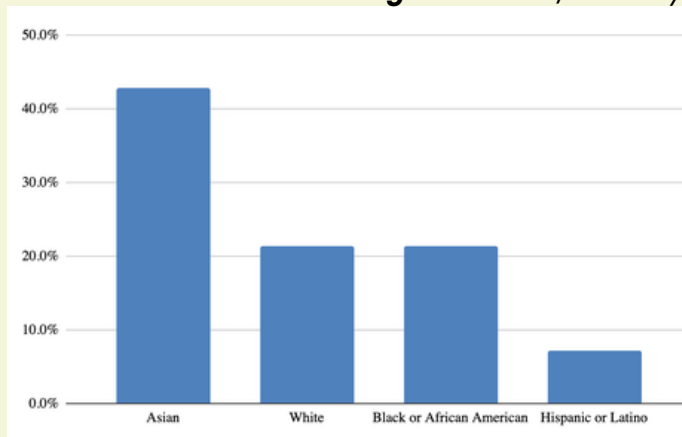
Eight participants (57.1%) identify as women, five (35.7%) as men, and one (7.1%) as non-binary (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Gender identities**



In terms of race/ethnicity, six participants (42.9%) identify as Asian, three (21.4%) as White, three (21.4%) as Black or African American, and one (7.1%) as Hispanic or Latino; one participant preferred not to answer (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Race/ethnicity**



### III. Rating of Experience

Participants who attended at least one AAAL GSC event during the year were asked to respond to seven statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” To summarize these findings, we converted responses to numbers where strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, neither agree nor disagree=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for each of the seven items. Of the 21 survey records received, 14 respondents progressed past the demographic section, and 5 reached and completed the rating items; the remaining respondents either indicated that they had not attended any GSC events this year and were therefore not asked to rate them or did not progress to this section of the survey.

Six of the seven items received uniform “strongly agree” ratings from all five respondents ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 0.00$ ): that GSC events reflect the values of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusivity; provide diverse perspectives that are meaningfully represented; were well organized; gave useful insights applicable to research, teaching, and service; fostered a sense of community and belonging; and took into account the needs of members at different points in their studies and careers. Together, these results indicate that, among those who attended, GSC programming is perceived as substantive, well run, professionally useful, community-building, and responsive across career stages.

The seventh item — “AAAL GSC supports members who are caregivers for dependents” — was the only departure from uniform agreement ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). Four respondents selected “strongly agree” and one selected “neither agree nor disagree.” Although the small sample warrants caution, this is consistent with prior years’ findings in which the caregiver-support item also received the least positive ratings, suggesting that this remains the area in which GSC programming is perceived as least clearly meeting member needs.

#### IV. Experiences and Suggestions

Although the survey findings were limited in scale, the qualitative answers suggested that the needs of graduate student caregivers merit additional attention. These findings suggest that caregiver support remains an area where respondents see less clear evidence of GSC responsiveness. Although ratings of caregiver support were still positive overall, this item was the only one not to receive uniform “strongly agree” responses, and it was also identified in the report as an area warranting continued attention. This pattern should be interpreted cautiously given the small number of respondents who completed the ratings, but it nevertheless indicates that caregiver inclusion remains a meaningful area for future development. Continued efforts might include more explicit communication about available supports and consideration of how conference and year-round programming can better accommodate members balancing academic and dependent-care responsibilities.

Furthermore, the real experiences at the conference suggested a broader and more diverse range of engagement than the survey alone was able to capture. For example, the Sister Scholars JEDI event attracted more than 50 participants, indicating a strong interest in spaces centered on community-building, mentorship, and perhaps more importantly, solidarity among graduate students and early-career scholars. During this event, participants engaged in activities in which they wrote and shared reflections on what it means to build community as graduate students and as individuals positioned at the margins. JEDI subcommittee received direct feedback expressing appreciation for the events, with several participants emphasizing that such spaces were both meaningful and necessary. The events also created opportunities for graduate students and early-career scholars to collectively engage with established members of the Sister Scholars community and ask questions about navigating academic life. Some of these discussions included very candid and vulnerable questions regarding the gap between publication pressures and the desire for meaningful community-building within academia, as well as questions about navigating authorship and collaboration

within writing groups and academic communities. Given the current conditions of academia, in which community-building can be urgently necessary, continued support from JEDI for these kinds of events may be particularly valuable for fostering connection and collective care among graduate students and early-career scholars.

#### V. Discussion

The 2026 GSC JEDI Survey offers a useful snapshot of both the diversity of the AAAL graduate student community and respondents' experiences with GSC programming. Although the number of respondents was modest, the survey nevertheless highlights several important patterns.

First, the demographic findings reinforce that the graduate student membership includes students at different educational stages and from varied national, racial/ethnic, gender, and caregiving backgrounds. The respondent pool was composed primarily of doctoral students, included a strong international presence, and reflected diversity in age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, and family responsibilities. These patterns underscore the importance of maintaining JEDI efforts that are responsive to a broad range of lived experiences and professional circumstances.

A second major finding is that respondents who attended GSC events evaluated them very positively. Across nearly all rating items, attendees reported uniformly strong agreement that GSC programming reflected JEDI values, represented diverse perspectives, was well organized, provided useful professional insights and took into account the needs of members at different stages of study and career. This pattern suggests that, among those reached by current programming, the GSC is succeeding in creating events that are professionally relevant and community-building.

With that, the survey points to a distinction between program quality and program reach. The highly positive evaluations from attendees indicate that the issue is not dissatisfaction with the events themselves. Rather, the more pressing challenge appears to be expanding awareness of and participation in GSC initiatives.

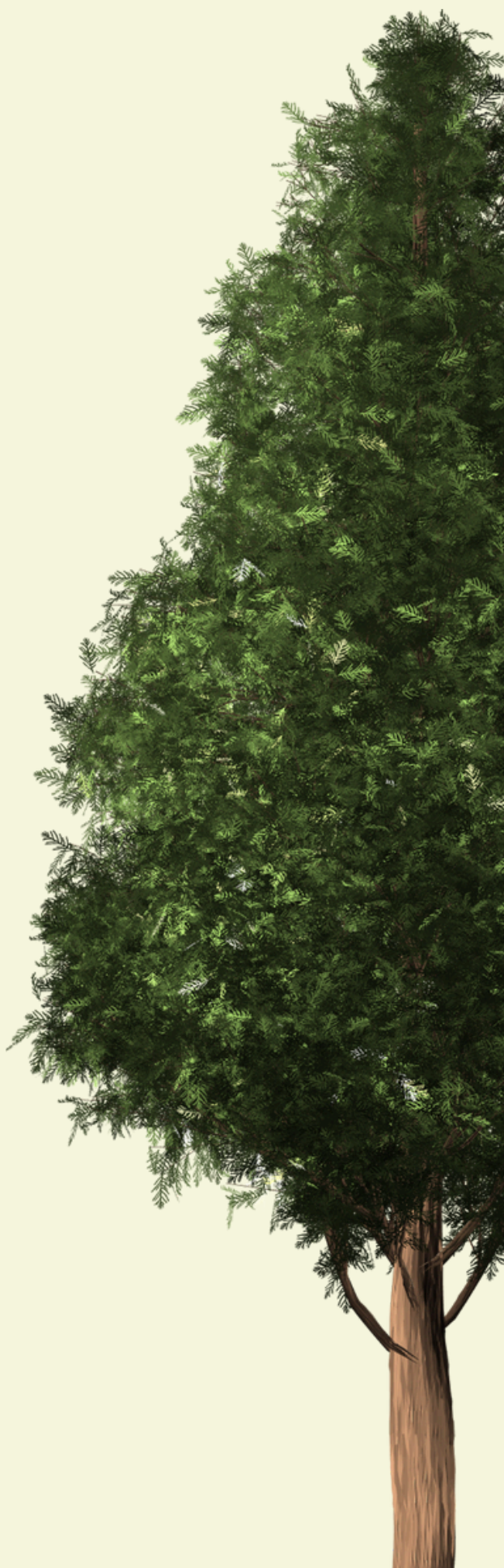
This interpretation is consistent with the survey's broader emphasis on tracking engagement and barriers to participation, and it suggests that future efforts may benefit from stronger communication with more visible promotion and intentional outreach before and beyond the annual conference.

Relatedly, the narrative feedback from respondents suggests that community-centered programming remains especially valuable. Events such as the Sister Scholars gathering appear to have created opportunities for mentorship and candid discussion about navigating academic life having a JEDI agenda. This is important because it indicates that JEDI-oriented programming is not only about representation in principle, but also about creating concrete spaces where graduate students and early-career scholars can exchange support and reflect on shared challenges within academia.

To restate, the current findings suggest that the GSC has established a strong foundation for inclusive graduate student programming, but that future progress will depend on expanding participation and ensuring that support is visible and accessible to a wider range of members. The 2026 GSC JEDI survey points more clearly to an opportunity for growth through increased visibility and targeted support.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The 2026 GSC JEDI Survey suggests that AAAL graduate students view current GSC programming as valuable and well aligned with JEDI goals, particularly among those who participated in events. At the same time, the findings make clear that the central challenge is not simply program quality, but reach. Many respondents did not attend events because they were unaware of them, pointing to communication and accessibility as critical areas for future growth. Moving forward, the GSC is well positioned to build on existing strengths by improving outreach and expanding support in areas such as mentorship, teaching, research, career development, and caregiver inclusion. All in all, these results provide a practical foundation for continued student-centered planning and affirm the importance of ongoing assessment in shaping a more inclusive and responsive graduate student community within AAAL.





## AAALGRADS NEWSLETTER (SPRING 2027)

We're excited to welcome submissions for the Spring 2027 issue of the **AAALGrads Newsletter**! We are open to receiving a wide range of proposals and intend to showcase an array of topics and scholarly areas that our graduate student community is currently engaged with. Whether you're exploring emerging research, reflecting on your academic journey, or sharing insights from your field, we want to hear from you.

Please consider submitting a proposal for any of the formats listed below. Selected contributions will be published in mid-March.

**Possible Submission Formats**

We extend our call to include Feature Articles, Resource Reviews (e.g., books and technological tools), Creative Corner pieces (e.g., poetry, art, and video), short "how to" or "what I wish someone had told me" blurbs for the Professional Development Corner, and opinion pieces on topics affecting the AAALGrads community. Please refer to the provided examples for each submission format, but note that submissions are not limited to the presented examples. Additional examples can be found in past issues of the newsletter.

- **Feature Article.** A feature article should be 750–1,500 words. It should address and critically develop a question or idea relevant to the AAALGrads community. Feature articles can report on empirical research, take a theoretical perspective, or share completed projects and administrative or service work.

Example: Osuman, F. (2025). Translanguaging and target language immersion: A coexistence in the second language (L2) classroom. *AAALGrads*, 10(1), 6–8.

- **Professional Development Corner.** Blurbs for the Professional Development Corner are 500–1,000-word "how to" or "what I wish someone had told me" reports by advanced graduate students. The format can take several shapes, such as, but not limited to: a short narrative of a successful strategy, a "do's and don'ts" list, or a flowchart. The goal of this newsletter section is to give graduate students adequate support and guidance as they navigate their graduate careers. In that vein, please maintain a professional tone and positive outlook. **Do not refer to institutions, departments, or individual people by name.**

Example: Candan, D. (2025). Side by side through graduate school: Keeping love alive during deadlines. *AAALGrads*, 10(1), 27–28.

- **Resource Review.** A resource review should be about 500–1,000 words. It should critique material (e.g., books, textbooks, technological tools, or a website) that might be helpful to graduate students. You are expected to have read and/or used the material before you write your review. For your proposal, please include a brief summary of the resource and your opinion of its helpfulness for graduate students.

Example: Lim, S. (2025). Resource review of: Silvia P. J. (2019). How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing (2nd ed.). APA LifeTools. *AAALGrads*, 10(1), 21–22.

- **Creative Corner.** The Creative Corner is a section designed to showcase the creativity and diverse experiences of graduate students in our field. In addition to short essays, submissions in this section may include poetry, visual art/photography, and/or a high-quality video related to graduate student life. In your proposal, please be sure to describe the submission format (e.g., 25 MB .mp4 video). Reflections on personal experiences are encouraged. In keeping with AAAL's ongoing commitment to multilingualism, we are pleased to announce that the *Creative Corner* now accepts submissions in languages other than English. If you choose to submit your work in a language other than English, please indicate the language used for the final submission and provide a brief explanation in English. Text-based creative submissions (poetry/essays) may be up to 1000 words. All submissions may be accompanied by a description of no more than 500 words.

Example: Togafau-Lewis, T. (2025). Re: Diaspora. *AAALGrads*, 10(1), 25–26.

- **Trending Topics Forum.** This forum gives you the opportunity to share your opinion on current issues, events, or topics affecting the AAALGrads community. Opinion pieces allow you to take a stance on a topic, share personal experiences, or issue a call to action. In your proposal, please be sure to describe the relevance of this issue to members of our community. Submissions to the Trending Topics Forum should be 500–1,000 words.

Example: Jung, J. (2025). When task-based language teaching (TBLT) meets AI in Korea. AAALGrads, 10(1), 23–24.

### Guidelines for Proposals, Submission, and Timeline

Your proposal should...

- be approximately 300 words
- provide your name, department and institution, degree, and area of study
- identify the type of submission (Feature Article, Professional Development Corner, Resource Review, Creative Corner, or Trending Topics Forum)
- include an overview/description of your submission
- confirm your ability to commit to the timeline (provided below)

Proposals will be collected through this [Google Form](#) and are due by **Monday, January 4, 2027 @ 11:59 PM Eastern Time**. You can submit a proposal if you are a current grad student or recent graduate. You do not have to be a current AAAL member.

Please review the timeline listed below to ensure that, should your proposal be selected for inclusion in the issue, you don't foresee any major issues following it.

If you have any questions, please reach out to the newsletter co-editors at [aaalgrads@gmail.com](mailto:aaalgrads@gmail.com).

| Tentative Timeline for Spring 2027                    |                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monday, January 4                                     | Proposals are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time.                                          |
| Monday, January 11                                    | Authors notified of acceptance.                                                      |
| Monday, January 25                                    | The first draft of the manuscript is due.                                            |
| Monday, February 8                                    | Editors provide feedback to authors on first drafts.                                 |
| Monday, February 15                                   | Revised drafts are due.                                                              |
| Monday, February 22                                   | Editors provide additional feedback, <i>if necessary</i> .                           |
| Friday, February 26                                   | Final drafts of manuscripts are due. Authors provide a short biography and headshot. |
| Wednesday, March 3                                    | Editors return the final draft with proofs.                                          |
| Monday, March 8                                       | Authors respond to proofs.                                                           |
| The issue is expected to appear around March 12, 2027 |                                                                                      |