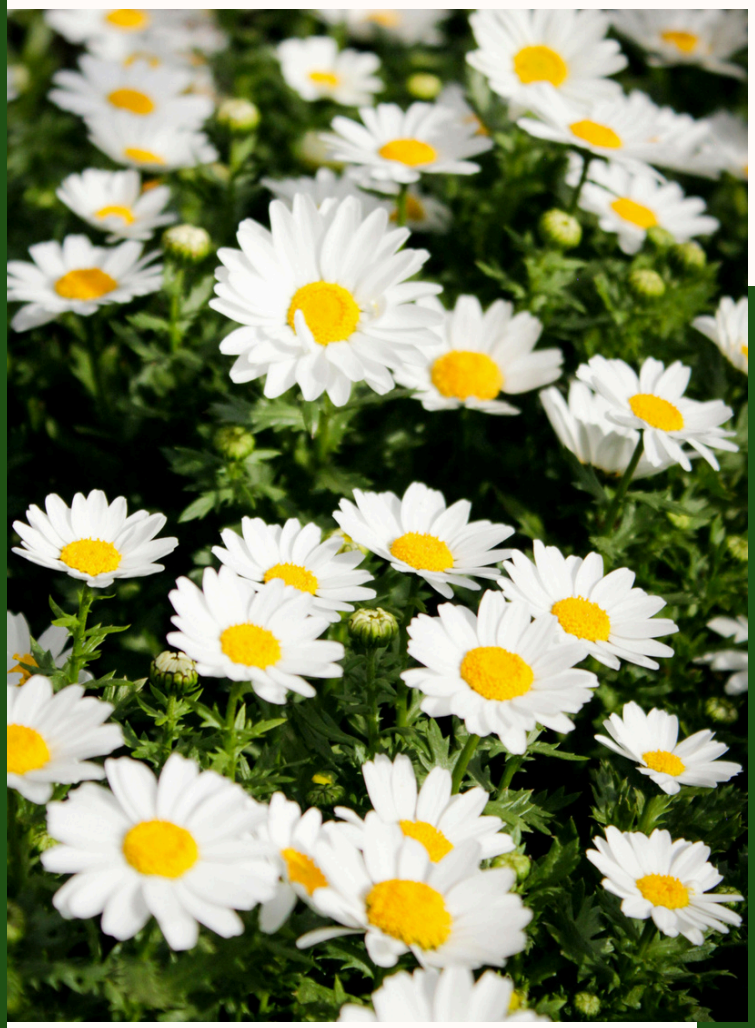
Spring 2026 Vol. 10, Issue 2

AAAL GRADS

The AAAL Graduate Student Council Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



A Change in Register by Ifeoluwa Awopetu

Branches once bare begin to script in green, as the air carries the scent of something returning.

Clause by clause, color by color, what lay implicit turns explicit; what rested in subtext steps into articulation.

Nothing here is abrupt. This is careful rephrasing.The margins widen as fields and gardens compose themselves anew. Spring leans in, new beginnings take root. As a community, it's a reminder that every season holds the chance to begin afresh.

BONUS CONTENT

LETTER FROM THE CO-EDITORS

Dear Readers,
It is with great pleasure that we present the Spring 2026 issue of the AAALGrads Newsletter. This issue brings together diverse voices and perspectives that reflect the evolving landscape of applied linguistics, from theoretical reflections to pedagogical innovations and personal insights into the lived experience of research and learning.

Our **Feature Articles** foreground language research as a site of power, engagement, and innovation. In *"The Politics of Naming: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Adivasi and Khudro Nri Goshthi,"* **Anamika Das** examines how naming practices operate as ideological tools that shape identity and sociopolitical positioning. In *"Engagement in Fanfiction Author Notes: A Genre Analysis,"* **Maria Razcon Echeagaray** explores how writers use author notes to negotiate stance, community, and relationality in digital spaces. Rounding out this section, **Ogulcan Durmaz**, in *"A Design-Based Research Approach to Virtual Language Learning Environment Development with Graduate Teaching Assistants,"* presents a collaborative and research-driven model for developing responsive virtual learning environments.

Our **Resource Review**, *"The Guidebook You Need to Map Out Your Graduate School Journey,"* by **Tin Yuet (Tiffany) Tam**, offers something both practical and reassuring. A reminder that while graduate school often feels unstructured, there are tools that can help us navigate it with intention.

In **Trending Topics Forum, Yushi Kashimura**'s *"Toward Transparency and Openness in Second Language Research: An Opinion from a Doctoral Candidate,"* invites us to consider what it means to practice research with greater clarity and openness. In *"My Experiences as a Woman and a Second Language Speaker of English While Teaching in a Prison,"* **Eda Yildirimer** offers a courageous and nuanced account of navigating identity, authority, and vulnerability in a carceral classroom.

The **Creative Corner** features *"In the Quadrangle We See Home"* by **Tin Yuet (Tiffany) Tam.** Through the imagery of screens, pixels, blurred faces, and interrupted signals, the poem captures the fragile threads that connect many of us to home across continents.

We conclude with the **Professional Development** pieces, where lived graduate experiences take center stage. In "*Faking It Until You Make It: How One Conference Question Changed My Grad School Journey*," **Dilay Candan** reflects on a pivotal academic moment. In *"Navigating a U.S.-Based MA in TESOL Program as a Transnational, Non-Native English Speaking Student and Graduate Teaching Assistant from the Global South,"* **Mehmet Sahin** examines the layered negotiations of language and belonging. Finally, **Melike Akay's** *"What I Wish I'd Known About Professionalism, Organization, and Neurodivergence in Graduate School,"* offers a thoughtful, practical reflection on thriving beyond narrow academic norms. These pieces remind us that scholarship is always embedded within lived realities.

This issue reflects our community of scholars who are not only producing knowledge but also critically examining the structures within which that knowledge is produced. We extend our sincere gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and the AAAL Graduate Student Council (GSC) for their dedication and hard work in bringing this issue to life. As co-editors, we are continually inspired by the intellectual curiosity and generosity reflected in each contribution. We hope this issue not only informs but also affirms your place within our vibrant community of scholars.
Thank you for reading, supporting, and contributing to the AAALGrads community. We look forward to your contributions in future issues and hope you find something in these pages that resonates with your own journey.

With warm regards,
Ifeoluwa Awopetu, Dayoung Joo, Mark Sullivan, Xinhang Hermione Hu, & Victor Adedayo
Co-Editors, AAALGrads Newsletter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Politics of Naming: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Adivasi* and *Khudro Nri Goshthi*

Anamika Das
Tulane University

Figure 1

Introduction

Naming is never neutral; it is tied to power, state, and politics. It conveys continuity, permanence, and identity, both individual and collective. These performative characteristics of names are used strategically in everyday politics and public discourse (Galasiński and Skowronek 2001, 51). The politics of naming is central to the construction and contestation of identities, power structures, and social hierarchies. In Bangladesh, the terms *Adivasi* (indigenous) and *Khudro Nri Goshthi* (small ethnic communities) represent far more than labels for non-Bengali communities; they are embedded in ideological conflicts and state politics over autonomy, recognition, and sovereignty.

This paper analyzes a renowned Bangladeshi newspaper article, The Daily Star. The title of the article is "Why graffiti containing the word 'Adivasi' faces reluctance in Bangladesh," which was published on January 13, 2025. It examines how linguistic choices and narrative framing reflect and reproduce state power, identity politics, and ideological control in the news article. Highlighting the ideological positions and historical tensions surrounding the recognition of indigenous identity, this study shows how media discourse reflects broader sociopolitical struggles over naming, legitimacy, and national identity in Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by scholars such as Fairclough and van Dijk, provides a framework for examining how language reproduces, legitimizes, or challenges power. Fairclough (1995, 9) proposed a three-dimensional model (i.e., text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice), suggesting that "the analysis of texts should not be artificially isolated from analysis of institutional and discoursal practices within which texts are embedded". Fairclough (1992, 269) also notes that newspaper articles are discursive events that can be analyzed both linguistically and socially.

Van Dijk (2001, 279) argued that CDA significantly contributes to understanding how language, discourse, and communicative events participate in the production and reproduction of dominance and inequality. Since discourse is never neutral, linguistic choices reflect ideology, social interests, and political agendas. Analyzing lexical selections such as Adivasi vs. Khudro Nri Goshthi, narrative structures, and intertextual references reveals how dominant institutions reshape and control public discourse. This framework is particularly relevant to the analysis of The Daily Star article, which demonstrates how identity construction intersects with state policy and historical trauma.

Background of the Study

The Daily Star, a renowned newspaper in Bangladesh, reported on January 13, 2025, that the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) used the term “Adivasi” in graffiti on the back cover of the Grade 9 and 10 Bengali Grammar and Composition textbook (Bangla 2nd paper). However, some Bengali political groups, such as *Students for Sovereignty*, protested against the term “Adivasi,” claiming that they were not the only people native to the land and that the word is unconstitutional.

Figure 2


The Daily Star

বাংলা

The politics of denial

Why graffiti containing the word 'Adivasi' faces reluctance in Bangladesh

13 JANUARY 2025, 14:46 PM • ANALYSIS SHARE

Md Abbas

The previous back cover of the Grade 9 and 10 Bangla Grammar and Composition textbook. Photo: Collected

Figure 3 **[Source: The Daily Star]**


The Daily Star

বাংলা

NCTB removes 'Adivasi' graffiti from textbook after protests

13 JANUARY 2025, 04:45 AM • UPDATED 13 JANUARY 2025, 10:52 AM • NEWS SHARE

Star Digital Report

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) removed graffiti featuring the word "Adivasi" (indigenous) from the back cover of the Grade 9 and 10 Bengali Grammar and Composition textbook last night amid student protests.

As a result, NCTB removed the graffiti, including the word “Adivasi,” from the book and instead used a quotation from the poem Biddrohi (The Rebel), written by the national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam. The NCTB board chairman, AKM Reazul Hassan, stated that the graffiti had been removed because Adivasi is absent from the Bangladeshi constitution. To avoid conflict, they removed the previous graffiti containing the word Adivasi and replaced it with a new graffiti featuring a quotation from the poem The Rebel. The quotation is“Bolo bir chiro unnoto momo shir,” which is translated as: “Speak hero, say My head is held high” (The translation has been adapted from the International Nazrul Institute). The current back cover picture of the book is shown in Figure 3.

When the NCTB removed the graffiti and replaced it with the new one, indigenous representatives across the country repeatedly voiced objections and demanded the restoration of the original graffiti. However, the interim government (formed after the July 2024 revolution) ignored their appeal. Police even attacked them while they were peacefully protesting. The government stated its position regarding the removal as a follow-up to the constitution and the regulation of unauthorized public inscriptions. Rather, it is an act of governmental authority shaped within a border-ideological framework. Under the guise of Bengali nationalism and governmentalism, the government privileged the narrative of dominant groups like Students for Sovereignty, thereby encouraging discriminatory practices and avoiding political confrontation.

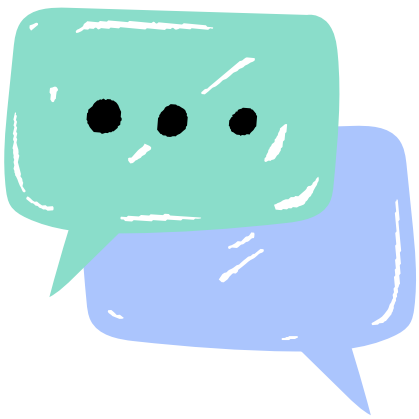
Linguistic Choices and Ideological Positioning
The article uses strong evaluative terms such as “aversion,” “unwillingness,” “erasure,” and “reluctance” to describe the government’s actions in removing the graffiti. Drawing on Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model, at the textual level, the evaluative terms such as “unwillingness” and “reluctance” portray the government’s actions as deliberate and ideologically motivated rather than administratively neutral. These lexical choices framed the state as a promoter of dominance and marginalization. Discursive practice interprets linguistic choices, such as “aversion” and “erasure,” as politically motivated acts that exclude indigenous self-identification. At the sociocultural practice level, this discourse reflects broader struggles over naming, recognition, and national identity, showing how language becomes a site of ideological contestation. Finally, the difference between Adivasi and Khudro Nri Goshthi illustrates how euphemistic terminology obscures historical depth (adi meaning “original” or “first,” vasi meaning “inhabitant”) and weakens a community's position in society.

Narrative Framing
The article frames the graffiti as a symbol of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Featuring all communities, such as the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Adivasi, and the Muslim majority, signals the multi-ideological identity of Bangladesh. The government’s removal of the graffiti representing these communities is framed as undermining social justice and denying the legitimacy of indigenous identity. The narrative constructs a clear binary: marginalized communities and student activists on one side, and the state and nationalist groups like Students for Sovereignty on the other. This framing reveals how media constructs discourses of resistance and solidarity while exposing the state’s control and politics over naming practices.

Intertextuality and Historical Continuity
The article highlights a historical continuity of what van Dijk (2001, 255) called “power abuse,” namely, the breach of laws, rules, democracy, equality, and justice by powerful authorities. By referencing former prime minister Sheikh Hasina’s 2009 statement that “there were no ‘Adivasi’ in the country,” the article demonstrates a long-standing pattern of discrimination and the use of power to control and dominate minorities through rules and regulations created by the government and the majority community. This intertextual move illustrates how the discourse of denial operates across administrations, portraying institutional efforts at domination. CDA suggests that such intertextual moments are crucial because historical discourse shapes present-day policy and public perception.

The Discourse of Threat and Sovereignty
The article shows how certain groups claim that recognizing indigenous communities as *Adivasi* will threaten national unity, potentially inviting “foreign intervention” and creating “separatism.” This aligns with Van Dijk’s notion of “cognition” (2001, 258), which characterizes ideologies as fundamental social cognitions that reflect group beliefs, aims, values, and interests. In Bangladesh, dominant groups emphasize risk and exaggerate threats to delegitimize minority claims, revealing their underlying beliefs about non-powerful minority communities.

Naming, Identity, and Moral Legitimacy
People had expectations from the interim government after the July revolution, expectations of equality and justice. However, by adhering to the demands of groups such as Students for Sovereignty, the interim government betrays the ideals of the July Revolution and follows the practices of past administrations. By avoiding recognition of indigenous identity, the government damages Bangladesh’s progressive image and undermines its commitment to human rights. CDA identifies this as a strategy for delegitimizing marginalized voices, revealing the symbolic and material consequences of naming.



Discussion and Conclusion

Names associated with nations become markers of national identity and cultural reality, a way of "taming reality" (Galasiński & Skowronek, 2001, 51). For example, in Chinese naming practices, names are not simple labels but strategic tools used to shape relationships and reflect social roles (Blum, 1997, 358). The dispute over the name "Macedonia" between the European Union (EU) and Greece also demonstrates how names can create political tension. While the EU and the United States viewed Greece's reaction as exaggerated, for Greece, the name was tied to history, identity, and national pride (Galasiński & Skowronek, 2001, 51). Similarly, Bangladesh's refusal to use the term Adivasi reflects state politics and hegemonic dominance, where minority voices are marginalized by the power of the majority.

The official insistence on the use of Khudro Nri Goshthi reveals deep-rooted historical, constitutional, and sociopolitical tensions. Article 6(2) of the Constitution states that the people of Bangladesh will be identified as *Bangalees* as a nation, and the citizens of Bangladesh will be identified as *Bangladeshies* (Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, 1972), even though Bangalee is an ethnic identity of the majority population of Bangladesh. In addition to the Bangalees, 54 indigenous communities live in Bangladesh (IWGIA), each with distinct ethnic identities. Mohsin (2010, 157) argues that identifying all citizens as Bangalee imposes the majority's identification category on non-Bangalee populations. It is an act of hegemonic dominance that undermines minority identities and forces them into a hybrid identity.

This ideological stance is reflected in the naming of indigenous communities as Khudro Nri Goshthi, meaning 'small ethnic communities'. This terminology not only hides their distinctiveness but also subordinates them by emphasizing population size. While these communities may be numerically smaller, defining identity by numbers is an act of dominance and power control. By promoting Khudro Nri Goshthi on television talk shows and other public platforms, the state constructs a hierarchical relationship and denies historical continuity and territorial claims associated with indigeneity ("Unresolved Adivasi Questions," 2024).

Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh identify themselves as Adivasi, meaning indigenous. The term was recognized during the British colonial period, and the self-identification process aligns with the United Nations' contemporary understanding of indigenous peoples.

> "Indigenous peoples share a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonization and a strong connection to their lands. They maintain, at least in part, distinct social, economic, and political systems. They have distinct languages, cultures, beliefs, and knowledge systems. They are determined to maintain and develop their identity and distinct institutions, and they form a non-dominant sector of society (United Nations n.d.).

The Adivasis of Bangladesh have historical continuity in regions such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts division and possess distinct languages, cultures, beliefs, and knowledge systems; they identify themselves as Adivasi. However, the Constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize the term and instructs that it should not be used in formal contexts. This discursive shift reflects what Fairclough (2003) calls ideological "recontextualization," in which powerful institutions redefine social categories to align with political interests. Avoiding Adivasi allows the state to bypass obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which requires the recognition of land rights, autonomy, and cultural preservation. Promoting Khudro Nri Goshthi thus serves as a mechanism for maintaining hegemonic control.

The newspaper article highlights the struggles of indigenous communities, presenting “Adivasi” as a symbol of resistance, while the state and certain political groups attempt to subordinate minority communities within a narrow nationalist framework. It also demonstrates the historical continuity of indigenous struggles rooted in the construction of their identity. For instance, during the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) regime, the government refused to recognize 1993 as the Indigenous Year, as declared by the UN. At that time, the opposition party, the Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina, expressed support for indigenous communities. However, their stance shifted upon coming to power. The Awami League government acknowledged the existence of some Nritattik Jonogoshti (ethnic communities), stating that there are no indigenous communities in Bangladesh. This classification, however, lacks legal protections (Mohsin, 2010, 162). The interim government continues the approach of previous administrations by disregarding the legitimacy of the term Adivasi and invoking the Khudro Nri Goshthi, thereby reflecting constitutional limitations while avoiding the moral and ethical consequences of denying the identity and existence of these communities.

CDA illustrates how discourse shapes social categories of belonging and exclusion. Bourdieu (1991, 75) noted that naming carries “magical” and performative power, expressing both symbolic violence and authority. The controversy surrounding the removal of the graffiti illustrates the profound implications of naming. School textbooks function as ideological tools that teach state-approved histories and identities. By removing the graffiti, the government is not only teaching students hegemonic dominance but also reinforcing ethnocentric and imperialistic beliefs.

The reaction to the removal of the graffiti also reveals how public discourse becomes an arena of ideological contestation. Indigenous activists and students used the term Adivasi as a symbol of visibility to demand rights, protest discrimination, and assert equality and justice. Their resistance demonstrates that naming is a form of counter-discourse that challenges structural inequality and hegemonic constructions of national identity. Conversely, the state’s alignment with nationalist groups such as Students for Sovereignty shows how dominant actors suppress counter-hegemonic narratives by policing language. The state believes that legitimizing the term Adivasi will foster separatism and increase the risk of foreign intervention, thereby undermining national sovereignty. Thus, the battle over naming reveals broader tensions over authority and power in society.

Recognizing Adivasis as indigenous is not merely a linguistic choice; it constitutes a critical step toward acknowledging the historical continuity of injustice faced by minorities, fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, and upholding the values of the July Revolution, which emphasize diversity, equality, and justice. This analysis demonstrates that debates over naming are far from trivial; they reveal underlying power struggles, historical legacies, and contested visions of nationhood that continue to shape Bangladesh’s sociopolitical landscape.

Overall, the politics of naming in Bangladesh is deeply intertwined with political authority, historical continuity, and social belonging. It demonstrates how language is used as a tool to negotiate power, identity, and legitimacy. The politics of naming at the Adivasi and Khudro Nri Goshthi illustrates how discourse shapes public perception and material realities, including land rights, recognition, and state protection. Adivasi carries historical depth and political weight, while Khudro Nri Goshthi enables the state to delegitimize indigenous rights under the guise of constitutional interpretation. The Daily Star article shows that the continued reluctance to recognize Adivasi exposes structural inequalities, ideological anxieties, and discrimination. By appeasing political groups, the interim government not only avoids political conflict but also betrays the July Revolution, whose central goal was to build a multilingual, multireligious, and nondiscriminatory society.

References

- Abbas, MD. 2025. “Why graffiti containing the word ‘Adivasi’ faces reluctance in Bangladesh.” *The Daily Star*, January 13, 2025. https://www.thedailystar.net/analysis-1/news/why-graffiti-containing-the-word-adivasi-faces-reluctance-bangladesh-3798646
- Bangladesh. IWGIA. n.d. “Bangladesh.” International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. Accessed November 25, 2025. https://iwgia.org/en/bangladesh.html.
- Blum, Susan D. 1997. “Naming Practices and the Power of Words in China.” *Language in Society* 26 (3): 357–79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4168776.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press. https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Bourdieu_Pierre_Language_and_Symbolic_Power_1991.pdf.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2003. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge. https://howardaudio.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/n-fairclough-analysing-discourse.pdf.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. New York: Longman. https://www.felsemiotica.com/descargas/Fairclough-Norman-Critical-Discourse-Analysis.-The-Critical-Study-of-Language.pdf.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1992. “Intertextuality in Critical Discourse Analysis.” *Linguistics and Education* 4 (3–4): 269–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898(92)90004-G.
- Galasiński, Dariusz, and Katarzyna Skowronek. 2001. “Naming the Nation: A Critical Analysis of Names in Polish Political Discourse.” *Political Communication* 18 (1): 51–66. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/10584600150217659?needAccess=true.
- Islam, Kazi Nazrul. *Bidrohi (The Rebel)*. Translated by Kaiser Haq. Accessed on February 16, 2026. https://icnazrul.com
- Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. 1972. *The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*. Accessed February 3, 2026. http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-367.html
- Mohsin, Amena. 2010. “Language, Identity and the State.” In *Between Ashes and Hope*, 157–70. Dhaka: University Press Limited. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/161445627.pdf#page=165.
- The Daily Star. 2025. “NCTB Removes ‘Adivasi’ Graffiti from Textbook after Protests.” January 13, 2025. https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/nctb-removes-adivasi-graffiti-textbook-after-protests-3798231.
- New Age. 2024. “Unresolved Adivasi Questions and State Reforms.” *New Age*, September 12, 2024. https://www.newagebd.net/post/new-age-specials/244983/unresolved-adivasi-questions-and-state-reforms#google_vignette
- United Nations. n.d. “Indigenous Peoples.” Accessed February 3, 2026. https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/indigenous-peoples
- van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.” *Discourse & Society* 4 (2): 249–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006

Anamika Das is a PhD student in linguistic anthropology at Tulane University. She studies how indigenous communities negotiate linguistic borders and sustain cultural continuity amid state nationalism and linguistic marginalization. She is particularly interested in sociolinguistics, language and power, critical and multimodal discourse analysis.

Engagement in Fanfiction Author Notes: A Genre Analysis

Iran Maria Razcon Echeagaray
University of Maryland Baltimore County

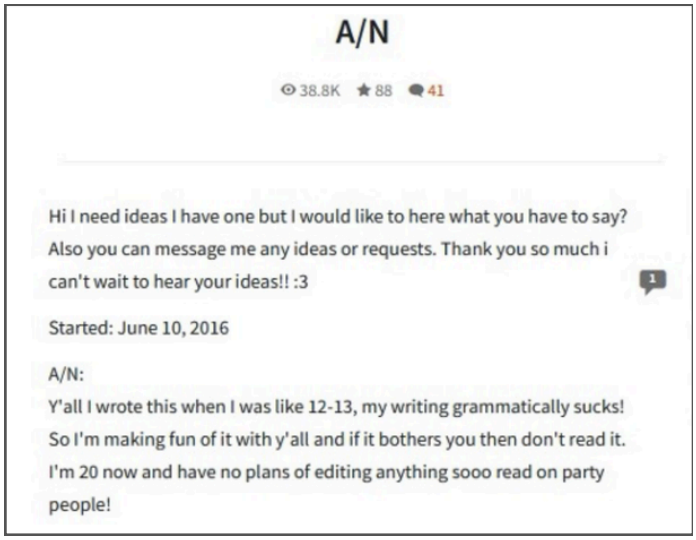
In the 'digital wilds', communities come together in 'affinity spaces' (Gee, 2004) to engage and share common interests. Technology has allowed fans to congregate in different fandom spaces to build community through diverse communicative tools. According to Elola and Oskoz (2017), there has been an immense growth in digitized and digital genres that are made more accessible online, i.e. blogs, and e-books. A prominent genre in the digital wilds among fandoms is fanfiction, which is a fan practice that re-writes or re-invents an already existing story or characters that have been already written (Black, 2008; Sauro, 2020). Within fanfiction, paratexts, which are accompanying texts surrounding the main story (Genette, 1991, in Leavenworth, 2015) function as spaces for fans to communicate while establishing their presence. Paratexts can be considered genres since they tend to carry communicative actions and follow conventions that users of such genres employ (Hyland, 2012). 'Author Notes', or A/N, is a sub-genre in fanfiction where writers express relevant details of their stories and creative processes (Black, 2008; Herzog, 2012; Sauro, 2020). According to Herzog (2012), authors tend to share in such spaces (A/N) their purposes, creative and rhetorical choices made in their stories, as well as their requests and invitations to their readers and fandoms. A/N can be found at the start of a story or at the end, providing information to the readers, allowing the author to open up a conversation and opportunities for fans to provide feedback, share their opinions, or communicate synchronously with other readers (Jwa, 2012).

Review of the Literature

Writing entails adopting a point of view and claiming a position within a discourse community. Claiming an attitude is noted as 'stance taking' (Hyland, 2005). Taking a 'stance' requires "evaluation" of the content to interpret the writer's attitudes and judgement towards the content. Thus, writers use their rhetorical and linguistic choices to judge and shape their texts according to their audience (Hyland, 2005). To this end, **"Engagement"** is considered as "writers' relation to their readers with respect to their position and guiding them to interpretations" (Hyland, 2005, p.176). Engagement pertains to the discourse choices that authors make in order to signal their position within their community, build rapport, and persuade their audience to partake in specific actions (Luzon, 2023). Therefore, fanfiction authors create their A/N acknowledging that their audience will recognize and expect specific content in their story that aligns with their chosen fandom (Hyland, 2012).

A/N opens up a window for dialogue and community participation. Through "fan" discourse, writers can convey multiple meanings and forms of engagement. Moreover, fanfiction authors exert some forms of "group" control and manage their audience's perceptions and participation through the use of notes and paratext, conveying their identities and "create an impression of authority and credibility" (Hyland, 2005). Engagement tends to be highly present in fanfiction communities, not only between the readers but also between the authors and their audiences. A/N is a place where writers acknowledge the presence of their readers and as discourse participants, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, recognizing their uncertainties, and guiding them to interpretations (Hyland, 2005).

Figure 1: A/N in Wattpad



This exploratory genre analysis aims to identify common rhetorical moves found in Harry Potter fanfiction Author Notes (A/N), in order to retrieve information about the author's engagement with their readers.

Methods

The corpus consists of 30 preceding author notes found on Harry Potter one-shots in the fanfiction archival site, Wattpad (see Figure 1). Across different fanfiction sites, the Harry Potter fandom has been well-established since the first book was published in 1997, followed by the success of the movie franchise in 2001. In Wattpad, different fanfiction genres based on Harry Potter have been prominent since the launch of the site in 2006, hosting over 195K fanfictions based on the franchise.

One-shots are "a single piece of writing, as opposed to a multichapter work, that can be of any length" (tvtropes.com). Writers can create a one-shot book with multiple chapters, each one dedicated to a single one-shot. This genre was chosen due to the brief nature of the stories, and the main author's notes are usually set on the first page of the novel to contextualize or guide the reader through the multiple stories written. Introductory author notes in one-shots usually include the plot, characters, types of stories, and fandom, among other personal features related to the author's fan and personal identity, in order to establish the content of the reading to the audience.

Author's notes were analyzed following Jacobson et al. (2015) rhetorical moves analysis, where parts of the texts are identified and labeled depending on the specific goals that they carry. By analyzing moves across texts, patterns of the genre are identified, and critical attention is paid to the roles and purposes the moves play so that the genre "functions" accurately among its users and discourse communities (Jacobson et al., 2015, p.219).

Results

Black (2008) stressed the importance of A/N in order to cultivate strong relationships with the readers as well as the fandom. Readers are crucial in the fanfiction community, since they provide relevant feedback and support other authors (Sauro, 2020). Thus, authors note the importance of the reader's role in their creative process, as their intended audience and potential collaborators. The analysis showed four moves that were connected to Engagement in Wattpad (see Table 1).

Table 1: Moves in one-shot A/N

Move	Description	Example
Invitation to Request 50%	Invites readers to send requests for the stories	"Recommendations and ideas are welcomed and appreciated🥺"
Content Warning 10%	Notice to be cautious about explicit or sensitive content.	"This book will include smuut, fluff, angst, swearing, female x female"
Language Apology 23%	Apologizes for bad or poor writing, grammar or 'limited' English fluency.	"(Grammar isn't the best in it, sorry about that))"
Update Frequency 16%	Announce the timeline to update.	"I don't have a updating schedule but I try my best to write whenever motivated or inspired👍"

The most frequent move found in A/N was ***Invitation to Request,*** which positions the readers as active "creative collaborators" of the fanfiction. This 'directive move' enables readers to participate in their text if it is open for them to share requests for different scenarios or characters to be developed in a one-shot. However, some of the requests appear to be "CLOSED," meaning that this move actively positions the readers as "passive recipients" of the content, negating their views and limiting their participation in the fanfiction to only "praise the story" or ask questions to the authors. This particular move recognizes the author's agency and their power over their own creative work (Herzog, 2012; Hyland, 2012). Additionally, this move showcases the dialogic interaction found on fanfiction sites, which acknowledges or restrains readers' creative suggestions (Jwa, 2012).

Language Apology generates reader-expectations towards the story while sharing the author's 'stance' on their own writing proficiency. This move might be related to attitude markers and directives, since authors position their readers as more "proficient", implicitly soliciting feedback or general critique while 'criticizing' the quality of their language (Black, 2020; Jwa, 2012). The author's stance of their language proficiency invites readers to engage and correct errors found in the text.

Content Warning is a directive that discloses sensitive or explicit content, which rests on the reader to continue with the story or refrain from reading it. Thus, pausing readers' engagement with the content by actively notifying about stories and characters that they might not like**.**

Update frequency alerts the audience about the timeline of story updates; thus, controlling the pace at which the reader might engage with the content. This directive could even "assert control" over the audience's reading autonomy and agency to read through the stories. Engagement and readers´ participation seemed to be "controlled" or influenced through these moves, either evoking emotions or constructing certain expectations of the intended story (Herzog, 2012).

The previous moves allude to the notion that A/N serve as a space where readers and writers engage in active participation, usually managed by the author, creating an open or a more 'restricted' interaction and collaboration from the readers.

Closing remarks

This exploratory genre analysis focused on retrieving common moves found in Harry Potter fanfiction Author Notes (A/N) to identify engagement opportunities created by the writers. In addition, understanding of discoursal conventions employed in fandoms allowed us to understand the socialization practices to legitimize fans as writers.

This study will provide valuable information regarding digital genre studies. Not only does this analysis attempt to explore fanfiction as a genre, but it also examines how socialization and discourses are authentically used in fanfiction paratextual features where fandoms participate in meaningful communication and negotiation practices, which contribute to the field of applied linguistics in the 'digital wilds'. Furthermore, more exploration of the nuances of dialogic interaction in fandom spaces can be carried out to understand fan affiliation, engagement , and identities in affinity spaces online (Gee, 2004).

María Razcón Echeagaray, MA., is a PhD student in the Language, Literacy and Culture program at The University of Maryland Baltimore County. Her areas of research include fan practices and second language learning, learning in the digital wilds and heritage language learning. She received her masters in Applied Linguistics and TESL from the University of Arizona. Her teaching experience includes English as a Foreign Language, Second Language Writing and Spanish as a Foreign language in diverse educational contexts.

References

- Black, R. (2008). *Chapter 5: Language, Culture and Identity in Fanfiction*. In Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction. Peter Lang.
- Black, R. (2008). *Chapter 7: Fanfiction and Literacy in the 21st Century*. In Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction. Peter Lang.
- Elola, I., & Oskoz, A. (2017). *Writing with 21st century social tools in the L2 classroom: New literacies, genres, and writing practices*. Journal of Second Language Writing, 36, 52-60. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2017.04.002
- Gee, J.P. (2004). *Situated Language Learning: A critique on traditional schooling*. Routledge
- Herzog, A. 2012. *"'But this is my story and this is how I wanted to write it': Author's Notes as a Fannish Claim to Power in Fan Fiction Writing."* Transformative Works and Cultures, no. 11. https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0406.
- Hyland. (2005). *Stance and engagement: a model of interaction in academic discourse.* Discourse Studies, 7(2), 173–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365
- Hyland, K. (2012). *Chapter 1: Identity: Interaction and community*. In Disciplinary Identities: Individuality and Community in Academic Discourse. Cambridge University Press & Assessment.
- Hyland, K. (2012). *Chapter 2: Discipline: Proximity and Positioning*. In Disciplinary Identities: Individuality and Community in Academic Discourse. Cambridge University Press & Assessment.
- Jacobson, B., Pawlowski, M., & Tardy, C. M. (2015). Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres. *Writing Spaces*, *4*, 217-238.
- Jwa, S. (2012). *Modeling L2 Writer Voice: Discoursal Positioning in Fanfiction Writing*. Computers and Composition, 24(4), 323-340. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2012.10.001
- Leavenworth, M. L. (2015). The Paratext of Fan Fiction. Narrative, 23(1), 40–60. https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2015.0004
- Luzón, M.-J. (2023). *Multimodal practices of research groups in Twitter: An analysis of stance and engagement markers*.English for Specific Purposes, 70, 17-32.
- *One-Shot Fic*. (n.d.). tvtropes.com. Retrieved 2026, from https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/OneShotFic
- Sauro, S., & Zourou, K. (2019). *What are the digital wilds?* Language Learning & Technology, 23(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10125/44666
- Sauro, S. (2020). *Fan fiction and informal language learning.* In M. Dressman & R. W. Sadler (Eds.), The handbook of informal language learning (pp. 139–151). Wiley Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119472384.ch9

A Design-Based Research Approach to Virtual Language Learning Environment Development with Graduate Teaching Assistants

Ogulcan Durmaz
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

1. Introduction

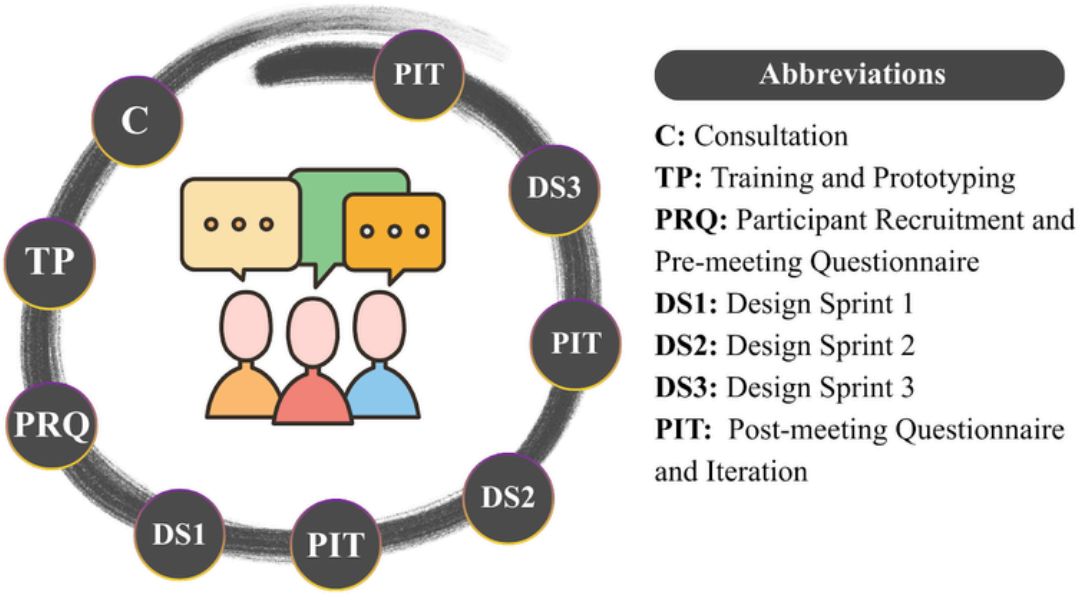
Virtual Reality (VR) is a multi-sensory experience in which users are situated in three-dimensional spaces as avatars, with motion tracking and responsive rendering enabling embodied, interactive experiences (Alizadeh & Cowie, 2021). Kaplan-Rakowski and Gruber (2021) treat low-immersion VR and high-immersion VR as distinct experiences, based on the level of immersion. While high-immersion VR requires advanced headsets such as Quest 2, Quest 3, or Apple Vision Pro, low-immersion VR is peripheral and accessible on mobile, laptop, and desktop computers. In language learning, VR has been shown to benefit vocabulary learning (Alfadil, 2020; Chen & Yuan, 2023), speaking skills (Hwang & Lee, 2025; Park, 2022), and listening skills (Lan & Liao, 2018; Tai & Chen, 2021).

Although prior studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of VR for language learning, there is a need to move beyond outcome comparisons to examine how pedagogical and technological design decisions shape learning experiences in the design and development process (Durmaz, 2024). Design-based research is particularly well-suited to this goal, as it enables iterative collaboration among diverse stakeholders. This design-based study, comprising two professors, an experienced game designer, eight English as a Second Language (ESL) graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), and the researcher, sought to create a virtual environment, the International Language Chat Consortium (ILCC), on Spatial.io. Through collaborative design, the study aimed to create a pedagogically meaningful virtual space and to reveal design fundamentals.

2. Methodology

The study employed a design-based approach, resulting in iterative development across five guiding phases: consultation; training and prototyping; participant recruitment and pre-meeting questionnaire; design sprints; post-meeting questionnaire and iteration (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Methodology Overview



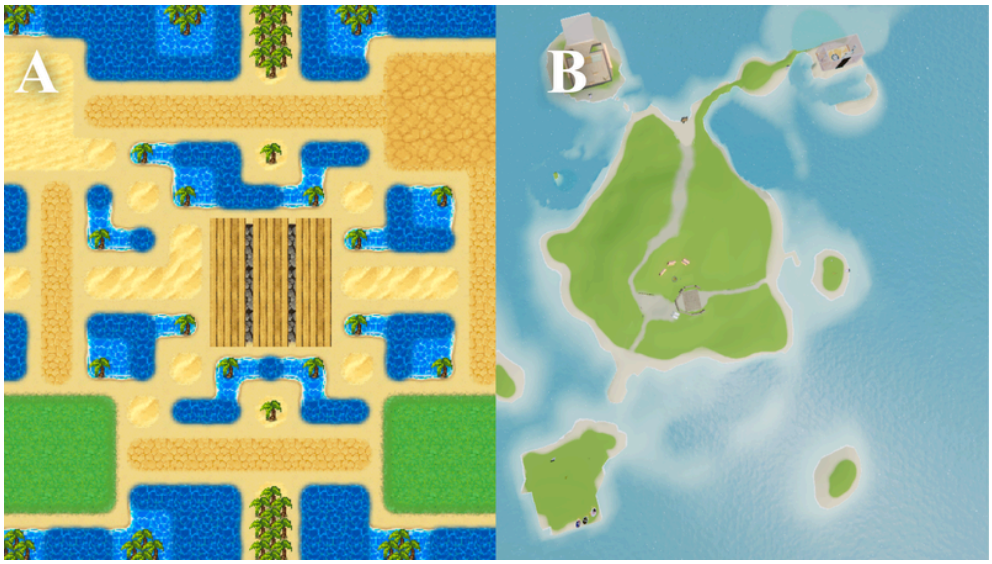
2.1 Consultation

During the consultation phase, the researcher sought expert opinion on the study's design and feasibility. To understand the skills required to conduct the study, the researcher consulted two professors, one in Linguistics and the other in Game Studies, and a game designer with industry experience who was also an instructor in the Game Studies program. Based on these consultations, the researcher decided to integrate game design principles and language learning to conduct an interdisciplinary study and to develop a pedagogically informed virtual space.

2.2 Training and Prototype Development

Following the consultation phase, the researcher learned to use the Unity game engine and the Spatial.io toolkit, a set of functions in a metaverse platform, to familiarize himself with virtual space development. Having experimented with prototypes (Figure 2A), he developed the first draft of ILCC (Figure 2B). The design was informed by the Cognitive Behavioral Game Design Model (2014) and a list of considerations adapted from Reinhardt's *Gameful Second and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning* (2019).

Figure 2. From 2D Prototype (A) to 3D First Draft



2.3 Participant Recruitment and Pre-meeting Questionnaire
Participant recruitment employed convenience and purposeful sampling. The pre-meeting questionnaire collected demographic data and background information from eight ESL GTAs across games, game-based learning, virtual environments, and computer literacy. The participants were selected because they were readily accessible to the researcher in the ESL program and exhibited varying levels of digital competence and teaching experience. Based on questionnaire results, three GTA design teams were formed: low skill (LS), daily user (DU), and high skill (HS).

LS team members were language teachers who either never or rarely used digital environments for teaching. Compared to the LS, the DU team had more experience with technology integration and game-based learning. Lastly, the HS team had the most experience in virtual worlds and game-based learning. Some had programming skills in R, Python, and C#.

2.4 Design Sprint
Design teams participated in three one-hour design sprints. In each session, the researcher, acting as both facilitator and developer, began with an orientation and presented the most recent version of the virtual environment. The first sprint was based on the researcher's initial draft. After incorporating feedback from the LS group, the environment was revised and presented in the second sprint; similarly, the third sprint with the DU group was based on the iterated version developed in response to the LS group's feedback.

During each sprint, participants evaluated existing features and their potential for language learning, suggested new tools, identified bugs, and explored the space in real time. They were also asked to reflect on the ILCC draft, game-based learning elements, and ideal design features. Feedback from each session directly informed the development of the next iteration of the virtual environment.

2.5 Post-meeting Questionnaire and Iteration
Following each sprint, GTAs completed an anonymous post-meeting questionnaire focusing on the virtual environment's navigation, interaction, communication, usability in formal and informal language teaching, and comfort. Their feedback, collected through open-ended and Likert-scale questions, was crucial in shaping the virtual environment and in involving GTAs in the development process.

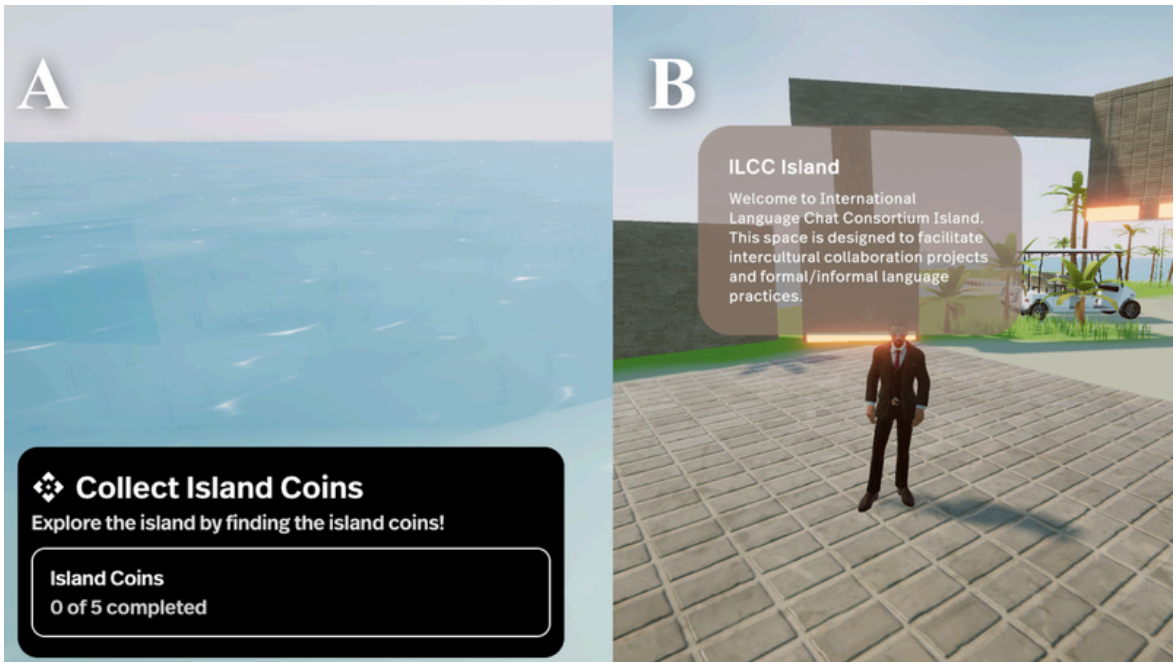
3. Iterations
The study included three design teams, consisting of GTAs, and three sprints: LS, DU, and HS. Each group, with its unique background, informed the development of ILCC. The main contributions of each design team to the iteration will be discussed in detail.

3.1 Design Sprint with LS
The Low-Skill (LS) group prioritized accessibility issues, considering the users with average hardware. Their feedback on performance problems on standard computers directly led to significant optimization efforts, including the minimization of vegetation (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Before (A)-and-After (B) Vegetation Update

This design sprint also informed engagement and spatial design decisions. Based on the suggestions, the researcher added a message to the main area and a quest system to enhance engagement and motivate learners (Figure 4).

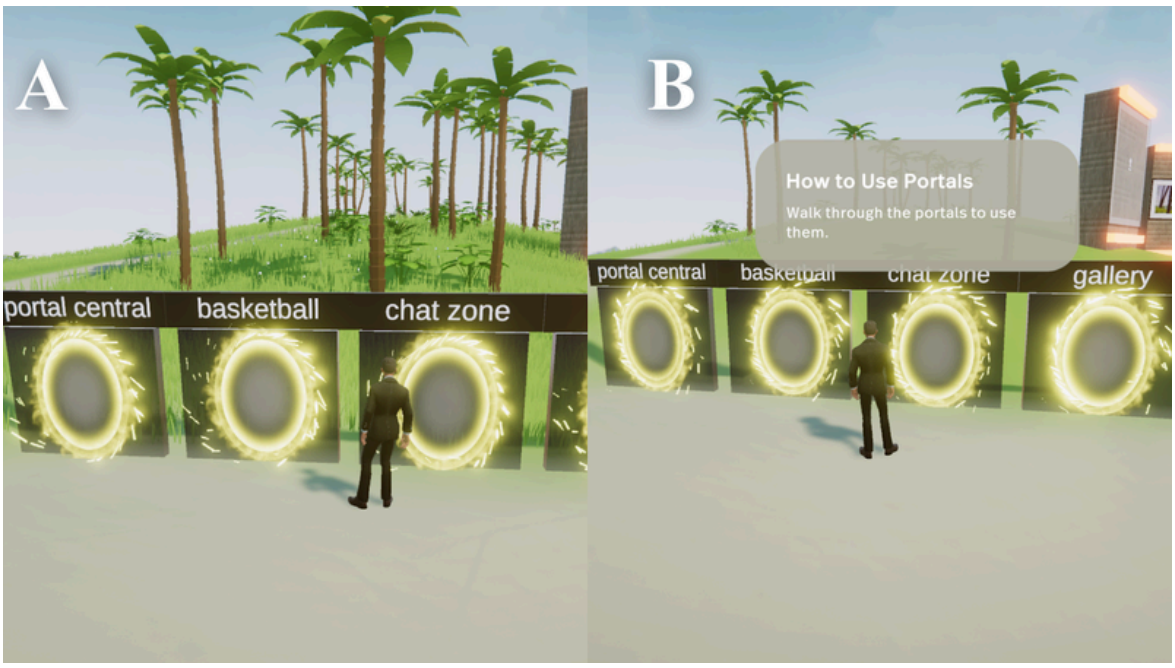
Figure 4. Quest System (A) and Welcome Message (B)



3.2 Design Sprint with DU

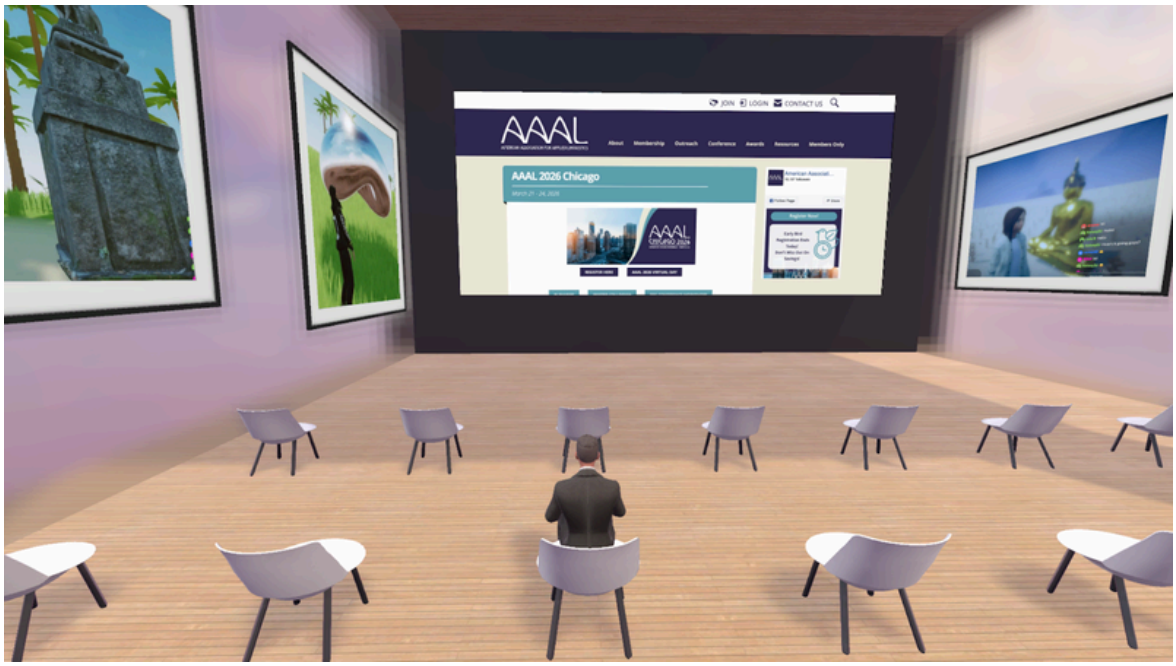
While providing feedback on the second draft of ILCC, the DU group prioritized the need for more guidance and identified a significant design flaw. First, they indicated that users might require guidance on how to use portals. A pop-up message was added (Figure 5). Second, the transparent material in the basketball area hindered its usability. The group suggested a color modification and the addition of an area marker, which the researcher addressed.

Figure 5. Before (A)-and-After (B) Pop-up Message



In addition, they identified a tension between the island's "fun" tropical atmosphere and classroom needs. They expressed that the fun theme might distract users from learning. In response to this design critique, the researcher developed an additional space, the Formal Lesson Hub, which included projector screens and seating to support focused instruction (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Formal Lesson Hub



3.3 Design Sprint with HS

The High-Skill (HS) group shaped the island's gamification and social design, focusing on the third draft. They emphasized challenge and role-play, which led to the creation of a News Studio environment to stimulate creative language production (Figure 7). They also introduced the concept of "mirror dwellers," a type of user who prefers to chat informally by looking at their avatars in the mirror. This concept was addressed by adding mirrored seating areas to support avatar-centered social interaction. Their call for a more "information-dense" environment led to the addition of sound effects for portal feedback and the integration of a Google Drive link for in-world content storage.

Figure 7. News Studio

4. Findings
The study revealed important insights regarding practice, layout, and interaction. GTAs found ILCC more valuable for informal language exchange than formal instruction. The follow-up survey showed that the world was more usable (89.7%) for informal language learning. The island's fun tropical theme was perceived as a hindrance to formal language practice.

In addition to usability for language practice, the design teams assessed the layout of the ILCC. LS and DU groups appreciated the distant islands surrounding the main area, noting their potential for speaking tasks, jigsaw activities, and stress relief. Similarly, the HS group found navigation practical. Portals were also seen as facilitating efficient travel.

The design teams also favored interactivity. For instance, the HS group indicated that interactive objects were information-dense and enriched the engagement. Further, the LS team noted their usefulness for activities such as scavenger hunts and storytelling.

Lastly, during the design sprints, the design teams were asked about the ideal features of the virtual world. They suggested that a virtual world design should prioritize accessibility, user-friendliness, the availability of multiple distant areas and communication tools, and the ability to upload media, such as PDFs, audio, and images.

5. Limitations
The design sprints aimed to develop a visually appealing yet technically unchallenging virtual world that could run on any device. However, this led to the abandonment of the full-immersion version of the space, the headset version. Most GTAs did not use headsets, and the world-positioning problems in the higher-immersion version could not be resolved due to technical constraints.

The quest-and-reward system was another challenge, requiring sophisticated programming skills that the design teams lacked. For this reason, the system was added to the virtual space but remained a prototype, showcasing its potential rather than being used in practice.

Lastly, fail states, situations where players fail at tasks or quests, were considered important for learning, engagement, and motivation of learners. Although they were suggested during design sprints and in post-meeting questionnaires, they also required advanced programming. Additionally, time constraints hindered the addition of fail states.

7. Conclusion
As a result of the design sprints with three design teams of GTAs, the final version of the ILCC island was developed (Figure 8). The island was considered more useful for informal language practices. The design teams noted that developing activities on the island might increase teachers' workload, and that technical issues could adversely affect the learning experience. Regarding ideal features, accessibility, user-friendliness, multiple areas, communication tools (e.g., text or voice chat), and the ability to transfer media (e.g., PDFs, audio files, and images) were considered essential.

Figure 8. ILCC Island Final Version

Overall, this study demonstrated that a design-based approach can yield pedagogically valuable, innovative tools for language learning. By engaging participants in iterative design cycles, the research combined pedagogy and development to create a virtual environment and investigate ideal features of virtual worlds for language learning. The design-based approach highlighted collaboration, enabled continuous refinement, and foregrounded instructors' perspectives in the design and development.

References

- Alfadil, M. (2020). Effectiveness of virtual reality game in foreign language vocabulary acquisition. *Computers & Education*, *153*, 103893. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103893
- Alizadeh, M., & Cowie, N. (2021). An exploratory student-centred approach to immersive virtual reality: Reflections and future directions. In *Proceedings of ASCILITE 2021: Back to the Future* (pp. 131–136). ASCILITE. https://doi.org/10.14742/ascilite2021.0117
- Chen, C., & Yuan, Y. (2023). Effectiveness of virtual reality on Chinese as a second language vocabulary learning: Perceptions from international students. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2023.2192770
- Durmaz, O. (2024). *Language learning beyond the borders: Virtual space development with Spatial* [Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]. Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Illinois https://hdl.handle.net/2142/125525
- Hwang, Y., & Lee, J. H. (2025). "Yes, I am more confident with my avatars": Integrating EFL students' speaking practice into metaverse. *RELC Journal*, *56*(3), 760-771. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882241251952
- Kaplan-Rakowski, R., & Gruber, A. (2021). One-on-one foreign language speaking practice in high-immersion virtual reality. In *Contextual Language Learning* (pp. 187–202). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3416-1
- Lan, Y. J., & Liao, C. Y. (2018). The effects of 3D immersion on CSL students' listening comprehension. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *12*(1), 35-46. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2018.1418242
- Park, H. (2022). Effects of Virtual Reality-based English Learning on Korean University Students' Speaking Ability. *Multimedia-Assisted Language Learning*, *25*(4). https://doi.org/10.15702/mall.2022.25.4.93
- Reinhardt, J. (2019). *Gameful second and foreign language teaching and learning: Theory, research, and practice*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04729-0
- Starks, K. (2014). Cognitive behavioral game design: A unified model for designing serious games. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*(28). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00028
- Tai, T. Y., & Chen, H. H. J. (2021). The impact of immersive virtual reality on EFL learners' listening comprehension. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, *59*(7), 1272-1293. https://doi.org/10.1177/0735633121994291

Ogulcan Durmaz is a PhD student in Informatics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he also earned his MA in TESOL and a graduate minor in Game Studies. His work focuses on game-based learning, virtual reality environments, and extended realities in general. With experience in serious game design and immersive virtual spaces, he has developed interactive learning environments. As an educator and designer, he integrates digital innovation with pedagogy, enhancing engagement in computer-mediated language learning.

Resource review of:
Calarco, J. M. (2020). A field guide to grad school: Uncovering the hidden curriculum. Princeton University Press.

The guidebook you need to map out your graduate school journey

Tin Yuet (Tiffany) Tam
University of Toronto

Since the start of graduate school, I have found that there is a lack of representation from racialized or immigrant graduate students who share how they stay afloat at graduate school and its hidden curriculum. As a first-generation, immigrant, and multilingual graduate student myself, I always find the need to navigate on my own while studying at decentralized, huge academic institutions. While I am fortunate to have access to many resources, there are still many graduate students with similar backgrounds who feel unseen or unsupported. Therefore, in this issue's Resource Review, I would like to review the book *A field guide to grad school: Uncovering the hidden curriculum* (Calarco, 2020).

How is this guidebook related to graduate students and faculty members from systematically marginalized groups?
As an applied linguistics graduate student, I came across this book from a Ph.D. friend who read it as one of her course readings. Back then, I was in the excitement of starting graduate school, but sometimes felt there were many questions I would like to ask. Epistemology? Differences between methodology and methods? Positionality? During classes, these terms were often used, but I did not think I had completely grasped what they really mean in academia. Besides, there were more new questions when I heard the senior graduate students talking about their comps, submitting abstracts to conferences, and did I mention they seemed to know the faculty members and other graduate students very well? That being said, I read Calarco's book with curiosity, hoping it would guide me to a clearer direction. Calarco wrote a very concise and resourceful guidebook for graduate students from different disciplines, as she acknowledged the insufficient resources many racialized graduate students are facing. Given her background as a sociology professor, in the introduction, Calarco set a tone for why making the hidden curriculum part of the formal curriculum is necessary (p. 5). First, there are students from systematically marginalized groups, such as first-generation college students, students of color, women students, and international students, who need more help in figuring out the hidden curriculum of graduate school. Second, professors from marginalized groups have already taken a lot in making graduate school more equitable. Therefore, Calarco would like to write a field guide for everyone by uncovering key parts of the hidden curriculum.

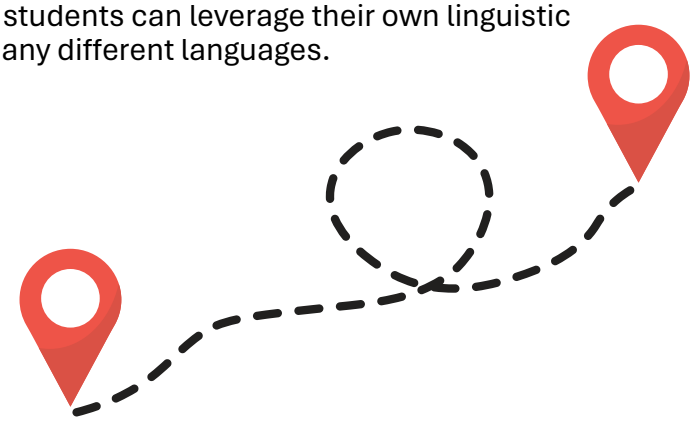
A handy guidebook: useful questions, email templates and ways to do graduate school wisely
Beginning each chapter with an anecdote of real-life embarrassing graduate school moments, Calarco rewrote the narrative to let readers know there are no stupid questions to ask in graduate school, from picking a program that suits you, fully understanding the academia jargon, to sharing own research and applying for faculty positions. While there are many graduate programs out there, Calarco asked readers many thoughtful questions before making prudent decisions. Factors such as personal career goals, geographical locations, types of degrees, and people in the program should be considered before picking the most suitable ones. Even when some of us feel constrained in graduate school due to our socioeconomic status or gender, Calarco posed concrete questions and suitable observations that will empower us to ask the right questions, ask for help, or find the right people to answer. Through knowing graduate school right from the outset, we can turn limitations into opportunities and more open doors. She also included many thorough email templates and sample CVs where students can adapt based on which stage they are at in graduate school.

Besides, this book gives me concrete ways of handling coursework and research work wisely, delivering structured presentations and networking better in academic conferences, and finding support networks inside and outside schools. Remembering the first time of going over your reading notes, but don't know how to organize a literature review out of these? I have been there and searched multiple practices, but Calarco's shared note system on p. 113 has given me a clearer structure. With a clear structure, which includes Key background, Data/methods, Research questions, Argument/contribution, Key findings, and Unanswered questions, we can skim the most-needed points from our endless readings and really put what we have read into finding what has been found and missed in current literature. I combined this structure with my existing note system, and this combination has helped me find the crux of the review with less hassle.

My recommendation for adapting this book for fellow applied linguistics graduate students

Of course, Calarco's book adopts a generalist approach because she initially planned to write for all graduate students with the hope of debunking the hidden curriculum. Although the resources and funding she mentioned are largely US-based, it does not mean that students from other regions or countries cannot use them. We can look up for the equivalents in our home institutions and ask our faculty and administration if they have come across something similar. To put this book into use in our context as applied linguistics graduate students, I have been inspired by Chapter 3 "Deciphering Academic Jargon" to call us into action (maybe some of us in AAAL Graduate Members can start the collab) to build an applied linguistics-specific Academic Glossary together. Not knowing what SIG stands for and how many SIGs are out there in the field? No worries, we can find graduate students from every SIG to write a short entry explaining what their research interests are and citing the most significant or recent works in these fields. Perhaps adding multilingual elements would work for an applied linguistics-specific field guide where graduate students can leverage their own linguistic repertoires to introduce diverse resources written in many different languages.

This resource review hopes to help other applied linguistics graduate students across North America so that they can learn from and apply the tips in their specific contexts. Graduate school is not a race; it is a journey that needs solid support networks; it doesn't end with graduation. So make sure you are not doing it alone. At the end of the day, look around and find the people who root for you after reading this guidebook. A journey is out there and oh, the places you'll go!



Tin Yuet (Tiffany) Tam is a Master of Arts student in Language & Literacies Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. She is a certified teacher in Ontario and Hong Kong with over 6 years of experience teaching K-12 and adult students. Her research interests span from multilingual identities, teacher education, to students and teachers of immigration, refugee and diaspora backgrounds.

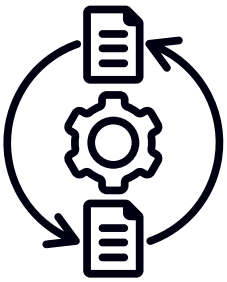
Outside grad school, Tin Yuet enjoys writing poetry and reviews in performing arts, pop culture, literature in both English and Chinese. Her work has been featured in printed magazines and online literary journals. When she is not writing, you might find her strolling along the streets for hours just to immerse herself in cities.

Toward Transparency and Openness in Second Language Research: An Opinion from a Doctoral Candidate

Yushi Kashimura
Meiji University

There has been a growing shift among second language (L2) researchers toward the incorporation of open science practices. Several journals (e.g., *Language Learning*, *The Language Learning Journal*) have newly established a new article section, called Registered Reports, to enhance research quality by promoting transparency in research procedures. In addition, field-specific infrastructures (e.g., IRIS) have been developed to support the sharing of data, analytic code, and materials, thereby facilitating the replication of original findings. Furthermore, several journals, such as *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* and *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, have gradually adopted open-access policies by publishing accepted articles fully open access without paying any article processing charges to disseminate research findings to wider audiences. Despite these positive developments in the research environment, there remain a few challenges. First, journal submission systems often require authors to declare data availability, and several options are provided, including "data are available upon request." A large proportion of authors typically select this option (Foung & Kohnke, 2025), but many of them do not share the data even if other researchers request the data (e.g., Hussay, 2025), which hinders their full replications. This reporting option seems to be highly researcher-dependent on data sharing practices, which might lead to such undesirable situations. Second, while the initiatives of adopting open science principles have largely been led by established scholars and teams, relatively little conversation has taken place among postgraduates, who are integral members of the field and play an important role in the field's future growth. Importantly, many doctoral students recognize the importance of open science, and they are willing to adopt its principles into their own research (Liu & de Cat, 2024). To address these issues, this *Trending Topics Forum* briefly argues for the potential of a *Transparency and Openness* subsection in L2 research articles from the perspective of a doctoral candidate.

Since a series of replication crises in psychological research, scholars have sought to address these concerns by foregrounding open science practices. One of the symbolic changes is that a group of psychological researchers has developed the Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP) Guidelines (Grant et al., 2025; Nosek et al., 2015) in the hope to "translate scientific norms and values into concrete actions and change the current incentive structures to drive researchers' behavior toward more openness" (Nosek et al., 2015, p.1423). The guidelines articulate a set of standards for "promoting the verifiability of empirical research claims" (Grant et al., 2025, p. 3). The guidelines conceptualize research transparency and openness in terms of seven research practices (i.e., individual approaches to make research more transparent and open for planning and reporting), two verification practices (i.e., independent procedures for assessing whether reported results accurately reflect the findings), and four verification studies (i.e., particular study designs and publication formats). A lot of stakeholders agree with the underlying principles. Journal editors have in particular taken concrete action by introducing a new section, titled as Transparency and Openness, that requires authors to report whether their data, analytic code, and materials are accessible at public repositories (e.g., Open Science Framework) and whether the research is preregistered or not (see American Psychological Association, 2024). Despite this practice being less prevalent in the current L2 research, it appears to offer a practical means for addressing persistent concerns about data sharing. As noted above, authors who select the "data are available upon request" option may not always share their data even if requests are made. If journal policies mandate the inclusion of statements about the availability of data, analytic code, and materials, or if journal editors require authors to disclose such information during the submission process, the problematic situations that Foung and Kohnke (2025) identified may be resolved.



It is important for postgraduates, as emerging members of the L2 field, to engage with and contribute to ongoing disciplinary discussions. In order to learn from past failures and sustain the current positive turn, they should take action individually. Accordingly, they are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the TOP guidelines and incorporate the principles into their own research as well as journal articles; for instance, by establishing the Transparency and Openness subsection in the Method section of their theses or dissertations. I hope that such efforts may contribute to the development of a more transparent, open, and methodologically robust L2 research community.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2024, April). *Transparency and openness promotion*. https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/resources/transparency-openness-promotion
- Foung, D., & Kohnke, L. (2025). "Available upon reasonable request": A case study of the open data culture in three language learning journals. In L. McCallum, D. Tafazoli, & A. H. Al-Hoorie (Eds.), *Research cultures in applied linguistics and TESOL* (pp. 20–35). Applied Linguistics Press.
- Hussay, I. (2025). Data is not available upon request. *Meta-Psychology*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.15626/MP.2023.4008
- Grant, S., Corker, K. S., Mellor, D. T., Stewart, S. L. K., Cashin, A. G., Lagisz, M., Mayo-Wilson, E., Moher, D., Umpierre, D., Barbour, V., Buck, S., Collins, G. S., Hazlett, H. F., Hrynaszkiewicz, I., Lee, C. J., Parker, T. H., Rethlefsen, M. L., Toomey, E., & Nosek, B. A. (2025). *TOP 2025: An update to the Transparency and Openness Promotion guidelines*. MetaArXiv. https://doi.org/10.31222/osf.io/nmfs6_v2
- Liu, M., & de Cat, C. (2024). Open science in applied linguistics: A preliminary survey. In L. Plonsky (Ed.), *Open science in applied linguistics* (pp. 63–93). Applied Linguistics Press.
- Nosek, B. A., Alter, G., Banks, G. C., Borsboom, D., Bowman, S. D., Breckler, S. J., Buck, S., Chambers, C. D., Chin, G., Christensen, G., Contestabile, M., Dafoe, A., Eich, E., Freese, J., Glennerster, R., Goroff, D., Green, D. P., Hesse, B., Humphreys, M., … Yarkoni, T. (2015). Promoting an open research culture: Author guidelines for journals could help to promote transparency, openness, and reproducibility. *Science, 348*(6242), 1422–1425. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aab2374

Yushi Kashimura earned his M.A. from Gakushuin University, Japan, and is currently a doctoral candidate at Meiji University, Japan. His research interests include individual differences, network psychometrics, and secondary research.

My Experiences as a Woman and a Second Language Speaker of English While Teaching in a Prison

Eda Yildirimer
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

What is a prison? How do incarcerated learners spend time within such a tightly controlled space? Within these limits, is there still room for growth? On the other hand, what does it mean to teach in a place designed to restrict? How does learning exist where knowledge is intensely mediated by control? I found answers to these questions over the course of a semester, through weekly three-hour class sessions with incarcerated men in a medium-security prison. In these classes, I taught as an international woman from a Muslim-majority country, a non-U.S. citizen, and a second-language speaker of English, in a space where assumptions about belonging, leadership, and safety were continually renegotiated.

Incarcerated individuals constitute "the most educationally disadvantaged population in the United States" (Klein et al., 2004, p. 1). Limited access to educational opportunities within prisons restricts individuals' ability to develop new skills and resources for reentry, which leads to higher rates of recidivism (Ginsburg, 2019). In response, the Education Justice Project (EJP), a college-in-prison program based at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), has partnered with Danville Correctional Center (DCC), a medium-security men's prison in Illinois, to expand access to higher education for incarcerated individuals.

I was fortunate to volunteer with EJP almost by coincidence. While sitting in Dr. Randall Sadler's office, the MA TESOL and ESL Program Director at UIUC, he mentioned that he would be a volunteer instructor for *Teaching Second Language Reading and Writing*, a core MA TESOL course, at DCC. As a second-year student enrolled in the course, I immediately expressed interest in volunteering as well, although it was unclear whether this would be possible, as most EJP volunteers participate through the Language Partners program, where they support ESL instructors primarily through materials development. However, this situationwas different, as it involved a graduate-levelcourse. For that reason, our request initially seemed unlikely to be approved.

After completing an interview, I was granted permission to volunteer and attend the course at DCC alongside Dr. Sadler, though the clearance process required time and patience. The interview felt less like an orientation and more like a warning. I was told plainly that lockdowns could happen, and uncomfortable situations or fights were always possible. The bluntness was unsettling, but it made expectations clear. That clarity stayed with me during my first visit to DCC. I had never been inside a prison before. It felt heavy. Walking through a series of bulletproof doors, each closing behind me, emphasized the controlled nature of the space. Everything was slow and deliberate, and the outside world seemed to disappear. I was surprised by how intense the experience felt. Despite the unease, I found myself looking forward to what lay ahead.

Then, I entered the classroom.

There were eight students, all men, representing a range of national and linguistic backgrounds, including Nigeria, Mexico, and the U.S. Then there I was, a 25-year-old student-teacher. The students seemed initially surprised and intrigued to see me. Luckily, we were able to introduce ourselves, and once everyone had a sense of who we were within such a limited environment, we began working through the course content.

At the beginning, learners were aware of my presence, but it was clear that trust needed time to develop before my contributions became integrated into the class. Unless Dr. Sadler explicitly invited me into the discussion, I occasionally found myself repeating my comments at the start of class before they were acknowledged. Learners often shared their work only with Dr. Sadler, although they had access to printers to make multiple copies, which meant that I had to ask him to share their work with me.

However, over time, learners increasingly directed questions to me and showed growing interest in what I had to offer. Sometimes, after listening to Dr. Sadler, learners turned to me to solicit my perspective. As trust gradually developed, I found myself counting down the seconds to meet the learners and share the content we covered on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In the following weeks, I began sitting among them, responding to Dr. Sadler's questions alongside the learners, completing assignments together, and participating as a member of the classroom community. Learners also began sharing their work with me and asking for feedback. They requested to see my assignments as models and brought work from other classes to show their progress. Some even shared personal writing, including short personal narratives, signaling a deeper level of trust and connection.

Toward the end of the semester, trusting the relationships we had built, I brought a notebook to class and invited the learners to write in it. I wanted something tangible to carry with me beyond the classroom, a reminder of our time together that I could keep once I walked outside the prison walls. Everyone participated, filling the pages with messages of gratitude, reflections on our time together, and words of encouragement. Reading their entries was incredibly affirming, not only because of their kindness , but also because of the care and attentiveness with which they chose to communicate. I found myself being supported by individuals who are so often reduced to their pasts or rendered invisible within broader social narratives that portray them as beyond redemption, inherently violent, or incapable of contributing to society. Ultimately, over fifteen weeks, the relationships we built in the classroom reshaped how I understood them and my own position within that space.

As a woman in a men's prison, I felt safe and respected; as someone from a starkly different cultural background, I was met with genuine curiosity and openness as learners asked about my country, traditions, and experiences. As a TESOL student and second-language speaker of English, I felt comfortable admitting when I did not know a word, and the class eagerly stepped in to help me learn with them. Coming from a Muslim-majority country, I experienced thoughtful, open exchanges about religion, marked by mutual respect and sincerity. In the end, carrying that notebook with me became a way of literally holding onto the trust and connection that emerged within that classroom, reminding me that meaningful educational spaces can exist even in the most constrained environments.

Beyond what this experience has taught me personally, I also believe that TESOL practitioners and educators may take something meaningful from it. Teaching in highly regulated spaces is not merely about delivering content, but also about an ethics of ongoing negotiation of presence and trust. Constrained environments do not eliminate the possibility of growth; rather, they reshape the conditions under which it occurs. My experience showed me that when teachers enter such contexts with humility, openness, and a willingness to learn alongside their students, classrooms can foster dignity and intellectual engagement even when faced with tremendous challenges.

References

- Ginsburg, R. (Ed.). (2019). *Critical Perspectives on Teaching in Prison: Students and Instructors on Pedagogy Behind the Wall* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351215862
- Klein, S., Tolbert, M., Bugarin, R., Cataldi, E. F., & Tauschek, G. (2004). Correctional Education: Assessing the Status of Prison Programs and Information Needs. *Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, US Department of Education*.

Eda Yildirimer is a master's student in TESOL at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She previously completed her MA in English Language Teaching and her BA in Foreign Language Education, with a minor in Sociology, at Middle East Technical University. Her master's research examined the identity (re)construction, tension navigation, and pedagogical growth of transnational graduate teaching assistants, which was awarded the AAAL Graduate Student Award. Her second project focused on the professional development of MATESOL teacher candidates, with particular attention to course preparation and the challenges they experienced while engaging in service teaching with LESLLA learners. She is currently working as a writing consultant and has worked as a sole instructor and head teaching assistant in the ESL program. Beyond her research, she volunteers in teaching initiatives focused on developing literacy skills among Afghan refugee women and collaborates with incarcerated ESL teachers to support instructional development and resource sharing.

In the quadrangle we see home

Tin Yuet (Tiffany) Tam
University of Toronto

In and out of places
We move along
Leaving behind the continents
Getting farther from the place we used to call home

For homesickness,
out of obligation,
or for nostalgia
The screen on the digital quadrangle is a thread to home
Calling us to forget the real distance for a moment

Pixels form images
Images come with sounds
Dots create the faces of loved ones
The past and present are stored within these four lines

Slow internet
The screen says
Images become blurry
Sounds turn to static
Sometimes we need to make out their faces to imagine,
to guess the words coming from their muffled voices

Camera switching on and off
A familiar landscape is shown before us, confined in that quadrangle
We say, 'Show me more.'
To see home with the expansive sky and harbor
They shrug and say, 'That's all I can show.'

While they do their best to show us what they have got
We are catching the last bits of everything
A moment of silence whenever the quadrangle darkens
Our hearts ache with a pang of emptiness that
The cord to home is currently disconnected

Description of the poem “In the quadrangle we see home”

This poem is called “In the quadrangle we see home” to describe the limited connection we have with home as diasporic persons, confined by the edges of our phones, laptops or tablets, sometimes disconnected by the not-so-reliable Wi-Fi signal. This poem is among the diaspora-themed poems I have written in English since my move to Toronto in 2021 at the height of the pandemic.

Moving to a new country and city, there has been an immense longing for home that I had never experienced. When I commute via the public transit, I see many people holding their phones while videocalling their friends and families and speaking a language that brings comfort. Despite the geographical and time differences, our phones, shaped in quadrangles, serve a purpose of connecting us to homes and to the faces of our loved ones. Even though we are far away, we can still see glimpses of home from the pixelated videos and photos.

Being a graduate student who studies how using multiple languages shapes one’s understandings of identities, I often find the lump in my throat and cannot fully utter what I really want to say, in between the languages I choose to introduce and re-introduce myself. This poem captures the shared homesickness experienced by those of us in the diaspora, especially when our cell phones become the only connection to our home. The poem reflects on how our hearts ache and sometimes find relief as we see our homes and the faces of our loved ones reduced to glowing, connected dots on a screen.

Tin Yuet (Tiffany) Tam is a Master of Arts student in Language & Literacies Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. She is a certified teacher in Ontario and Hong Kong with over 6 years of experience teaching K-12 and adult students. Her research interests span from multilingual identities, teacher education, to students and teachers of immigration, refugee and diaspora backgrounds.
Outside grad school, Tin Yuet enjoys writing poetry and reviews in performing arts, pop culture, literature in both English and Chinese. Her work has been featured in printed magazines and online literary journals. When she is not writing, you might find her strolling along the streets for hours just to immerse herself in cities.

Faking It Until You Make It: How One Conference Question Changed My Grad School Journey

Dilay Candan
Georgia State University

The first time I tried to speak up and ask a question at a conference in grad school, I was terrified. In front of a crowded audience, rereading notes I'd rehearsed many times before, I felt like a fraud. Everyone else belonged—asking brilliant questions comfortably, nodding at inside jokes I missed. I wasn't sure I deserved space there, and my next-day presentation looked less and less solid. With self-esteem sinking, I dreaded asking a not-PhD-like question.

But in that moment, I decided to imagine my question was the best one in the room. I pictured myself as one of those people speaking comfortably. Then I prepped. I took courage in my hands and asked anyway. As the words came out, I surprised myself—I was doing well. What happened next was even better: the presenter engaged thoughtfully with my question. Audience members nodded, and some asked follow-ups referencing it. The question wasn't revolutionary. What changed was realizing I didn't need full confidence to participate—just a plan I could execute, even with shaking hands and voice. That one small act of "faking it" became the beginning of learning how to participate before I felt ready.

Starting Small: Building the Practice

These days, I take opportunities I once skipped due to doubt, telling myself: “What if I just tried?”. I volunteer for work-in-progress presentations despite doubts and find my slides are stronger than I thought. I submit special issue proposals even when I doubt they'll be invited—and some of them get accepted. I share my critical thoughts on an article and find that others agree or at least engage thoughtfully. I sign up for conference volunteer roles, nervous, but push my comfort zone further than expected.

Each small act builds evidence against the imposter voice, not that I'm perfect, but that I can function effectively alongside uncertainty. What changed isn't conquered imposter syndrome. I still feel it often. What changed for me is treating participation as experiment: act imperfectly, discover what works, repeat.

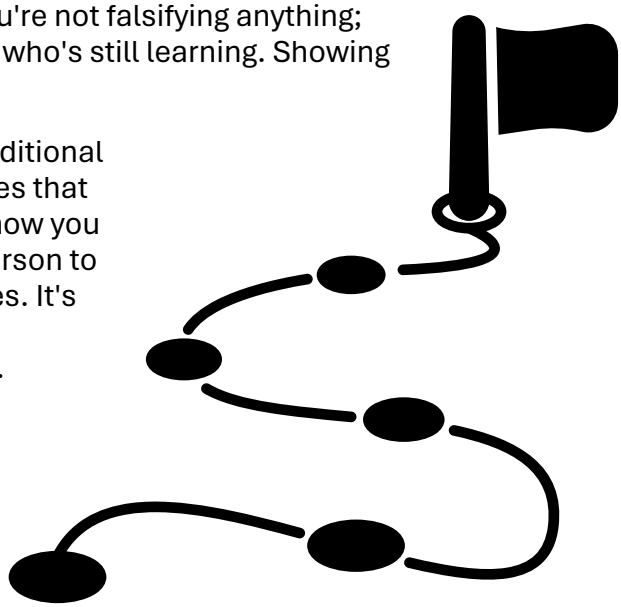
From Questions to Submissions

That same “faking it” imagination—picturing myself as someone who belonged—became my strategy for every high-stakes moment later.

I applied this to writing too. Instead of waiting for the “perfect” draft that never came, I submitted my first full research paper—something I never thought I could do like a “real researcher.” But I used the same trick: picturing myself as a PhD student who “could” write. I'd already authored a book review; I could build on that. That mental shift made “submit” feel possible.

When "Faking It" Feels Dishonest

"Faking it" doesn't mean lying about your credentials or knowledge. It means acting in line with your scholarly identity before your feelings catch up. You're not falsifying anything; you're allowing yourself to be visible as a developing scholar who's still learning. Showing up anyway can expand what feels possible.



That said, for some of us, imposter syndrome comes with additional layers such as language anxiety, social anxiety, or experiences that make public contribution genuinely hard or risky. However, how you show up and the steps to get there may differ significantly person to person. What matters isn't the "form" your participation takes. It's that you practice showing up, at your own pace and steps, in sustainable ways, rather than waiting for doubt to disappear.

Looking Back: From Faking It to Making It

That first conference question didn't cure my imposter syndrome, but it showed me I could participate alongside it. The distance between who I felt like then and who I'm becoming now was bridged by repeated acts of imperfect participation.

That person who once felt like a fraud in the conference room? She's here. Now, she is asking questions at conferences, submitting papers, taking on roles. From faking it at that conference to making it now—she belongs.

Dilay Candan is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at Georgia State University. Her research interests center on corpus linguistics and its applications in second language pedagogy and assessment. She is especially interested in usage-based approaches, construction grammar, corpus pragmatics, data-driven learning, discourse analysis, and technology-enhanced language learning and teaching. Her work explores how corpus-based approaches can bridge research and practice in second language classrooms and assessment practices.

Navigating a U.S.-Based MA in TESOL Program as a Transnational, Non-Native English-Speaking Student and Graduate Teaching Assistant from the Global South

Mehmet Şahin
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

When I began my MA in TESOL in the U.S., I expected the usual graduate school challenges such as dense readings, long papers, and a lot of writing. What I did not anticipate was how much of my learning would involve negotiating identity and professional experiences, specifically regarding what it meant to study and teach English in an English-speaking country, as a transnational, non-native English-speaking student from the Global South.

Along with graduate school, I was also a teaching assistant supporting undergraduate academic writing courses, many of which were composed of international students. I found myself in an intricate paradox: teaching "standard" academic English to students from non-dominant language backgrounds, while constantly being reminded, implicitly and explicitly, that my own English was marked. Looking back, I wish someone had told me that this tension was not a personal shortcoming to overcome; it was a structural reality to navigate.

Recognize how power shows up in everyday interactions
In TESOL spaces, conversations about linguistic diversity are common, yet "native speaker" norms still quietly shape expectations. I noticed this in small moments: hesitation from students when I introduced myself as their TA, surprise at the way I speak, or my own tendency to overprepare for everything so no one would question my credibility.

These experiences were not merely about proficiency. They were also about power, whose English is treated as default, whose knowledge is questioned, and who is assumed to be the expert.

Understanding this helped me stop internalizing every awkward moment. Instead of asking, "Am I good enough to be here?" I began asking, "What assumptions are shaping this situation?"

Remember, at the end of the day, this shift in question alone will feel freeing enough.

Treat your multilingual and transnational background as pedagogical knowledge
For a while, I tried to minimize my "difference." I worried about pronunciation, rehearsed what I would say in classes, and constantly compared myself to native-speaker peers. Ironically, this made everything harder in practice.

What changed was realizing that my experience learning and learning to teach English in another educational system provided me with unique tools. Thanks to my own background, I understood what it feels like to struggle with academic writing conventions. I could explain grammar and rhetorical choices explicitly as I had once needed those explanations myself.

My previous pre-service training and in-service experience as a teacher in another geopolitical context with quite different sociocultural and sociopolitical approaches to the teaching profession also shaped how I approached instruction in U.S. higher education. I tended to scaffold more, model more, and build stronger extracurricular rapport with my students. What I once saw as evidence that I was "behind" turned out to be a strength.

Remember, instead of trying to approximate a native-speaker norm, lean into being a "different" kind of instructor. In time, that "difference" becomes your unique teaching style.

Learn the hidden rules of U.S. academic culture

In my experience, succeeding required learning norms that were seldom formally explained. Participation styles, emailing etiquette, expectations about "confidence," and even how to present yourself in classes varied from what I was used to.

As a graduate school student in my previous experience in Türkiye, I was taught that success comes from formality and distance. In my new context, approachability and informality often built more trust. I had to adjust how I spoke with faculty, peers, and students, how I framed and interpreted feedback, and how I interacted with colleagues.

As a graduate teaching assistant, what helped most was observation and conversation. Watching how experienced instructors ran their classes and asking peers direct questions saved me from guesswork. Also, treating these norms as learnable, not innate, made my adaptation less stressful.

Remember, you are not expected to already know these rules.
You are allowed to learn them.

Build solidarity, not isolation

Transnational graduate study as a teaching assistant can be quietly exhausting. You are expected to manage coursework, research, teaching, cultural adaptation, and often immigration, financial, and formal responsibilities across borders. On top of it all, you usually feel pressure to prove that you deserve to be there. For me, trying to handle everything alone only intensified that pressure.

Finding and building community, especially with other multilingual or transnational students, changed my experience. We shared graduate school experiences, learning, teaching, and communication strategies, and most importantly, normalized frustrations that might otherwise have felt personal. As time passed, what these conversations showed me was that many of our struggles were structural, not individual failures.

Remember, professional growth becomes more sustainable when it is collective.

Redefine what "belonging" looks like
One of the most important lessons I learned is that belonging does not mean blending in. For a long time, I thought success meant sounding like a native speaker or teaching like colleagues trained locally.

Through the end of my second year in this experience, I see belonging differently now. It means contributing perspectives shaped by different educational histories, languages, and geopolitical realities. I think TESOL, as a field, depends on those perspectives.

Remember, our transnational experiences are not side notes to our professional identities, they are central to how we understand culture, language, norms, and communication.

Moving forward
I would say this to my past self: you do not need to erase where you come from to succeed here. The way you speak, the way you learn and teach, and the fact that your journey is transnational are not obstacles to professional legitimacy. They are sources of expertise.

It is important to acknowledge that transnational academic experience at the higher education level can be very uncomfortably complex. However, with awareness of power dynamics, intentional community, and confidence in your own unique background, it is possible not only to navigate spaces, but to reshape them.

Remember, you probably bring more value to where you are than you give yourself credit for.

Mehmet Şahin is a graduate student in Linguistics and a graduate research and teaching assistant in Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Holding a prior master's degree in education, he will begin his PhD at the Manchester Institute of Education in 2026. His research focuses on heteroprofessionalism, intersectionality, sociology of education, transnational higher education and academic mobility, educators' multiple identities and workplace experiences, and sociopolitical ideologies in educational contexts. He has presented and been invited to present at international, national, and regional conferences, including AAAL, TESOL, ITBE, and CALICO. His broader scholarly interests include critical and radical pedagogies and equity-oriented teacher education.

What I Wish I'd Known About Professionalism, Organization, and Neurodivergence in Graduate School

Melike Akay
University of South Florida

I entered my doctoral program as an international graduate student with a résumé that signaled composure, discipline, and consistent adherence to deadlines. I was, by conventional academic metrics, a "*high achiever.*" First, gradually, and then abruptly, I was *not* in my first year. The doctoral ecosystem introduced a rapid accumulation of responsibilities, intensifying expectations and a high level of autonomy. For someone with diagnosed or self-diagnosed attention differences, this environment might be especially overstimulating. My tendencies toward hyperfocus, task-switching challenges, and fluctuating executive control, which had not interfered with efficiency and productivity under structured conditions, became liabilities. Eventually, this issue metastasized into burnout and a profound erosion of self-confidence. At that time, I interpreted this collapse as a personal or identity failure, but it reflected less a shortcoming in individual performance than a breakdown between my established working style and the tacit regulatory demands of doctoral study (Holliday, 2017). Although my approach falsely promised bursts of high achievement and efficient output, doctoral work often privileges linear progress over time. What I wish I had understood earlier is that graduate school is not a pure meritocracy of brilliance. It systematically rewards self-regulation: the ability to manage one's cognitive, emotional, and temporal resources independently (Vohs & Baumeister, 2016) while navigating the institution's implicit norms and unspoken rules. For international doctoral students in particular, these expectations are often assumed, making struggles invisible until they become personally costly.

This is a story about how I figured that out.

The myth of effortless professionalism

For years, I believed professionalism was synonymous with appearing perpetually prepared, punctual, and unbothered. The ideal academic, I assumed, moved flawlessly from task to task, never visibly distracted or bored, and certainly never scrambling at the last minute. This belief imposed an inhuman standard, with tangible personal costs. Research indicates that the pressure to maintain such a performative persona often leads to "self-handicapping" behaviors such as perfectionism, procrastination, and "busyness" (i.e., appearing busy with low-priority tasks to avoid facing high-stakes work) as a way to protect one's self-worth from perceived incompetence (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Furthermore, the myth of the "unbothered" academic ignores the reality that negative emotions (i.e., frustration, confusion, anxiety) are actually the dominant affective states during the doctoral process.

What I eventually learned is that professionalism is not an *aesthetic or effortlessly cool*. Indeed, it is about being accountable, predictable, reliable. While we often idealize a "mentorship" model of professionalism, Sverdlik et al. (2018) suggest that success and satisfaction are more closely tied to functional reliability such as respecting timelines, preparing for meetings, and remaining responsive in times of need. Everything changed once I reframed professionalism as the ability to deliver consistently over time rather than the pressure to perform competence on demand. During my first year of doctoral work, the absence of immediate milestones left me feeling disoriented. I realized I had to shift my focus from seeking short-term satisfaction to cultivating predictability that, I discovered, can be systematically engineered even within long-term objectives.

How to design external scaffolding

My greatest breakthrough came when I stopped expecting my brain to behave differently and started designing systems that worked *with* it. For those prone to distraction, procrastination, or nonlinear thinking, internal organization is often unreliable.To achieve this purpose, I started implementing external scaffolding as a set of deliberate structures designed to bridge the gap between my internal cognitive reality and the tacit demands of the academy.

How to practice external scaffolding:

1. Break tasks into hyper-specific actions to replace ambiguity with a series of low-stakes, achievable wins.
2. Consolidate all deadlines and ideas into a single system; stop relying on "memory, email, and optimism."
3. Drive progress through artificially urgent, self-imposed deadlines and visible accountability markers.
4. Use digital tools as an external brain—impartial, tireless systems that maintain momentum when you just need attention.

Boredom is not a moral failing

As tasks and deadlines accumulated, boredom quietly crept in, tipping over my motivation. I once believed that motivation was a prerequisite for work; that I had to "feel like it" to begin. Graduate school taught me otherwise. Research identifies boredom as a dominant emotion in the doctoral process, yet it is often stigmatized as a lack of rigor (Sverdlik et al., 2018). For someone with attention differences, boredom can trigger "executive dysfunction," where the brain's "starter motor" fails to engage because the task lacks sufficient dopamine or immediate urgency (Danckert & Merrifield, 2018; Rafaelli et al., 2018). So, I realized that my struggle was not a lack of discipline.

How to work strategically to bypass the "boredom blockade":

1. Alternate high-demand cognitive work with routine tasks to maintain momentum and prevent burnout.
2. Replace vague deadlines with strict, time-blocked intervals to create the "artificial urgency" needed for focus.
3. Treat changes in location or digital tools as cognitive aids rather than distractions, leveraging novelty to maintain engagement.

Treating boredom as a design problem rather than a character or cognitive flaw restored my productivity, and my self-respect.

Intercultural fluency as a professional skill

As an international doctoral student in the US, I quickly recognized that academic professionalism is governed by a "hidden syllabus" with a complex set of cultural rules and implicit norms that remain largely invisible to those outside the domestic academic tradition. Research underscores that international students often carry a "double burden": they must simultaneously master advanced research methodologies while decoding the unspoken expectations of the Western academy (Sverdlik et al., 2018). The US doctoral model, while globally prestigious, is frequently criticized for its lack of transparency, and this structural ambiguity is a primary trigger for psychological distress and attrition among international scholars (Nerad, 2004).

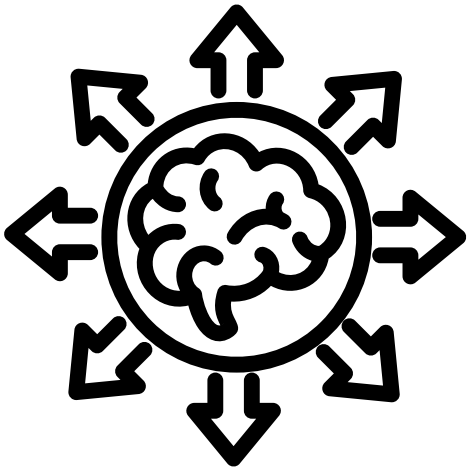
Rather than navigating the "guesswork-anxiety" cycle that fuels imposter syndrome, I adopted a systematic approach to professional integration:

1. Ask clarifying questions early and openly, without the performative apology of "not knowing." This directly counters the maladaptive perfectionist tendency to mask confusion, which empirical literature identifies as a significant risk factor for doctoral burnout (Sverdlik et al., 2018).
2. Confirm verbal expectations in writing to eliminate the "disorientation" for functional reliability.
3. Treat critiques as a longitudinal dataset for growth, rather than an emotional indictment of competence.

That is, intercultural fluency is not about blending in.

What I wish I'd known

If I could offer one piece of advice to graduate students navigating a similar path, particularly those balancing the "double burden" of international status and neurodivergent thinking: you do not need to remake your cognitive or cultural identity to succeed. The doctoral journey is a transition from highly structured environments to an "autonomous nature" that rewards self-regulation over raw brilliance. Success is not found in mirroring a "typical" academic persona, but in building external scaffolds that allow you to work consistently and authentically. When I stopped performing "effortless professionalism" and treated my challenges as design problems, I was able to 1) stabilize my reputation through functional reliability, 2) make my work ethic visible via explicit planning and data-driven regulation, 3) protect my well-being by reframing professionalism on my own terms. All in all, professionalism is not about being effortlessly "typical," it is about being dependably you.



References

- Danckert, J., & Merrifield, C. (2018). Boredom, sustained attention and the default mode network. *Experimental Brain Research*, *236*(9), 2507–2518. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00221-016-4617-5
- Holliday, A. (2017). PhD students, interculturality, reflexivity, community and internationalisation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *38*(3), 206–218. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1134554
- Nerad, M. (2004). The PhD in the US: Criticisms, facts, and remedies. *Higher Education Policy*, *17*(2), 183–199. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300050
- Raffaelli, Q., Mills, C., & Christoff, K. (2018). The knowns and unknowns of boredom: a review of the literature. *Experimental Brain Research* 236, 2451–2462 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1007/s00221-017-4922-7
- Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *13*, 361–388. https://doi.org/10.28945/4113
- Vohs, K. D., & Baumeister, R. F. (Eds.). (2016). *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*. Guilford Publications.

Melike Akay is a Ph.D. candidate in the Linguistics and Applied Language Studies program at the University of South Florida. As a Graduate Teaching Associate, she is dedicated to integrating digital tools and autonomous learning strategies into her classroom. Additionally, she co-chairs CALICO's Graduate Student Special Interest Group and serves on her college's technology committee. Her research interests include CALL, L2 pragmatics, and digital linguistics, with work published in journals such as Language Learning & Technology and Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, Research Methods in Applied Linguistics, Communication & Medicine, Language and Pop Culture, among others.

GSC JEDI

2026 Chicago Conference Notes:

International and First-Time Attendee Conference Guide

https://tinyurl.com/AAAL-conference-guide

Please complete the 2026 GSC JEDI Survey

https://uarizona.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8J7IHUSj8IZV3Dg

GSC Event: Lessons on Community-Building with the Sister Scholars

"Attendees will gain insights into community-building as both a scholarly commitment and a transformative practice essential to equity-oriented research and professional life."

Sun, March 22
12:30 PM - 1:45 PM
Goldcoast
Hotel Lobby Level - (3rd) Floor

AAAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
JEDI
AAAL

Hosted By: AAAL Graduate Student Council
grad@aaal.org
https://www.aaal.org/graduate-student-council
https://www.aaal-gsc.org/

Call for Proposals for the AAALGrads Newsletter (Fall 2026)

We're excited to welcome submissions for the Fall 2026 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 late October.

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:
  Cheng, M. (2024). Resource review of: Crawford, K. F., & Windsor, L. C. (2021). The PhD parenthood trap: Caught between work and family in academia. Georgetown University Press. *AAALGrads, 9*(1), 17-18.

- ***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. Taking a small step to acknowledge the current changes at the AAAL 2024 conference, 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:
  Marino, F. (2023). Looking for my niche. *AAALGrads, 8*(1), 23-26.

- ***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, August 17th, 2026 @ 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.

Tentative Timeline for Fall 2026	
Monday, August 17th	Proposals are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time.
Tuesday, August 24th	Authors notified of acceptance.
Tuesday, September 8th	The first draft of the manuscript is due.
Friday, September 18th	Editors provide feedback to authors on first drafts.
Thursday, September 24th	Revised drafts are due.
Wednesday, September 30th	Editors provide additional feedback, ***if necessary*.**
Tuesday, October 6th	Final drafts of manuscripts are due. Authors provide a short biography and headshot.
Thursday, October 15th	Editors return the final draft with proofs.
Monday, October 19th	Authors respond to proofs.
The issue is expected to appear around October 31, 2026	

Kindly note that this schedule is subject to change if deemed necessary.
For questions or inquiries, please reach out to the newsletter co-editors at aaalgrads@gmail.com.