

PEER COMMENTARY

Responsible Language Teacher IdentitiesGary Barkhuizen^{a*}^a University of Auckland* Contact Info: CLL Bldg., 18 Symonds St., Auckland, 1010, New Zealand, g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz**Article Info**

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Abstract

This commentary reflects on the evolving nature of language education, highlighting reflexivity, translanguaging, Generative AI, and language teacher identity as interconnected, pivotal forces shaping the field. Drawing from personal interactions, classroom experiences, and scholarly literature, the author emphasizes the importance of language teachers critically examining their practices (reflexivity), challenging linguistic boundaries (translanguaging), and responsibly navigating technological advancements. Central to these intersecting themes is teacher identity, positioned as essential for understanding educators' responsibilities in addressing emerging educational challenges, diverse multilingual contexts, and rapid technological changes.

Keywords

GenAI; identity; reflexivity; responsibility; translanguaging

I begin by telling two stories. The first occurred very recently when I was having a cup of coffee with a visitor to my university, an early-career researcher. Out of the blue, he asked me where I thought the field of language education was heading in the next few years. This caught me off guard. High on caffeine, I mumbled something about Generative AI (GenAI), teacher identity, researcher reflexivity, and translanguaging. We touched briefly on these concepts, and then the conversation meandered off into different directions until our coffee cups were cold and the meeting ended. Later that evening, I reflected on how I responded. Why had I chosen these particular topics to point a way forward in our field? Where did they come from? Are they really that important, and what about other possibilities?

The second story is a sequel. After reflecting on my coffee meeting response, I decided to test it in two of my classes that I am currently teaching. The first is a second-year undergraduate second language acquisition (SLA) class of over 50 students. Maybe one or two had some teaching experience, but most had none at all, though they would end up becoming language teachers in the future. I asked them what they knew about translanguaging. Nothing. I asked about reflexivity. Nothing. They all knew something about teacher identity – they could sort of figure it out from personal experience. And everyone knew a lot about GenAI – in personal

life as well as in education. They used it extensively in their own academic work. A slightly different picture emerged with my postgraduate class on *Identity in Language Teaching and Learning*, again, over 50 students, most of whom had some level of language teaching experience. Everyone knew about and used GenAI and saw its increasing relevance in their future professional lives. Those who had completed other graduate courses knew about translanguaging and fully embraced its philosophy and potential practical uses (those who didn't know about it seemed eager to find out more). And regarding reflexivity, when I explained that in our class we were being reflexive teachers by constructing, analyzing, and sharing personal multimodal narratives, they immediately grasped its meaning.

So, what did I learn from my in-class experiment? To try to answer this question, I decided to consult the literature. In distinguishing between positionality and reflexivity, Consoli and Ganassin (2025) say the following: “We define positionality as the various factors that shape a researcher’s perspective and reflexivity as the critical process through which researchers actively examine and engage with these influences throughout their social inquiries” (p. 2). Substituting *researcher* for *language teacher*, language teaching involves teachers critically examining the various factors that shape their teaching experiences, stories, and theories throughout the processes of their teaching practices. These factors are, of course, complex and powerful and include discourses that operate at scales ranging from micro classroom levels to institutional and community levels, to macro national or even global levels. The teacher reflection (‘the reflective practitioner’) and teacher-researcher movements continue to encourage teachers to be reflexive in this way. I think I was probably right in saying that reflexivity will continue to play a major role in our field heading into the future.

What about translanguaging? Li Wei and García (2022) seem convinced. They say:

In going beyond named languages, translanguaging is also intended as a decolonizing project, that is, a way to undo the process through which the knowledge base and linguistic/cultural practices of colonized people was obliterated. In so doing, translanguaging opens spaces for social and cognitive justice in the education of these students (p. 314).

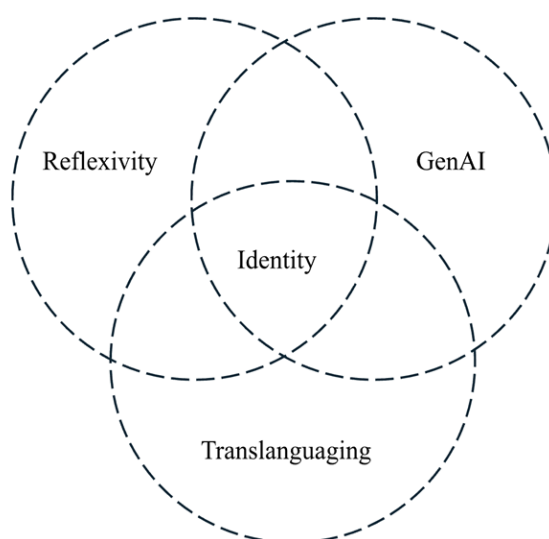
What caught my attention here is the forward-looking rhetoric, such as “going beyond”, “decolonizing project”, “undo the process”, and “opens spaces”, which signals that language teachers still have some work to do. So, I’m convinced too.

I have full confidence in my choice of GenAI for its future significance in our field, and I hardly needed to ask my students. I witness them using it all the time, for a myriad of purposes in class, such as translating written lecture materials, summarizing classroom interaction, and

doing their assignments. However, Shaofeng Li (2025) says that “GenAI literacy refers to users’ knowledge of the fundamentals of GenAI’s mechanism, ethics, affordances, and limitations, and users’ ability to effectively use GenAI” (p. 124). My current experience engaging with my students’ use of GenAI tells me that we still have a long way to go in developing their AI literacy, and my own, for that matter. Some of us may know how to use bits and pieces of various AI technologies, but we’re far off from being fully aware of how to do so ethically, truly understanding its mechanisms, and respecting its limitations. And questions of access – who has access, who doesn’t, and why – are another matter.

Although my reflections, class discussions, and literature search have more or less convinced me that reflexivity, translanguaging, and GenAI will contribute to shaping the future of language education, particularly in these uncertain times of rapid change and global instability, I am also aware that there are probably other areas of interest and scholarship that are equally, if not more, important. Nevertheless, if we can assume for argument’s sake that reflexivity, translanguaging, and GenAI are indicative of what lies ahead, I would further argue that teacher identity sits comfortably at the nexus of all three (see Figure 1). Why do I say this? Just for example, I have claimed previously (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4) that language teacher identities (LTIs) are “cognitive in that language teachers constantly strive to make sense of themselves; reflexively, they work towards understanding who they are and who they desire or fear to be” (see *reflexivity*). LTIs are “dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded” (see *translanguaging*), and they are negotiated in the “social, material and technological world” (see *GenAI*).

Figure 1. Identity at the Nexus of Reflexivity, Translanguaging, and GenAI



Language teacher identity, therefore, is central to our future work as language teachers and teacher educators, and to our ongoing, future endeavours to understand this work. Perhaps it could be argued that teacher identity (positioned as nexus, as described above), and especially *pedagogizing* identity (see Yazan & Uştuk, 2025) in language learning and teacher education classrooms, is pivotal to shaping the road ahead. In our multilingual world, where teachers are confronted with ongoing questions, challenges, and dilemmas, they have the responsibility to make sense of who they are, who their learners are (and for their learners to make sense of who they are), and how they can work together effectively. What this responsibility looks like and how it unfolds in particular contexts will depend precisely on those contexts, that is, with the teacher situating learning and identities. The research reported in the articles in this special issue on *Language Teacher Identities and (Perceived) Responsibilities in the New World* makes some ground in this regard. They explore, for example, topics such as how teachers navigate institutional expectations, trauma-sensitive pedagogy during wartime, how language educators navigate increasingly restrictive legislation, and mentors' evolving identities and responsibilities.

The two stories that opened this article – my coffee meeting responses and the in-class testing of my reflections on those responses – tell how I instinctively came up with and then tentatively verified four intersecting areas of professional and research interest that will (continue to) be important in the field of language teaching and learning in the future: these are reflexivity, translanguaging, GenAI, and centrally connected to these three, language teacher identity. Focusing on different topics, in specific professional contexts, this special issue, too, centralizes identity in understanding the work that language educators do.

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Gary Barkhuizen  is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of language teacher education, teacher and learner identity, study abroad, and narrative inquiry, and these are reflected in his many publications, conference presentations, and books, which include *Narrative Research in Applied Linguistics* (2013) (Cambridge), *Reflections on Language Teacher Identity Research* (2017) (Routledge), *Qualitative Research Topics in Language Teacher Education* (2019) (Routledge), *Language Teacher Educator Identity* (2021) (Cambridge), and *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research* (2nd ed.) (2025) (Routledge). In 2017, he won the TESOL International Association's award for Distinguished Research.

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