

EDITORIAL

Navigating New Realms: Language Teacher Identities and Evolving Responsibilities in the New World

Luis Javier Pentón Herrera ^{a*}, Anna Becker ^b, Michał B. Paradowski ^c

^a VIZJA University

^b Polish Academy of Sciences

^c University of Warsaw

* Contact Info: ul. Okopowa 59, 01-043 Warszawa, Poland, luis.penton@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a profession ... that involves a specific task, a specific militancy (in the sense of advocating for students), and specific requirements for its implementation ... being a teacher implies the responsibility to assume [its] demands. (Freire, 2005, p. 7)

Across cultures and centuries, education has been entrusted with a profoundly ethical and political mission: to shape individuals into responsible and proactive members of society; that is, into ‘good citizens.’ This civic ideal, often implicit in educational discourse, positions schools as agents of social cohesion and teachers as agents charged with cultivating the values, dispositions, and competencies deemed necessary for democratic life (Biesta, 2010; Echegoyen de Cañizares & Suárez Gómez, 1945).

The burden of translating these abstractions into everyday practice frequently falls on teachers, who are expected to act not only as instructors but as moral stewards, cultural brokers, and civic gatekeepers of schools and societies at large (Goodlad, 1999). Responsibility is inseparable from the teaching profession (Kuhlmann, 2022), and from who teachers are (i.e., teachers’ identity), what teachers do (i.e., teachers’ agency and actions), and how teachers are expected to act, behave, and educate within and outside school buildings (i.e., teachers’ roles). In this light, responsibility in education transcends mere professional obligation; it is a deeply entangled ethical stance, shaped by history, ideology, and power.

Responsibility is one of education's most enduring and ambiguous concepts, evoking, among many things, care, accountability, moral duty, institutional burden, professional integrity, and resilience (Kuhlmann, 2022; Sockett, 1993). Yet, as Kuhlmann (2022) so incisively argues, responsibility is not an innocent term. It is a historically layered, politically charged idea that has shaped the ethos of educators as well as the systems within which they work, and the ways in which they are praised or blamed, empowered or constrained. For instance, Freire (2005) asserts that the devaluing of teaching is, in great part, connected to how parents and society at large hold “teachers responsible for assuaging all the ills of society, particularly the cruel and unjust presence of human misery that directly affects in multiple ways the students they teach” (p. 7). Responsibility and teaching are, then, tightly connected; and, in our view, if we want to contribute to the much-needed elevation and (re)valuing of the teaching profession in the 21st century, we must begin by centering responsibility in our conversations: the responsibilities that come with being a teacher; the responsibilities that teachers assign to themselves; the responsibilities that others assign to teachers; and the responsibilities generated by forces that often position teachers as both agents of change and scapegoats for systemic failure.

The growing complexity of today's educational landscape demands deeper engagement with teachers' lived experiences and evolving roles. As outlined above, educators have always faced pressure to respond to social, emotional, and civic expectations, but this strain has drastically increased with the uncertainties of the post-pandemic world. These demands have become especially pronounced in language education, where language teachers often work at the intersections of policy, identity, and culture. Their professional lives are shaped by broader forces, such as migration, technologization, global and political unrest, and shifting definitions of citizenship (Morska et al., 2022; Yazan et al., 2023), which influence both how they see themselves and how they are seen by others (Varghese et al., 2005; Yazan, 2018). Examining the interplay between identity and responsibility, thus, provides insight into how language teachers negotiate their roles in rapidly changing contexts. Responding to this need, in this Special Issue we use the phrase (*perceived*) *responsibility* to emphasize that responsibilities dwell within the dynamic relationship between structural expectations (e.g., policies, discourses, societal demands) and teachers' own interpretations, experiences, and sense-making processes. This introduction offers the conceptual foundation for the Special Issue and the contributions within it, situating them in contemporary scholarship on language teacher identity and the ‘new world’ we now inhabit.

FRAMING THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Over the past 15 years, the topic of language teacher identity (LTI) has emerged as a focal point of attention in our field (Kayi-Aydar, 2019), gaining increasing prominence as educators confront challenges posed by rapid global changes, instability, and increasingly multilingual classrooms. Scholars concur that language teachers are more engaged than ever in a continuous cycle of (re)evaluation, (re)construction, and (re)positioning of their identities (Alosaimi, 2023; Zhang & Hwang, 2023), which are not only “dynamic” (Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2021, p. 2) and “constantly evolving” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 9), but also “multifaceted and multidimensional” (Ahn, 2019, p. 299) constructs shaped by a complex interplay of cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical factors. These iterative processes demonstrate how language teachers actively navigate the evolving landscape and are shaped by shifting pedagogical paradigms, which in turn influence the ongoing development and redefinition of their identities, placing them at the core of the dynamic field of language education.

Despite rich explorations of LTI investigating different dimensions such as identity negotiation (Donaghue, 2020; Yazan, 2017), well-being (Pentón Herrera et al., 2022; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2022), power and prestige (Appleby, 2016; Becker, 2023), reflective practices (Banegas et al., 2023; Dimitrieska, 2022), tensions (Yazan et al., 2023), dilemmas (Aminifard et al., 2023; Barkhuizen, 2021), transformations (Song, 2016), and teacher agency (Mansouri et al., 2021), less attention has been paid to the intersection of LTI and (perceived) responsibilities in the new world. For clarity, in this Special Issue, we understand the new world as the world we have inherited post-COVID, which has experienced rapid instability in mental health, technological advances, social polarization, political upheavals, violence and war, environmental disasters, mass migration, economic volatility and widespread employment precarity, and informational chaos in different parts of the world. Consequently, today’s society is quickly and abruptly transforming, and responsibilities are being reshaped in tandem. Teachers are navigating an era marked by uncertainty and contradiction, where public expectations continue to grow while professional autonomy and recognition often diminish. Similarly, teachers’ authority is increasingly mediated by institutional constraints and the growing influence of social media influencers and digital content on students’ perceptions of knowledge, credibility, and expertise. In this Special Issue, we bring together contributions that shed light on how LTIs are negotiated alongside the evolving, complex, and often contested responsibilities of language teachers.

LTI AND RESPONSIBILITY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Conversations about responsibility in language education span centuries and have historically framed teaching as a moral and civic duty. The 19th century saw responsibility positioned not as optional, but as an inherent condition of the teaching profession. For example, Page and Payne (1885) stated that although “the parent has an overwhelming responsibility [for educating their children] ... the teacher is responsible in a very high degree” (p. 35). They went on to emphasize that “by taking the position of the teacher, all the responsibility of the relation is voluntarily assumed; and he is fearfully responsible, not only for what he does, but also for what he neglects to do” (p. 35; emphasis in the original).

Similarly, Sauveur (1875), in a critique of the state of French language education, asked pointedly, “are [language teachers] not conscious of their responsibility?” (p. 44). These early perspectives anticipated, to a certain degree, current understandings of LTI, where both ethical commitment and external pressures often hold teachers responsible for circumstances beyond their control. At the time, however, responsibility was largely framed within the boundaries of language instruction, focused on how teachers taught and how well students performed linguistically, rather than the wider roles that language teachers are now expected to navigate.

The 20th century experienced a significant expansion in the responsibilities assigned to language teachers. No longer seen as merely transmitters of linguistic knowledge, language teachers increasingly came to be viewed as cultural mediators and moral actors within complex sociopolitical landscapes. For instance, as articulated by Jordan (1922), in addition to language proficiency, modern language teachers were expected to cultivate civic values, national loyalty, and intellectual development. This view deepened in subsequent decades, as scholars such as Widdowson (1990) and Wallace (1991) emphasized the importance of critical reflection, intercultural understanding, and ethical awareness in language teacher education. Kramsch (1995) further crystallized this perspective by famously arguing that the ‘cultural component’ of language teaching could no longer be treated as a neutral or peripheral aspect of pedagogy, but rather as central to how teachers construct meaning and identity in their classrooms.

Similarly, Byram and Risager (1999) underscored that language educators are embedded in ideological systems, with responsibilities that include navigating global politics, challenging stereotypes, and preparing learners for participation in democratic societies. All of these expectations placed on language teachers and the language teaching profession have

certainly contributed to the growing reconceptualization of what it means to be a language teacher today, making LTI an increasingly complex, multilayered, and context-dependent construct.

Contemporary 21st-century publications have increasingly highlighted how the responsibilities assigned to language teachers continue to diversify in response to shifting, oftentimes unpredictable, societal realities, thereby encompassing technological, motivational, advocacy, and sociocultural dimensions beyond traditional linguistic instruction. For example, Compton (2009) and Skantz-Åberg et al. (2022) emphasize how language teaching responsibilities have significantly expanded due to the integration of digital technologies, demanding that language teachers acquire both pedagogical skills and new digital competencies in tandem.

Similarly, Cunningham's (2019) research sheds light on the intricate and emotionally charged responsibilities language teachers assume when expected to support and maintain students' heritage languages beyond the classroom, positioning teachers as central agents in the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity. Additionally, scholarship has contributed to the growing acceptance that language teachers are, in and of themselves, advocates, positioning and encouraging them to actively challenge inequities and promote social justice in their classrooms and beyond (Athanasios & De Oliveira, 2008; Linville, 2020). Carter (2006) further emphasizes the importance of clearly delineated roles and shared responsibilities between teachers and students, underscoring how contemporary language educators navigate complex interpersonal and professional boundaries to optimize learning outcomes.

Despite the significant expansion in how responsibilities have been framed in language teacher education literature, scholarship has primarily presented responsibility as externally imposed expectations rather than an internalized, agentic part of teachers' professional identities. Publications commonly emphasize what teachers *should* do, focusing mainly on responsibilities assigned by institutions, policies, and societal norms. In this context, responsibility often emerges as a burden teachers must—or are expected to—carry, rather than as a meaningful aspect of their professional self-concept. This framing overlooks critical dimensions of how language teachers themselves perceive, interpret, and navigate their responsibilities, especially in relation to their evolving identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Varghese et al., 2005). Given the complex, multifaceted, and fluid nature of LTI, it is crucial to explore the dynamic ways in which language educators negotiate their responsibilities

from their own perspectives. To fill this gap, this Special Issue brings together scholarship that highlights the voices of language teachers, offering critical insights into how they actively shape and respond to the interplay between responsibility and LTI in today's increasingly demanding educational contexts.

THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This Special Issue, titled “Language Teacher Identities and (Perceived) Responsibilities in the New World,” includes five contributions in addition to this editorial. Of these five, four are empirical studies and one is an invited commentary. Below, we briefly introduce each of the contributions. The first article of this Special Issue, *Balancing Acts: Polish Language Teachers Navigating Identity, Language Promotion, and Multilingual Education* by Anna Becker and Yelena Zakharova, explores how teachers of Polish as a foreign language negotiate the complexities of professional identity within increasingly multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Drawing on classroom observations at the University of Warsaw and interviews with language instructors, the study examines how teachers navigate institutional expectations to uphold linguistic purity and promote national identity, while also addressing the diverse cultural and communicative needs of international and migrant learners. Framed through Bakhtin's (1981) heteroglossia, Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice, and Freire's (2005) critical pedagogy, the analysis reveals that teachers often prioritize practical, inclusive, and student-centered approaches, even as they remain bound by tensions between the promotion of national heritage and the demands of internationalization in Polish language education. The authors call for institutional support, interdisciplinary collaboration, and reimagined teacher training to empower educators working at the intersection of cultural tradition and international diversity, ultimately positioning Polish language education as both a guardian of heritage and a conduit for social inclusion.

The second article, *Multilingual English Language Teachers' Identity (Trans)formation in War-torn Ukraine: A Collaborative Autoethnographic Account*, by Alla Fridrikh, Nataliia Antonenko, and Olena Kasatkina-Kubyskhina, offers a deeply personal and contextually grounded exploration of language teacher identity amid conflict. Through collaborative autoethnography, the authors examine how their professional roles and responsibilities as multilingual English language teachers have been reshaped by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Drawing on a socio-cultural framework of language teacher identity, the article highlights how trauma-sensitive pedagogy, emotion labor, and continuous professional development

intersect in wartime teaching. Reflective narratives provide vivid insights into the emotional toll and transformative growth that accompany teaching during crisis, while also underscoring the importance of resilience, care, and adaptability. This contribution illuminates the complexities of language education under martial law and provides actionable insights for educators navigating teaching in emergency or high-stress environments, offering an urgent and humanizing perspective on identity (trans)formation in times of upheaval.

The third article, titled *Cultivating Resistance: A Trioethnographic Exploration of Language Teacher Educators' Experiences in Brazil and the United States*, and written by Felipe Trevisan Ferreira, James Edward Coda, and Liv Halaas Detwiler, examines how language educators navigate increasingly restrictive educational contexts shaped by anti-DEIA [diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility] legislation. Using a decolonial framework and trioethnographic methodology, the authors reflect on their lived experiences as educators in Brazil and the Southeastern U.S. to explore how decolonial pedagogies reshape their perceived responsibilities. Through dialogic inquiry, they discuss challenges such as scripted curricula, native-speaker ideologies, and the tension between accessibility and theoretical depth. Their reflections reveal how language education can resist colonial power structures by fostering teacher autonomy, engaging with theory, and building community-centered classrooms. Rather than prescribing fixed solutions, the authors advocate for localized, relational, and critical engagements that disrupt colonial norms and reposition classrooms as spaces of resistance and re-existence. The article ultimately calls on language educators and teacher educators to embrace decoloniality not as a metaphor but as a transformative praxis grounded in ethical responsibility.

The fourth and final empirical contribution, *The Shifting Identities and Perceived Responsibilities of Language Teacher Mentors in the Multilayered Coaching and Mentorship Model Program*, by Doaa Rashed and Debra Suarez, investigates how participation in the MCaM model influences English language teaching (ELT) mentors' evolving identities and responsibilities. Drawing on interviews, a focus group, and written mentoring philosophies, the authors identify three central shifts: a move toward reflective, leadership-oriented mentor identities; an expansion of responsibilities from instructional support to holistic, equity-driven guidance; and heightened awareness of intersectionality in mentoring relationships. The model's integration of coaching, mentoring, and community engagement fosters dynamic, reciprocal development. The study underscores the importance of structured mentor

preparation and offers a compelling vision of mentorship as a collaborative process of identity negotiation and professional transformation.

Complementing the four empirical contributions is an invited peer commentary written by Gary Barkhuizen and titled *Responsible Language Teacher Identities*. Drawing on personal anecdotes, classroom experiences, and contemporary scholarship, Barkhuizen reflects on four pivotal forces shaping the future of language education: reflexivity, translanguaging, Generative AI (GenAI), and language teacher identity. He positions identity at the nexus of these forces, demonstrating how teachers' sense-making practices are inseparable from their responsibilities to navigate technological change, linguistic diversity, and ethical self-examination. Barkhuizen illustrates, through both narratives and literature, that while GenAI and translanguaging have already become pressing realities for teachers and learners, reflexivity remains crucial for educators to critically interrogate their practices and positionalities. His commentary not only underscores the centrality of teacher identity in these intersecting domains but also calls for a forward-looking engagement with the responsibilities that arise when teachers situate themselves and their learners in rapidly evolving, multilingual, and technologically mediated contexts.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Taken together, the contributions to this Special Issue shed light on how language teacher identities and (perceived) responsibilities are being redefined in a world marked by uncertainty, instability, and transformation. They collectively highlight the dual pressures teachers face: responding to externally imposed expectations while also negotiating internally driven commitments to their learners, communities, and professional selves. The articles and commentary presented here foreground the multiplicity of contexts in which these negotiations occur, from multilingual classrooms and wartime realities to restrictive legislative environments and mentorship programs, demonstrating that responsibility is never fixed, but constantly reinterpreted and re-situated.

As editors, we hope this Special Issue sparks further reflection and dialogue on how language teachers make sense of their roles in the new world. More than a professional obligation, responsibility emerges in this Special Issue as an ethical stance and identity practice, requiring educators to navigate tensions, embrace uncertainties, and reimagine possibilities. By centering identity and responsibility in these conversations, we reaffirm that

teaching is a profoundly ethical and political act, one that continues to demand courage, reflexivity, and care in the face of shifting global realities.

THE AUTHORS

Luis Javier Pentón Herrera  is an award-winning Spanish and English educator and a best-selling author. In 2024, he was selected as the 2024 TESOL Teacher of the Year, awarded by the TESOL International Association and National Geographic Learning. He is a Professor (Profesor uczelni, in Polish) at VIZJA University, in Poland, and a Book Series Co-Editor of the *Cambridge Elements in Language and Power* (Cambridge University Press) and *Contemporary Perspectives on Learning Environments* book series (Emerald Publishing), as well as Co-Editor of *Tapestry: A Multimedia Journal for Teachers and English Learners*, and Associate Editor of *Language Teacher Education Research*. Further, he is a Fulbright Scholar and Specialist, and an English Language Specialist with the U.S. Department of State. Previously, he served as the 38th President of Maryland TESOL from 2018 to 2019, and earned the rank of Sergeant while serving in the United States Marine Corps.

Anna Becker  is an Assistant Professor and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Poland. She has pursued her academic career across institutions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, teaching and conducting research in applied linguistics, multilingual education, and research–practice relationships. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Fribourg. Her research examines the intersections of language, identity, and access in higher education, with particular attention to equity, mobility, and institutional policy. She has published in leading journals, including *Applied Linguistics*, *Language & Education*, and *International Journal of Multilingualism*. Anna serves as Managing Editor of *European Education*, sits on the Advisory Board of the *Comparative Education Review*, and is a member of the Editorial Board of *Cambridge Elements in Language and Power* (Cambridge University Press)..

Michał B. Paradowski  is a professor and teacher trainer at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Applied Linguistics. He also works with educators and researchers to bring together evidence-based teaching and methodological rigour. Passionate about how we learn and use languages, he explores topics from second language acquisition and foreign language teaching to positive psychology, teacher and learner well-being, bi- and multilingualism, translanguaging, psycholinguistics, embodied cognition, English as a lingua franca, study abroad, social network analysis, corpus linguistics, and emergency remote instruction. Michał

has led various projects: *PEERLANG: How Peer Interaction Mediates Second and Third Language Acquisition, Teachers' and Students' Adaptation to Emergency Remote Instruction during COVID-19 Induced School Closures: A Global Research Study*, and *Language Learners' Perception of Online Vs Face-To-Face Learning Effectiveness*. When he's not researching, Michał loves sharing insights; he has given over 260 talks, seminars and workshops in 43 countries, edited volumes on innovative language teaching (*Teaching Languages off the Beaten Track*) and intercultural communication (*Productive Foreign Language Skills for an Intercultural World*), and wrote a monograph titled *M/Other Tongues in Language Acquisition, Instruction, and Use*.

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