

**Coming together at a distance: How language researchers across the globe met for the 1st Educational Role of Language online Session “Language and Teacher Language Identity”
– A report**

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The 1st Educational Role of Language online session on the theme of “Language and Teacher Language Identity” organized and hosted by the International Association for the Educational Role of Language took place on May 5, 2020 in the homes and offices of language researchers all across the globe. A total of 16 papers was presented in workshop-style over the course of a day, spanning multiple time zones. Presenters hailed from across several continents, including Europe, North America and Asia. Attendees numbered 40 and joined from all around the world.

For many participants, the virtual gathering was an unexpected respite to the relentless challenges of this pandemic-stricken year. Academic conferences everywhere were being cancelled at the last minute. Where disappointment abounded, Michał Daszkiewicz (University of Gdańsk, Poland) and Dragana Božić Lenard (University of Osijek, Croatia), both part of the Educational Role of Language Network, were able to offer a unique and uplifting solution to our new “normal”. Folks came together using online communication technologies (Google Drive, Webex) to circumvent the dangers of gathering together at an in-person conference. Moreover, the virtual venue offered a much more collegial and intimate setting than can often be gleaned even from an in-person conference when attendees shift between different break-out sessions and rarely get to collectively experience a sustained set of presentations and follow-up conversations.

As a whole, the papers and ensuing conversation (including lively parallel communication via the chat box) addressed both the major and minor scopes of the International Association for the Educational Role of Language focal strands. While the title of the session had invited a focus on teacher language identity, the topics chosen meant that the four major scopes were well represented in the presentations, namely Language & School, Language & Culture, Language & Methodology, and Language & Personality. Several of the minor scope themes that focus on learners’ beliefs, activity, affect and thinking were also covered in the session.

Perhaps closest to the session title were papers by Ewa Bandura (Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland), Andre Kurowski (University of Chichester, UK) and Anita Bright (Portland State University, USA). Ewa Bandura’s presentation shared her thoughts on how foreign language education should promote students’ and teachers’ cultural self-awareness and foster the expression of both students’ and teacher’s identities. Andre Kurowski shifted the focus to school leaders who in the face of policy changes can take on different stances to power. Andre’s paper also highlighted the Language & Methodology scope as it used language as a tool through which to make sense of school leaders’ views. Anita Bright described how she and a colleague had worked collaboratively with a cohort of graduate students to humanize the research enterprise. Anita’s paper was in response to how her own teacher identity had shifted as a result of contingencies in teaching at the higher education level due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Inevitably, the realities of the pandemic crept into other presentations as well. One particularly thought-provoking presentation was given by Martha Decker (Hidasta, USA) who explained how cultivating mindfulness techniques can make teaching and learning more effective in the online classroom—something we all can benefit from knowing more about right now. Identity was also addressed by Paulina Krzeszewska, (University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland) from the learner’s

perspective and more broadly from the perspective of parents and their understanding that child language disorder is linked to students' identities.

My colleagues, Louise Wilkinson (Syracuse University, USA) and Carolyn Maher (Rutgers University, USA), and I contributed to the Language & School major scope with some acknowledgement of the role played by identity of teachers who may view themselves as content teachers (e.g., mathematics teachers) rather than as language teachers. However, to assist school-age students who are acquiring English as a new language (as in this US context), teachers need to know how to capture what mathematics students know at any point in time while students are still learning the language of the discipline. We shared how our review of the literature and analysis of verbatim interactions between teachers and 4th grade (10-year-old) students and between students in mathematics classrooms leads us to propose teachers formatively assess mathematics understanding in a language-informed way by 1) using learning progressions to monitor development of language and mathematics learning, 2) adopting open-ended mathematical investigations that encourage lots of talk and writing in the new language, 3) supporting phenomena-based teaching so students have first-hand experiences they can discuss and problem solve, and 4) becoming culturally responsive and sustaining teachers so that students' identities and speech communities are reflected in the curricula, enabling students to engage in deeper, more meaningful learning.

There were many points of contact between our own work and that of Dilyan Gatev (University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria) whose presentation was on teaching business English vocabulary. While Dilyan's work is at the higher education level and ours at the compulsory school-age level, the focus on terminology revealed the language demands placed on learners of English within a specific disciplinary context across the educational life-span. For example, in common, we were able to discuss how words that have an everyday meaning in English can take on a very precise and often less familiar meaning in mathematics or business studies e.g., *times* [vb.] (multiply); *liquid* [adj.] (characteristic of an asset easily converted to cash). Such differences in meaning can be a point of confusion for learners of English as a new language young and old, although content teachers may not always be aware of this situation.

Louise Wilkinson and I continued and extended the discussion by pointing out the increasingly contested notion of academic uses of language in the US context at the follow-up Educational Role of Language on-line session held October 6, 2020. We wanted to know if such a debate was also taking hold elsewhere in the world—if students' need proficiency in the dominant societal language for learning in schools and the current status of education offered to students in their home languages. The 2nd session allowed for us to hear how ideas in these areas of language research and policy are being articulated in other countries. From researchers working in India and in Arabic-speaking countries, we heard how education in a student's home language was only just beginning to surface and there was discussion on how it might better reflect the learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students the world over.

Anyone wanting to participate in this on-going conversation is encouraged to contact me at abailey@gseis.ucla.edu.