

# Toward humanizing SFL praxis: Coconstructing language teachers' understandings of their intersectional identities via language use

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## The Challenge

Centering language learners' diverse identities in the language classroom calls on language teachers to likewise know themselves deeply. This article—part of our efforts toward humanizing language teacher education—describes the results of a project in which language teachers engaged in reflective dialog around multimodal representations of their intersectional identities.

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## Abstract

Contextualized within our *Projects in Humanization* in language teacher education and part of our on-going collaborative self-study of our language teacher educator practices, we used multiple case study to examine multimodal representations of cultural and linguistic identities curated by three language teachers—Daniel, Yuseva, and Sarah—and humanizing dialog to engage them in reflection on those identities. The central task, the *Language Use Profile*—part of the foundations course in our language teacher education programs—guided language teachers in developing their understandings of their bi-/multilingual language use, language ideologies, and systemic functional linguistics (SFL). In all three

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cases, examination of language use served as a window for the language teachers to observe their intersectionality or, in some cases, to become aware of it. Each language teacher took up the assignment in different ways, with the task as the context for reflection on language use and identities journeys such as *translanguaging to survive*, *negotiating my identity* and *being a white woman who learned Spanish*. SFL metalanguage served as a tool for the language teachers to make sense of their multi-dimensional language use. Our findings point to the potential of the *Language Use Profile* as a means for guiding language teachers in the identity work that is central in humanizing language teacher education.

### KEYWORDS

humanizing methodologies, language teacher education, language teacher identity, language use, systemic functional linguistics

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly diverse world, the need for language teachers to enact pedagogies that are responsive, antiracist, and culturally sustaining is more important than ever. Likewise, language teacher education and professional development experiences must develop language teachers' abilities to enact these pedagogies. Recent scholarship has examined the need to engage language teachers and language teacher candidates in learning that deconstructs dominant views of language, race, and identity (e.g., Austin, 2022a, 2022b). Likewise, scholarship in “humanizing” teaching and learning (e.g., Paris & Winn, 2014; Salazar, 2010) and language teacher education (e.g., Kinloch, 2018; Percy et al., 2022) highlights the need to prepare language teachers to be able to critically examine their pedagogies to ensure that language teachers' “ways of being” in the language classroom enable “ways of doing” (Ladson-Billings, 2008, p. 176) that are responsive to the learners in their instructional contexts. In our view of humanizing language teacher education, part of this work is guiding language teachers and language teacher candidates in developing an understanding their cultural and linguistic identities through the lens of their linguistic repertoires. To achieve this goal, we enlisted systemic functional linguistics (SFL; Christie, 2002; Halliday, 1994; Hasan, 2009) as a theoretical lens through which we developed language teachers' awareness of their cultural and linguistic diversity through examination of their language use in context. Contextualized within our on-going collaborative self-study of teacher educator practices (e.g., Davin & Troyan, 2015; Percy & Troyan, 2017; Troyan & Percy, 2018; Troyan et al., 2021), we used multiple case study to examine multimodal representations of cultural and linguistic identities curated by three language teachers—Daniel, Yuseva, and Sarah—and humanizing dialog (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) to engage them in reflection on those identities.

## 1.1 | SFL in language teacher education

SFL (e.g., Christie, 2002; Halliday, 1994; Hasan, 2009) is a contextualized theory of language that views language use as bound to its functions within a particular sociocultural context. The theory provides a metalanguage for describing language use through which teachers and learners can examine how language is used within and across contexts. Halliday (1994) conceptualized register as the linguistic realization of three variables, field (what the text is about), tenor (relationship between language users), and mode (the channel of communication). The applicability of the theory was also enhanced by Martin's (1992) efforts to connect the construct of genre to the context of culture, with emphasis in applied educational contexts on the importance of the social purpose of discourse. SFL has been increasingly advanced as a meaningful tool for language learning and teaching; scholarship has demonstrated its descriptive and pedagogical potential for describing and harnessing the multilingual repertoires of learners to enact culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies (e.g., Harman, 2018; Harman & Khote, 2018). Likewise, SFL has been increasingly advanced as a key component of the knowledge base for language teaching (e.g., Accurso & Gebhard, 2021; Achugar & Carpenter, 2018; de Oliveira & Avalos, 2018; Gebhard et al., 2013; McCabe, 2021; Sagre et al., 2021; Schleppegrell, 2020; Troyan et al., 2022; Turkan et al., 2014). This area of scholarship has also described the development of the SFL knowledge base as language teachers learn the theory and begin to appropriate it in their work with multilingual learners (e.g., Gebhard, 2019; Harman & Khote, 2018) and in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogies (e.g., Accurso & Mizell, 2020; Cavallaro & Sembiente, 2020; Mizell, 2021, 2022; Ramírez, 2020; Sembiente & Tian, 2021; Troyan et al., 2021), as well as in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (e.g., Llinares & McCabe, 2023; Morton, 2023).

While this research has demonstrated the ways in which SFL is an effective tool in doing the work of language teaching, little scholarship in language teacher education has positioned SFL as a tool for language teachers to understand their linguistic diversity and linguistic identities. To this end, we sought to examine how SFL concepts could serve as the metalanguage for developing language teachers' awareness of their language use and cultural and linguistic identities, a foundational component of a humanizing SFL praxis.

## 1.2 | Toward humanizing SFL praxis

Praxis is a term that describes the relationships between theory, practice, and social action. In second language acquisition, praxis has frequently been defined in a rather limited way as the intersection of theory and practice. In our work, as we began to critically engage with learners around their language varieties, their language use, and its role in their teaching, this definition of praxis was insufficient for our work (e.g., Lantolf & Johnson, 2007; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). While the connection between theory and practice is central in the SFL scholarship, "critical SFL praxis" guides teachers in learning to use the linguistic theory, SFL, "to be adaptive and reflective, and thereby critical, in the process of deploying their language resources to achieve their own social purposes" with their learners (Harman, 2018; Troyan et al., 2021, p. 385). For this reason, we turned to the work of other scholars who have advanced praxis as means for social action. For instance, Lather (1986) described praxis as "characterized by negotiation, reciprocity, [and] empowerment." Likewise, in his seminal work, Freire (1970) defined praxis as "reflection and action upon the work to transform it" (p. 52). In language teacher education,

scholars working in language teacher identity (e.g., Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Waller et al., 2017) have advanced a view of “critical language teaching” that considers the following five components: the situated nature of the program and practices, responsiveness to learners, dialogic engagement, reflexivity, and praxis. As Waller et al. (2017) noted, to engage in this critical praxis in language teacher education, “it is imperative that critical educators know who they are and who their students are before walking into the classroom” (p. 23).

As part of praxis, we see language teacher’s understanding of their own cultural and linguistic identities as instrumental in developing the ability to enact a *humanizing* SFL praxis in language teacher education. Humanizing pedagogies center on the diverse sociocultural realities of learners’ lifeworlds; in these dynamic learning spaces, teachers and learners coconstruct knowledge via dialogic problem-posing to cultivate critical consciousness of social, economic, and political inequities and design avenues toward individual/collective liberation (Bartolomé, 1994; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Paris & Winn, 2014). Kinloch (2018) described teacher education as a “Project in Humanization” that engages teacher candidates in learning spaces that “value multiple languages, literacies, experiences, and cultural knowledge that young people bring into schools and carry with them within and across multiple communities” (p. 14). In this vein, Peercy et al. (2022) depicted their reflective process of examining their pedagogies for language teacher education through the lens of Salazar (2010) tenets of humanizing pedagogy. As a result of their self-study, they noted that “there are some foundational dimensions of humanizing pedagogy that need to be more deeply addressed in our [practices] if teachers of multilingual students, and their teacher educators, are to enact them in ways that are fully humanizing for students” (Peercy et al., 2022, p. 13).

SFL theory and SFL-informed pedagogies—from their inception—have aligned with our view of humanizing praxis. In his development of the theory, Halliday sought to highlight, deconstruct, and push against the stigmatization and marginalization of cultural groups that were based on their varieties of language. Later, Hasan’s (1996, 2004) work underscored the inequities that learners’ experience in accessing knowledges in schooling, as well as how learners’ social class has historically defined that access. In response to these inequities, Hasan’s “reflection literacy” advanced a pedagogy that—rather than focusing on reproduction of language and texts—sought to guide learners in questioning the meaning of texts through language analysis. Underlying this pedagogy is a principle of language variation.

To say that a community has many voices is to say that there are experiences of saying and meaning which differ from one social group to the next; this includes the possibility that the way a locution is evaluated in one segment of the community might be critically different from that in another. So, it becomes important to ask whose point of view does the writing represent? whose point of view is implied in which reading? (Hasan, 1996, p. 411)

Informed by Hasan’s humanizing approach, Achugar and Schleppegrell (e.g., Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2016; Achugar et al., 2007) engaged with teachers in California schools to develop a reflection literacy for multilingual learners. Teachers learned to use SFL to “enable explicit attention to language and meaning that involves learners in recognizing and participating in new ways of making meaning that they themselves help shape” (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2016, p. 361). Through this long-term project, the teachers learned to use the SFL metalanguage with their learners, enabling them:

to be explicit in the exploration of meaning in text in ways that set up opportunities for discussion about why an author has made a linguistic choice, and for consideration of its meanings and the alternative meanings that could have been made. This pushes the classroom discourse beyond decoding of local instances to more socio-historical approaches that explore the history of ways of meaning and linguistic choices, and that offers learners a means of bringing their own perspectives into dialogue about text. (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2016, p. 361)

In a more recent project, Mizell (2021, 2022) has advanced an antiracist and anticolonial pedagogy developed through a cross-pollination of SFL and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). Through a “loving critique,” in which he interrogated both the strengths and the shortcomings of each framework, Mizell articulated “culturally sustaining systemic functional linguistics” (CS SFL). CS SFL represents:

a race-conscious, purposefully sequenced set of languaging and literacies [...] that support anti-racist and anti-colonial participatory approaches, multimodal designing, translanguaging, and reflection literacy. [...] Reflection literacy [...] enables students to consider the ideological weight of their own languaging choices and that of others. In addition, it empowers them to create and re-design knowledge in order to have their needs met. Within CS SFL, youth are positioned as civic agents of change and as multimodal designers of meaning in a range of modalities (e.g., visual, haptic, embodied). They along with their adult accomplices are apprenticed into being racially and intersectionally conscious as they are supported in critically deconstructing hegemonic deficient portrayals of their communities (Crenshaw, 1989). (Mizell, 2022, p. 5)

Informed by and in solidarity with our colleagues engaged in this work—as well as to enable language teachers to engage in this humanizing SFL praxis—we began our work by using SFL as a lens through which language teachers examined their cultural and linguistic identities. In this regard, our work is likewise linked to the research and pedagogies in language teacher education focused on language teacher identity (LTI).

### 1.3 | Language teacher identity

LTI has drawn increased attention in language teacher education and teacher development (Varghese et al., 2005) and has been explored through a variety of theoretical perspectives. In recent scholarship, three major theories have guided most of the research of LTI: sociocultural theory, community of practice (CoP), and poststructuralism (Steadman et al., 2018). Other research has explored LTI from other perspectives such a Bakhtinian stance (e.g., Hallman, 2015), positioning (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015), developmental and social psychological perspectives (e.g., Friesen & Besley, 2013), and language socialization (e.g., Relaño Pastor, 2019). Over the decades, the LTI research has examined language teachers' identity development across a wide variety of instructional contexts, countries, and years of experience (Martel, 2015). Antonek et al. (1997) argued that professional identity formation entailed different knowledge sources, such as “knowledge about affect, teaching, human relations, and subject matter” (p. 24). That is, different knowledge sources inform the construction of teacher

professional identity, and the growth of the knowledge base further promotes the development of teacher professional identity.

Further, scholarship in LTI has examined the complex and intersectional nature of language teachers' identities (e.g., Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020; Park, 2017; Weng et al., 2023). Building on the groundbreaking work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991), the scholarship informed by intersectionality has sought to describe, examine, and deconstruct how power is structured in societies “not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). Varghese et al. (2016) captured the intention of this work in LTI:

Exploring our language teacher identities means understanding our lived and living history. It is to understand and unravel the complexities that are at the core of who we are on all levels—for instance, as multilinguals, scholars, children, teachers, parents, community members, language users, and activists and their intersectionality, all of which shape our classroom practices and pedagogy, which in turn fuel and circle back to shape our language teacher identities. (p. 566)

Informed by this research on LTI and calls for positioning LTI at the center of learning to teach (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2016), language teacher educators have increasingly positioned identity work at the center of language teacher preparation. Language teacher educators have used a variety of approaches—for example, literacy autobiographies (Canagarajah, 2020), critical autoethnographic narratives (Yazan, 2019), critical multilingual language awareness (Fu et al., 2023), and language ideology trees and language portraits (Lindahl et al., 2021)—to guide language teachers in examining identities and language ideologies in the work of language teaching. In their recent project, Martel and Yazan (2021) integrated a focus on identity throughout the practicum course activities in a language teacher education program. Inspired by this scholarship and following the work of Waller et al. (2017) on critical praxis, we centered the cultural and linguistic identities of language teachers in our foundations course such that they could know themselves before engaging in humanizing SFL praxis with their learners.

## 2 | THE STUDY

The present study is part of an on-going collaborative self-study of teacher educator practices (e.g., Austin, 2022a, 2022b; Percy & Sharkey, 2020; Percy & Troyan, 2017) in which we are collaboratively examining our development of a humanizing SFL praxis, moving back and forth between our language teacher education program and the classrooms where the language teachers teach (e.g., Sembiente et al., 2021; Troyan & Sembiente, 2021; Troyan et al., 2021). Because of the centrality of identity work in engaging in humanizing praxis, we position this reflexive work as a means for holding ourselves accountable, as teacher educators, to the language teachers we work with (Johnson, 2015; Troyan & Percy, 2018). Through both multiple case study (Merriam, 2009) and humanizing dialog (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), we engaged the language teachers in our data analysis to collaboratively examine their SFL praxis. Specifically, we focused on how three language teachers conceptually represented their language use and understood the influence of their language use in their professional and personal identity development. Our study addressed the



following research question: In what ways do language teachers explain their professional and personal identity development through their reflection on their language use?

## 2.1 | Context: EDUTL 5600—Language as a Resource

This study was conducted in the course EDUTL 5600—Language as a Resource. In addition to being the foundational course for a 1-year Master of Education K-12 licensure program and a Graduate Certificate Program in World Language Education, it also attracts students in the MA Program in Multilingual Education at the University, as well as practicing language and literacy teachers in the field. The 8-week course (June–July, 2020) was designed to develop language teachers' abilities to use SFL to examine their personal language use, their language ideologies, and their use of SFL as a pedagogical tool for understanding how language choices function to make disciplinary, genre-specific meaning (see Troyan & Sembiante, 2021). In the first part of the course, SFL was introduced as a functional, meaning-making resource for humanizing praxis. Framing language varieties through SFL allowed the instructor to highlight how hegemonic beliefs about language use led to the teaching of essentialized language varieties in the classroom, at the expense of other marginalized language varieties. Foundational concepts included the multilingual turn and native speakerism in language learning (May, 2014; Ortega, 2014), translanguaging and bilingual pedagogies (García, 2009), and racialized identities in language teaching and learning (Anyia, 2017; Baker-Bell, 2020). In this part of the course, language teachers began to examine their personal language use across contexts, revealing their cultural and linguistic diversity across context, and examining this language use through SFL via the *Language Use Profile*. In the second part of the course, the language teachers developed their knowledge of SFL and genre theory. As the concepts were introduced, language teachers practiced analyzing two personal texts written in English, a text message and an email. The underlying principle of these analysis tasks was that personal texts were familiar to the teachers in content and context and would scaffold their ability to analyze language for structure and meaning. In the third part of the course, the language teachers applied the theory to a unit plan for language teaching. Because the present study focused on one task in the course called the *Language Use Profile*, we encourage readers to see elsewhere for detailed descriptions of how teachers have applied the theory in their text analyses in the second part of the course (e.g., Sembiante et al., 2021), as well as in their instructional design in the third part of the course and beyond the course in their classroom teaching (e.g., Troyan, 2021; Troyan et al., 2021).

## 2.2 | Positionalities and identities

EDUTL 5600—Language as a Resource was taught by the Francis, who identified as a white, gay, cisgender male. The second author, Loretta, a professor in another institution, was a cisgender straight Venezuelan-Italian female and expert in Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Francis and Loretta had collaborated on the use of SFL in language teacher education in the past and, after Loretta attended a webinar presentation on EDUTL 5600, she suggested that they collaborate to study the language teachers experiences in the course. Zhenjie was a cisgender straight female international PhD student from China, who joined the project because of her interest in and expertise in language teacher identity. The three language teachers in this study, Daniel, Yuseva, and Sarah, were enrolled in the course during the

TABLE 1 Major tasks in EDUTL 5600.

Task #	Task name
1	Language use profile
2	Analysis of personal language use—text message
3	Analysis of authentic text
4	Instructional planning genre based backward design

summer of 2020. Their full background information is presented at the beginning of their respective sections to contextualize their experience.

### 2.3 | The Language Use Profile

In the vein of guiding language teachers to “know who they are” (Waller et al., 2017, p. 23), culturally and linguistically speaking, so that they are better prepared to engage in humanizing work with their learners, the *Language Use Profile* was developed as one of the four major course tasks. Together, the four course tasks are intended to develop teachers’ abilities in using SFL concepts through a variety of applications of the concepts throughout the 8-week course. Table 1 depicts the four course tasks were completed across the 14 sessions of the course.

The *Language Use Profile* task was constructed across the semester through three assignments. To begin the Language Use Profile task, the language teachers plot their use of language varieties on an X–Y chart with frequency on the *x*-axis (never-sometimes-daily) and perceived proficiency on *y*-axis (low-mid-high) (See Troyan & Sembiante, 2021 for details). Once they completed the chart, they created a visual representation of their use of these language varieties across contexts, shared them with the class, and completed the following task:

You will critically examine your path as a language user at three distinct points throughout the semester. **Using the language use map created in the first class session, you will prepare a two-page, first-draft narrative of your language use profile.** For session eight, you will revise the first draft of the language use profile, incorporating their understanding of field, tenor, and mode into a four-page second draft. In the fourteenth class session, you will present your language use profile, which includes a visual or graphic representation of language use across contexts.

As the language teachers developed their understandings of bi-/multilingual language use, language ideologies, and SFL, they increasingly applied those concepts to their subsequent drafts of their *Language Use Profiles*.

### 2.4 | Data sources and data analysis

Data collection occurred during the course in June and July 2020 and focused on the *Language Use Profile* task. Data sources for the study included (1) the visual representations of language



of language use, (2) three written reflections on language use described in the *Language Use Profile* task, and (3) a semistructured interview conducted via Zoom after the course in Autumn 2020. Data analysis followed both a within-case and across-case comparison of the salient concepts and identities that were present in the language teachers' images, written reflections, and interviews (Merriam, 2009). Following Saldaña (2021), we first coded the data using apriori codes informed by the major concepts of SFL, including field, tenor, mode, as well as the language metafunctions. In the second phase of analysis, we conducted open coding to identify emergent themes in their language use related to identities, such as language varieties, language use in context, language function, translanguageing, whiteness, race, bidialectalism. We then identified three cases that were illustrative and therefore representative of the experiences in the course and created a descriptive account of our findings for each case.

At this point, we re-engaged with Daniel, Yuseva, and Sarah in a dialog about the findings in which we presented the narrative descriptions and asked them to respond so that our final version of the findings fully represent their voices. The data points from these dialogs are indicated as “follow-up dialog” in the findings. While we cannot claim that this research fully represents a Project in Humanization from start to finish, we know that in the process of engaging in this work, we moved closer to humanizing work in our shift toward “reciprocity, care, and critical listening in research activities” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 391s).

### 3 | FINDINGS

We present the cases of Daniel, Yuseva, and Sarah as illustrative of the complexity of their cultural and linguistic identities analyzed through the lens of SFL. For each case, we begin with the overview of each language teacher, which is followed by the findings related to their language use experiences that were revealed as they engaged in and reflected upon the language use profile task.

#### 3.1 | Daniel

Daniel was a 31-year-old who identified as a queer African American, cisgender male who was also from the midwestern state where the university was located. His languages and language varieties included African American Vernacular English, Standard American English, Gay American English (GAE), Austrian German, Serbian, along with many other varieties of named languages. Daniel graduated from the Master of Education program in World Language Education at the same university in 2017, and subsequently taught German at a rural district and later TESOL in a suburban district. He enrolled in EDUTL 5600 because he was considering pursuing the Graduate Certificate Program for which it was the foundations course. Instead, he later applied and was accepted to the doctoral program in Multilingual Language Education.

The visual representation that Daniel created of his language use (Figure 1) centered African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as his dominant language variety, from which all other varieties, including Standard American English (SAE) emerged. As Daniel noted:

I would say that AAVE is at the core of me linguistically. It is the primary lens through which I learned to communicate with my family (and the world).

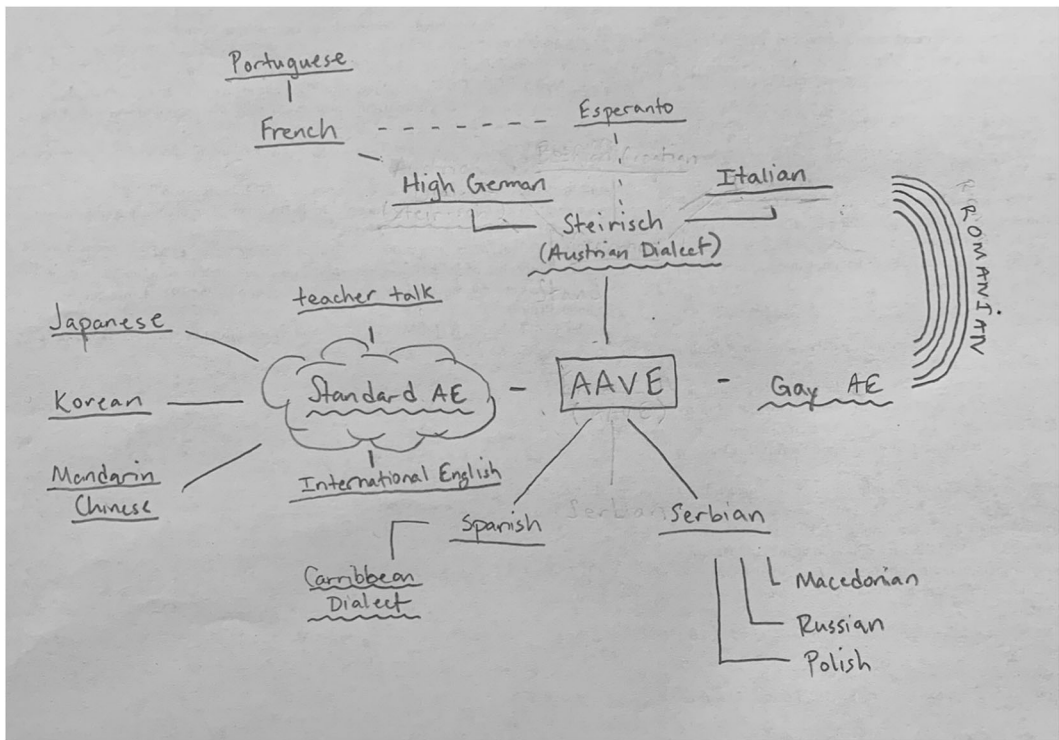


FIGURE 1 Daniel's visual representation of language use.

Specifically, speaking AAVE, a language variety of “lesser prestige” is what enabled me to understand, learn, and want to fully connect to Caribbean Spanish (Puerto Rican-not Castilian), Austrian German (even though people think learning/speaking it was a joke and not worth my time), and Serbian the minority/majority language spoken in Austria, and in turn, throughout the classrooms in which I was working. Further, it was via AAVE that I actively learned SAE formal and informal school contexts and GAE in professional and non-professional social spaces. All that's to say, AAVE is at the core of my being. (Follow-up dialog)

The centrality of AAVE in Daniel's life experience is evident, not only in his visual representation, but also in his reflection on the ways in which his AAVE functioned as a bridge to Caribbean Spanish, Austrian, German, Serbian, SAE, and GAE.

As Daniel reflected on his language use throughout the language use profile tasks, he highlighted the role that the language varieties played in his movement across contexts in his life. For instance, he described the ways in which contexts and interlocutors defined and determined the language varieties that he deployed:

I struggled tremendously with making the switch [and] understanding differences between the way I spoke and what let's say, standardized tests, or basically what the standard English was that they wanted me to learn in school. And so, it took me a really long time to make that switch and to do it well. And so going back and forth with bi-dialectalism, I also was a lot, oftentimes the only African American in

my classes. So, I would have to learn how to speak among, you know, my white friends, and then with my family, so there was a constant balancing act between how I spoke at school, how I spoke around my friends, and then how I spoke at home. Right? (Interview)

He lived his cultural and linguistic identities as a constant balancing act that was experienced and negotiated through his choices of language varieties. As a result of these situations of being the only Black person in academic and social situations, Daniel acquired SAE/white mainstream English. (Follow-up dialog)

Daniel experienced the balancing act as on-going and intense stress related to learning to how to talk in a particular setting:

the difficulty was learning how to not mix up the dialects. For example, there were implicit and explicit consequences for me for speaking “too black” around white people/friends as well as for speaking “too white” around my black and brown people/family/friends. Such a balancing act was crucial to my ability to survive and not offend, make friends, and traverse academic and social circles. (Follow-up dialog)

Through the foundational readings in EDUTL 5600 that focused on bilingualism and bilingual language use (García, 2009; Ortega, 2014) and Black language (Baker-Bell, 2020), Daniel began to see his language use through the lens of translanguaging.

I came out as queer, adopting gay speech patterns to identify myself openly as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community to both queer and non-queer folk alike. These situations of circumstantial bilingualism, i.e., the drive to learn the standard language to succeed in school, the perceived need to assimilate into queer culture, and the will to survive academically in white America, contributed to my cultural and linguistic identity as well as understanding of bidialectalism, translanguaging, and in turn, desire for subsequent elective bi/multilingualism. (Language Use Profile Task)

Through the lens of translanguaging, Daniel described his adoption of gay speech as akin to his usage of SAE in different contexts to identify himself. Each variety of language was used in a different context to identify himself as a member of that community, to “assimilate,” and to “survive,” depending on the circumstances and the stakes in each situation.

Growing up, it was definitely about assimilation. That’s all I knew. Get rid of me and become them to survive. As I learned languages and linguistic varieties, the very act of language learning become a way to integrate myself into societies and cultures without fully losing myself. Learning languages and specifically learning how to translanguage informally taught me more about my own Blackness and cultivated a deep appreciation for how my people learned language and literacy to survive. It is this appreciation that calls me to integrate as opposed to assimilate in addition to placing the onus on both parties’ understandings of each other’s sociocultural lifeworlds to make integration successful. (Follow-up dialog)

The language use profile activities and his analysis of his language use through the lens of SFL enabled Daniel to observe similarities between AAVE and other languages in his repertoire, such as Serbian and other Slavic languages.

And all of these grammatical things that are embedded in my way of speaking that I couldn't necessarily tap into that once I tapped into everything else, when it came to language learning made a whole lot of sense. So especially speaking Serbian in particular, I realized that AAVE in our aspect when we use habitual being things, there are similar grammatical power patterns in Slavic languages, right? (Interview)

Functionally speaking, Daniel described how his AAVE enabled his understanding of verbal aspect in Slavic languages:

my subconscious knowledge of verbal aspect in AAVE that was made clear with a study of the Slave aspectual system. Aspect is a notoriously tricky concept for native English speakers to grasp; however, I was able to make connections to imperfective, perfective, and aorist in Serbian because I understood how these worked/are realized in AAVE via “invariant be” and “completive done.” (Follow-up dialog)

Instead of needing to use another European language to facilitate his understanding grammatical aspect, he realized that he already had the tools within AAVE to make cross-linguistic and even cross-cultural comparisons. See Ferguson (2015) for his detailed exploration of AAVE.

Because of his extensive study of language and linguistics before taking the foundations course, SFL provided a new window on language use that enhanced his understanding.

I feel like SFL gave me a vocabulary, a different set of tools, a different set of vocabulary to talk about language, I think they there are other paradigms and other frameworks that work really well for language. Yeah, just depending on what you want to do. And I would say with SFL, for multimodal, like analysis, or even what I'm trying to do currently is to use SFL in my own personal language studies. (Language Use Profile Task)

The SFL metalanguage provided Daniel with a new “vocabulary, a different set of tools” to describe language use in context. The insights that SFL offered were experienced as so powerful, Daniel noted that it would have been helpful to have known about it earlier in his language studies.

I wish I had an understanding of systemic functional linguistics and genre-based pedagogy when I began my language learning journey. Intuitively, I understood the importance of changing my language based on my purpose for communication, the interlocutors, and the context in which I found myself. (Language Use Profile Task)

In effect, the SFL metalanguage provided Daniel with new perspectives on how language is used to make meaning in context.

### 3.2 | Yuseva

Yuseva identified as 41-year-old cisgender straight female from Indonesia, whose languages included several varieties of Javanese, Indonesian, and English. A language teacher, language teacher educator, and doctoral student from Indonesia, Yuseva took EDUTL 5600 as an elective in her doctoral studies. In contrast to Daniel, who was quite open and excited about using SFL, Yuseva was quite skeptical about the use of SFL at the beginning of the course. In the beginning, she struggled to identify her language varieties and as Figure 2 depicts, she organized her language use predominantly according to contexts: academic, family, and social. As her experience revealed throughout the course, getting a handle on the complexity of her language use required time, reflection, and multiple revisions, as is revealed later in this section.

Over time and as the course progressed, Yuseva continued to develop in her language use profile task. For instance, she used the concept of tenor to recall the ways in which she used language varieties in Indonesia as a child, according to context and the hierarchies involved in those contexts.

I used Javanese in my first 11 years of life especially for my communication purpose. There are three levels (hierarchies) of Javanese. *Krama Inggil* with schoolteachers and elders. *Krama Madya* with seniors at school and church. *Ngoko* with peers at school, church, and neighborhood (See Figure 3). (Follow-up dialog)

Her transition to elementary school highlighted a shift in her language use in Javanese. That is, school required her to begin to learn to use written Javanese:

my biggest challenge and struggle of using Javanese when I was in elementary school was when I had to shift from spoken to written form. In the daily spoken form, the utterance is not structured in a complete sentence construction for all levels. (Language Use Profile Task)

At the same time, while Javanese was her home language, Yuseva described how she learned Indonesian as her language of schooling.

The first time I learned [Indonesian language] was in elementary school in the written form. I spoke Indonesian only during the Indonesian class. Other than that, I was exposed to it through extensive listening/viewing on national TV programs and extensive reading from Indonesian children story books. I seldom spoke Indonesian when I was a kid. Entering junior and senior high school times, I started to use Indonesian more intensively because Indonesian was used as the instructional language. (Language Use Profile Task)

As a child, Yuseva had limited exposure to Indonesian because she lived in a small rural area where the majority of the people spoke Javanese. As she learned SFL throughout the course, she also came to understand her use of Indonesian through the lens of SFL:

I would say that the theme and rheme in Indonesian will depend on the tenor [...] When the conversation [...] happens between my friends and I (casual/informal



**FIGURE 2** Yuseva's visual representation of language use (beginning of course). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]





**FIGURE 3** Yuseva's understanding of tenor in Javanese. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

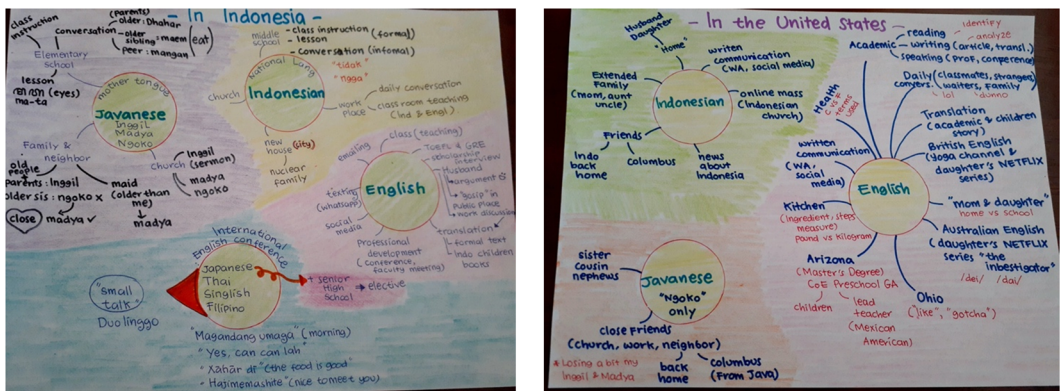
relationship), I use “aku” (I) and “kamu” (you). However, if it is between my teachers/parents/older people and I, I use “saya” (I) and “Pak/Bu (name of the person)” (Mr./Mrs.). (Language Use Profile Task)

In this instance, Yuseva used her understanding of the SFL concepts of theme, the beginning of a clause, along with tenor to conceptualized how she addressed people in her life. Her reflection on her complex language use experiences informed her awareness of language use and identity tensions in the United States. Through the experience and reflection involved in the language use profile task, Yuseva deepened her understanding of both her language use and her associated identities.

I think I feel that I have different identities. When I speak English, let's say, compared to Javanese [...] we are not supposed to look directly to the eyes of the other person [...] when I speak to, let's say, my aunt through [...] Whatsapp Video call. I was looking at her eyes [...] And then she was like, 'Why are you--Why do you keep looking at me?' [I responded,] 'Oh, Okay, I'm sorry' [...]. When I speak English, I tried to remember that I'm supposed to look at the person's eyes when I when I speak to people here in America. So yeah, I feel that those languages somehow [...] influenced my identity. (Interview)

In the excerpt above, Yuseva explained how sometimes when communicating via Whatsapp, she forgot to avoid making direct eye contact with her aunt, which is a polite way of communication in Javanese. This excerpt is evidence of the conscious effort that she made to perform pragmatic variations required in each language and how this effort influenced her identity. In other words, Yuseva described an increasing awareness of not only how to engage in a particular variety, but how to be (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2008) in that language variety. These ways of being intersected with her understanding of her identities as well.

Like, when I talk to [an] American and say [to myself] oh okay, I am part of the American [culture], then [...] I have to be like—American. When I talk to my relatives at home, especially [...] extended family, then I have to remember that I am Javanese. Then I need to also think about the norms when I'm talking to especially older people. Yeah, because in Javanese, if we make mistake [with the norms], then they are not going to talk to me directly. But [...] they [would] talk to my mom. They will say [...]: Can you tell your daughter to do this? Can you teach your daughter to do this? [...] Then I need to be more careful because [...] I have to keep my mom's [reputation], you know? (Interview)



**FIGURE 4** Yuseva's visual representation of language use (end of course). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rlan.12720)]

The reflection of the language use profile provided Yuseva a space to explore the ways in which norms played out for her according to context, what happened when she breached the norms, and the ways in which these negotiations influenced her understandings of her identities in the United States. She described the conflict that she felt in her negotiation of the norms and expectations in the United States:

Yeah, I feel conflicted. I'm Indonesian. Why am I supposed to pretend? Because I was thinking that I was pretending. So yeah, so I'm still like negotiating my identity. Like, when I talk to an American, should I be like American, or should I bring my own identity as an Indonesian to the American community? (Interview)

Throughout her completion of the three tasks of the language use profile assignment, Yuseva deepened her understanding of her language use in profound ways. At the final submission, she chose to revise her visual representation of her language use (Figure 4). In this revision, she depicted her language use in Indonesia and her language use in the United States. In this representation, she highlighted the language varieties in each setting and the purposes with for which she used them.

### 3.3 | Sarah

Sarah was a 22-year-old, who identified as a white, cisgender, straight female. She was from the midwestern state where the university was located. Her first language was English, and she learned Spanish and American Sign Language as additional languages in her K-12 and university schooling experiences. After receiving her B.A. in Spanish in 2019, she enrolled in the Master of Education (MEd) program in World Language Education to become licensed to teach Spanish.

Throughout the identity focused activities of the course, Sarah observed a shift that occurred from her initial reflection and creation of her visual representation (Figure 5), which was a rather simplistic illustration, in which she represented the languages/language varieties that she used "here," "there," and "everywhere."

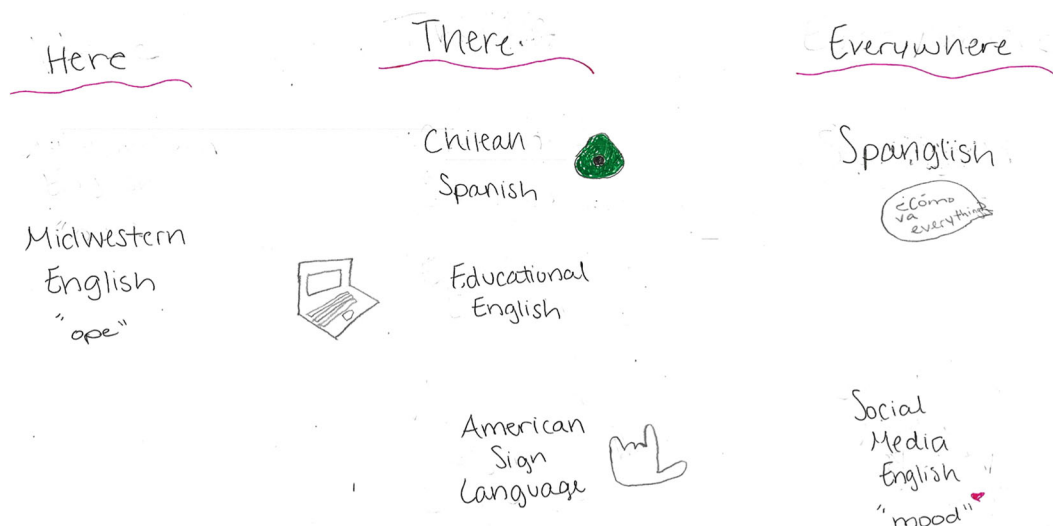


FIGURE 5 Sarah's visual representation of language use. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rlan.12720)] See the Terms and Conditions (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions>) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Prior to the first week of classes, I had only defined myself as bilingual, believing that I only spoke English and Spanish, and that I was learning my third language. (Language Use Profile Task)

As she reflected on the course during the interview, she noted the power of “language varieties” as a concept and as a means for taking up a more nuanced view of her repertoire of languages and language varieties:

I feel like it was really interesting because when we started the class [...] There were a lot of people who I was like you have way more diverse identities than me. I don't think I'm the most interesting person to talk about my identities with but by the end [...] I grew to see how it's important to recognize your own identity and how varied your identities are [...] to understand me, you have to understand all of my language varieties. (Interview)

Sarah's engagement with the concepts in the course and the other language teachers from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds deepened the way in which she viewed her own cultural and linguistic diversity. Even more, she noted the ways in which the language use activities made her aware of her Whiteness:

I've always been very aware that I'm a white woman who learned Spanish and is teaching Spanish. (Interview)

While she had been aware of her Whiteness in relation to other Spanish speakers, it may have been that, because of the ideologies about language use from her community and schooling, Sarah was grappling with the tension between that historical ideology and the ones that she was trying on in the course:

Accepting my own language varieties was really easy but it was one of those things where it's like okay. You also have to accept everyone else's language varieties and you have to understand like. What you shouldn't say because I grew up with a mom who's very much so, like this is proper English we speak proper English. (Interview)

Sarah began to question the “proper English” and other standard language ideologies that had informed her youth and schooling experiences in both English and Spanish. Her awareness of language varieties offered her a more flexible view of her language use.

I hadn't even considered that there were different varieties in my English, other than a regional dialect that didn't mean too much overall. Thinking about register variables made me think more about my teacher talk, and how different that is than how I normally talk, and how it tends to be in Spanglish. (Language Use Profile Task)

As she began to consider the use of different registers according to the SFL view of the register variables—field (what the text is about), tenor (relationship between language users), and mode (the channel of communication)—Sarah likewise began to apply this to the way that she envisioned her classroom interactions with learners. For her, translanguaging emerged as a helpful concept that mediated her planning for these interactions.

Translanguaging is a big idea that I'll take away from this class. I think that it's something that is important to allow in the language classroom because it's how language actually gets used in authentic interactions. Translanguaging also occurs across my English language varieties, so it's unrealistic to expect that students will stick to using specifically one variety of Spanish. (Language Use Profile Task)

For Sarah, translanguaging became a powerful lens through which she began to interrogate her language use, her cultural, linguistic, and racialized identities, as well as her future language teaching practice. As a classroom teacher, translanguaging became “the most important part for [her], especially [in that it] that informs [her] day to day practice” (Follow-up dialog).

## 4 | DISCUSSION

In this multiple case study, which is part of a larger self-study of our efforts to enact a humanizing teacher educator practice, we examined language teachers' developing awareness of their cultural and linguistic diversity via their language use in context in a task called the *Language Use Profile*. Following Waller et al. (2017), we argue that if we expect language teachers to engage in critical, antiracist, and socially just language teaching, it is imperative to guide language teachers in interrogating their cultural and linguistic diversity before they can be expected to engage this work with their learners. By placing identity at the center of language teacher education (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2016) in the *Language Use Profile* task, the language teachers gained insights on how they used language across contexts and with different interlocutors in their lives.

The *Language Use Profile* task provided a space for the language teachers to explore how their language use and identity were linked. For instance, Daniel described the balancing act that he experienced as he made choices between AAVE, gay English, and SAE, the language of schooling, and the stakes that were involved in his translanguaging to survive. Yuseva described the language choices that she made as a young person in Indonesia, as well as how she positioned herself through language once she was in the United States. In this regard, she was cognizant that she reflected on her ways of being (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2008) in particular language varieties and across contexts. As for Sarah, through the task, the discussions in the class, and her reflections on the class, she became aware her understandings of the “proper English” that she learned at a young age. As the task progressed and she observed the possibilities available to her in a more linguistically flexible approach, she began to move toward a more flexible view of her language use that was defined by the SFL description of the register variables. In addition to seeing the value of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool for framing language use in her Spanish classroom, Sarah’s reflections on her personal language use point toward the possibilities of the *Language Use Profile* task as a means for examining *Whiteness* (e.g., Salazar, 2018; Fasching-Varner, 2012) in language teacher preparation. While the task and the classroom activities did not explicitly address the role of *Whiteness*, we have identified modifications that we could make to more explicitly acknowledge and examine the role of White racial identities in this task, and that will better prepare language teachers to deconstruct *Whiteness*, as part of the work of undoing anti-Blackness in language teacher education (see the work of Austin, 2022a, 2022b for descriptive guide).

In all three cases, examination of language use served as a window for the language teachers to observe their intersectionality or, in some cases to become aware of it (e.g., Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Research in language teacher identity has increasingly described this intersectional nature of the identity development of language teachers (e.g., Lander, 2018; Paiz & Coda, 2021). This intersectionality “produce[s] divergent and unequal experiences” (Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020, p. 52) that language teachers must become aware of and learn to negotiate for themselves as well as for their learners. Informed by SFL, the *Language Use Profile* allowed for flexibility in representations of language use across contexts. In other words, each teacher took up the assignment in different ways, with the task as the context for reflection on language use. SFL metalanguage served as a tool for the language teachers to make sense of their multidimensional language use. Our findings point the potential of the *Language Use Profile* as a means for guiding language teachers in the identity work that is central in language teacher education. While it is similar to other identity-oriented pedagogies in language teacher education (e.g., Canagarajah, 2020; Lindahl et al., 2021; Martel & Yazan, 2021; Yazan, 2019), this approach guides language teachers in interrogating their identities using the SFL metalanguage, which provides a means for examining their identities through language use in context. Over time and across the parts of the task, language teachers recontextualize their developing understanding of SFL to describe their own experiences as language users.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

This study described an activity referred to as the *Language Use Profile* and the experiences of three language teachers as they engaged with us in reflection and dialog related to their usage of language varieties and their identities that were connected to them. Part of our developing

humanizing SFL praxis, this work is also part of our commitment to “Projects in Humanization” in language teacher education, which as our colleagues, San Pedro and Kinloch (2017) have lovingly described, demonstrate:

a necessary commitment that we must have to sustain, extend, and in many cases, revitalize the richness of the languages, literacies, histories, cultures, and stories embodied by those with whom we work (e.g., research participants; participants as co-researchers and co-authors) as well as by us (e.g., researchers; participant researchers) (p. 391s)

We share our experiences as a pedagogical resource for our colleagues, an act of hopeful reflection, and, we hope, inspiration for more humanizing collaborations in language teacher education.

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