

The Genie is Out of the Bottle: Exploring Critical Artificial Intelligence Literacies with Multilingual Educators

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In this qualitative research, we asked multilingual educators about their experiences teaching writing in the age of generative artificial intelligence (AI). While current research on artificial intelligence literacy tends to focus on the skills lost or gained through using this technology, the 15 multilingual educators interviewed emphasized the relational and social questions of literacy that are critical to writing development with generative artificial intelligence. Our qualitative research focused on writing, asking language educators about the purposes of writing in different contexts and what it means to be a writer now, using an inductive approach to data collection and analysis informed by a social-practices approach to literacy. The insights and pedagogies shared by the educators in our study highlight how multilingual educators understand writing as a culturally and linguistically embedded practice, drawing on this knowledge to support their teaching approaches with an evolving technology. With generative artificial intelligence emerging in a world where multilingual writers face linguistic discrimination, these educators share their hopes and fears for centring the voices and communities of multilingual learners in the age of AI. The study makes connections between social practices of literacy and the pedagogies of multilingual educators to consider how these relations might inform our understanding of critical artificial intelligence literacies. Our work contributes broader implications for language scholars and educators, posing questions to orient research and teaching toward the development of critical AI literacies as relational practices rather than acquired skills.

Dans cette étude qualitative, nous avons interrogé des enseignants multilingues sur leurs expériences en matière d'enseignement de l'écriture à l'ère de l'intelligence artificielle (IA) générative. Alors que les recherches actuelles sur la littératie de l'IA ont tendance à se concentrer sur les compétences perdues ou acquises grâce à l'utilisation de cette technologie, les 15 enseignants multilingues interrogés ont mis l'accent sur les aspects relationnels et sociaux de la littératie de l'IA, qui sont essentiels au développement de l'écriture dans le contexte de l'IA générative. Notre recherche qualitative s'est concentrée sur l'écriture, en interrogeant des enseignants de langues sur les objectifs de l'écriture dans différents contextes et sur ce que signifie être un scripteur aujourd'hui, en utilisant une approche inductive de la collecte et de l'analyse des données, éclairée par une approche de la littératie fondée sur les pratiques sociales. Les réflexions et les pédagogies partagées par les enseignants dans notre étude mettent en évidence la manière dont les enseignants multilingues appréhendent l'écriture comme une pratique ancrée dans la

culture et la langue et s'appuient sur ces connaissances pour soutenir leurs approches pédagogiques face à une technologie en constante évolution. Alors que l'intelligence artificielle générative fait son apparition dans un monde où les scripteurs multilingues sont confrontés à la discrimination linguistique, ces enseignants partagent leurs espoirs et leurs craintes quant à la mise en avant des voix et des communautés d'apprenants multilingues à l'ère de l'IA. L'étude établit des liens entre les pratiques sociales de la littératie et les pédagogies des enseignants multilingues afin d'examiner comment ces relations pourraient éclairer notre compréhension des littératies critiques en matière d'intelligence artificielle. Nos travaux ont des implications plus larges pour les chercheurs en linguistique et les enseignants, en posant des questions visant à orienter la recherche et l'enseignement vers le développement de littératies critiques en matière d'IA en tant que pratiques relationnelles plutôt que comme des compétences acquises.

Keywords: critical artificial intelligence literacy, generative artificial intelligence, multilingual educators, multilingual writers, writing pedagogy

Generative artificial intelligence (AI, generative AI) makes alluring promises to multilingual writers learning English as an additional language. It promises customized feedback (Carlson et al., 2024; Escalante et al., 2023; Evmenova et al., 2024; Su & Yang, 2023), increased vocabulary acquisition (Asad et al., 2024; Zhang & Huang, 2024), better textual organization (Asad et al., 2024; Song & Song, 2023), and positive feelings about writing (Song & Song, 2023; Wang, 2024). However, beneath these promises lie long-standing systems of linguistic discrimination which have ignored and devalued the voices of multilingual writers (Olding, 2017; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). To make sense of these promises and potential pitfalls, we interviewed 15 multilingual educators about how they were adapting to teach writing in secondary and post-secondary contexts since the advent of generative AI. "You can't put the genie back in the bottle," one educator (Participant 12 [P12]) told us in an interview as they reflected on how generative AI was shaping their writing pedagogy. With promises of magical efficiency, generative AI as "genie" highlights how this technology offers to fix grammar and form for "struggling" writers (Evmenova et al., 2024), continuing the practice of measuring multilingual writers by their ability to reproduce "standard" English (Mahboob & Szenes, 2010).

This desire to fix the writing of multilingual learners isn't new. Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) identified this form of racial discrimination, *linguicism*, which rests on the assumption of one "correct" or "standard" white English. This "standard" English systemically devalues and ignores the strengths and voices of multilingual people (Olding, 2017; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). While linguicism precedes generative AI, this technology is connected to the world in which it was built (Payne et al., 2024). Generative AI is being used to "soften accents" (Lawton, 2024; Payne et al., 2024), and this technology produces formulaic writing in place of distinct human voices (Asad et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Sasaki, 2023; Wang, 2024). This serves to "nullify" learners' "ways of languaging" (Payne et al., 2024, p. 3) and asks them to make the choice "between sounding better or sounding like me" (Wang, 2024, p. 15). This is a pressing concern for the multilingual educators who participated in our qualitative research study about writing pedagogies.

The educators we interviewed were part of a larger study of AI in language and literacy education exploring how teachers in secondary and post-secondary contexts who support developing writers (second language learners, high-school students, undergraduate students) were making sense of new relationships between what it means to be a writer and generative AI technology. As a grounded theory study (Charmaz,

2017), we interviewed participants with an inductive approach to analysis to ground our findings in their teaching perspectives and approaches. We focused on two research questions: (1) What does it mean to be a writer now in the age of generative AI, and (2) What are the purposes of writing in your teaching context? As a constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2017), these questions focused on exploring the relationship between educators' identities as writers and teachers of writing and how this shaped their pedagogical responses to generative AI. In our interviews, 15 of the educators shared their experiences as multilingual writers and how writing across languages shaped their teaching practices. Multilingual educators were those who identified relationships between their linguistic identities as speakers of languages other than English and their teaching practices (see Yang, 2018). Their identities and experiences point to the need for understanding writing as a relational practice in the age of AI and the implications for developing critical AI literacies.

This group of participants responded to our questions about generative AI by contextualizing their hopes and fears for their learners in an understanding of their own relationship with writing. For them, writing, multilingualism, and generative AI were socially and relationally connected. For this reason, this article considers how current definitions of AI literacy might be expanded to centre relationality in the face of colonizing literacies (Zhang, 2022). By (re)viewing these educators' writing literacies and pedagogies through a social-practice lens (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Street, 2005), we explore what it means to be a writer now and how that is related to AI literacy. Critical AI literacies as a construct for research and practice acknowledges the many ways of being literate with generative AI and values critical inquiry to chart how we are both transformed by and transforming with this technology. A vision of critical AI literacies responds to the alluring promises of generative AI in contextually rich and socially embedded ways (Ghimire, 2025; Long & Magerko, 2020). Generative AI is "out of the bottle," and these multilingual educators offer cautions, possibilities, and orienting questions to connect the literacies of our classrooms to the worlds of our learners. First, we describe the context and the theoretical orientation that inform this study.

Multilingual Writers and AI Literacies

In the past, multilingual writing has been studied as the acquisition of a skill, measuring multilingual writers by the "yardstick of the native speaker" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011, p. 357). However, in the past several decades, research around multilingual writers has shifted to include explorations of the sense-making processes of multilingual writers (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Velasco & García, 2014). This research has emphasized multilingual writers as those who draw on all their linguistic resources to shuttle between languages (Canagarajah, 2006) in order to develop self-regulatory mechanisms in all parts of the writing process (Velasco & García, 2014). Writing then becomes less about acquiring a particular set of skills and instead focuses on the holistic interactions between languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). This focus on the holistic language systems of multilingual writers is increasingly relevant in conversations about writing in the age of generative AI. On the one hand, educators and researchers are excited about the possibilities for language learning and development to support multilingual writers (Carlson et al., 2024; Escalante et al., 2023; Javier & Moorhouse, 2024; Topal, 2024). There are possibilities for generative AI to give more personalized feedback on writing (Carlson et al., 2024; Escalante et al., 2023; Topal, 2024; Yan, 2023), increase creativity (Marzuki et al., 2023), and help with text organization (Song & Song, 2023). On the other hand, the bias in the machine reinforces systems of racial and linguistic discrimination that multilingual writers are already facing (Ghimire, 2025; Higgs & Stornaiuolo, 2024; McKnight & Shipp, 2024; Payne et al., 2024). For this reason, language educators wonder about how to integrate generative AI into

their pedagogies (Kim & Kim, 2022; Yeo, 2023) in ways that help students to develop critical skills (Long & Magerko, 2020) for engaging reflexively with this technology (Ghimire, 2025).

Long and Magerko (2020) propose that critical AI literacy involves knowing what AI is, what it can do, how it works, and how it should be used and perceived. For them, critical AI literacy is about developing the right skills to use the technology ethically. But as Ghimire (2025) argues, “learning the functions and ways to adapt to technology is not enough. Users must critically engage with the politics of technology to fully understand its implications” (p. 4). This could look like helping learners consider the social and ethical implications of AI use (Butler-Ulrich & Hughes, 2024) or developing pedagogical strategies for supporting transnational learners in a globalized age (Ghimire, 2025). In particular, Ghimire suggests 4P praxis as a way to prioritize the voices and experiences of multilingual writers when using generative AI. The 4Ps are (1) pausing to reflect on the response generated, (2) pondering whether the responses reflect intent and voice, (3) posing questions or seeking clarification, and (4) prioritizing critical thinking and human ideas (p. 6). Rather than focusing on teaching a competency or set of skills, this approach issues an invitation to AI users which centres their creativity and critical thinking.

However, there remains a theory–practice chasm for the development of critical AI literacies in language and literacy education. Much of the empirical research is still dominated by a literacy-as-skill approach (e.g., Cardon & Fleishmann, 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Song & Song, 2023; Yan, 2023; Zhang & Huang, 2024). This approach focuses on knowing and understanding AI as a tool and developing pedagogies to help learners use and apply AI ethically (e.g., Ng et al., 2021). Even in Ghimire’s (2025) 4P praxis model, the focus is on the individual learner or educator responding to generative AI, rather than critically addressing the broader systems or relationships in which the technology is embedded. A skills development approach to AI literacy may overlook the longstanding histories of racism and linguistic discrimination embedded in social systems (Tajrobehkar, 2023). The 4P praxis model remains focused on the individual learner’s ability to critically engage with AI. A gap remains in our understanding of what it means to have critical AI literacy if we fail to address the socially situated nature of literacy practices (Street, 2005). Critical AI literacies must consider more than what skills are needed for individuals to respond to the racism, linguisticism, and colonialism perpetuated by the machine (Ghimire, 2025; McKnight & Shipp, 2024). These connections between AI and the wider world mean that truly critical AI literacies are socially situated ones.

Theoretical Orientations

This section describes the orienting assumptions about literacy that shaped our study. Our research questions about what it means to be a writer in the era of generative AI and how that might be related to different purposes of writing are rooted in an ontological theory of literacies as social practices. However, rather than detailing a stable “theoretical framework” for analysis, our methodology of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) required that we held this assumption in “doubt” during data collection to allow the data to lead the analysis for the purpose of refining or generating new theory (Charmaz, 2017).

Studying literacy as a social practice of communication is an invitation to pause and “look and listen to what is actually going on” (Street, 2017, p. 36). This approach values “multiple literate understandings” (Andrew, 2011, p. 220) and inquires into the ways literacies develop in relation to the socio-historical contexts in which they are practiced (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Street, 2005). Literacies also have a “(some)thing-ness” (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 344) in how they employ modes, media, tools, and technologies to communicate, a materiality that also has agency in how these practices take shape (Bezemer, 2024; Ott et al., 2022). Understanding relations between the social and material aspects of literacy (Baroutsis & Woods, 2019) allows consideration of how generative AI is a technology that both shapes how users can interact with it (Hamamra et al., 2024; Khlaif et al., 2024) and is itself shaped by the world as a socially

embedded tool, with “built-in” inequities, injustice, and bias that users should not ignore (Ghimire, 2025; McKnight & Shipp, 2024). From this standpoint, we argue that a critical approach to researching, teaching, and using new writing practices with AI requires understanding how these linkages between identity, systems of power, social contexts for communication, and modes and materials hold a literacy practice together.

Methods

The study was informed by the inductive, iterative methods of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2017). This allowed for open-ended, exploratory questions to understand the diverse experiences of all participants in our study and to develop theoretical concepts as needed to interpret the data (Charmaz, 2017). CGT theorizes about the world for the purpose of guiding practice (Apramian et al., 2017; Bhattacharya, 2017; Grbich, 2013). It also acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge with participants as an interactive process that should be approached from a researcher stance of self-doubt, reflection, and critique (Charmaz, 2017, p. 39). For this reason, we include more information about our positionalities as writers, educators, and scholars to show how attending to the diverse experiences of participants in this study challenged or added nuance to these stances. This aligns with the commitments of CGT as well as a social practices theory of literacy, which emphasizes the need for transparency about researchers’ ways of seeing and practicing literacies (Street, 2005).

Positionality

Sayra Cristancho: As a scientist who uses English as a second language, my writing is shaped by the challenges of adhering to English academic standards while maintaining my unique voice, rooted in my upbringing and initial education in a different language. This tension between conforming to linguistic norms and expressing my ideas authentically influences my writing process, as I strive to convey complex scientific concepts while honouring the richness of my multilingual background. In navigating this challenge, I have turned to generative AI as an editorial tool to help refine my language and ensure clarity without compromising my voice. While I sometimes use AI for tweaking structure and grammar, I remain mindful of its limitations in capturing the subtleties of my perspective. For me, writing is not only about meeting academic standards but also about asserting my identity and finding space where my voice can be heard.

Mercedes Veselka: Informed by my experiences as an adult language and literacy educator, I view literacies as a set of complex and embedded social practices. As a white, native English speaker my ways of languaging fit the racist and colonialist paradigms of many institutions and the multilingual educators in this study challenged me to reflect on my own languaging practices in new ways.

Mary Ott: I am a white, monolingual English language user, and that deep immersion in English language, literature, and culture is woven into my voice as a writer. As a scholar of multimodal literacies, I seek to understand the affordances and constraints of generative AI as a resource for meaning making. The multilingual educators in this study raised my critical awareness of how AI can both support and limit the voices of multilingual writers.

Participants and Data-Collection Methods

The 15 multilingual participants were a subset of a larger qualitative study of language and literacy educators ($N = 39$). Participants in this study taught in a range of educational contexts in Canada including high school, university, teacher education, and adult community English language education (EAL), and as writing tutors in academic institutions. Despite the range in contexts, these educators all supported developing writers (language learners, high-school students, undergraduate writers), which allowed us to see how writing pedagogies shifted in response to different purposes for learning writing and different education settings (Ott et al., forthcoming-a). The first and third authors began by piloting the interview questions with three participants from different contexts. Then the first author conducted the remaining interviews with participants over the next six months. While we did not actively seek the perspectives of multilingual educators at the outset of the study, we discovered early on that participants who identified as multilingual shared distinct points of view. We met regularly as a research team to discuss preliminary findings and refine interview probes and recruitment strategies (Charmaz, 2017). Through this approach, SC noticed a resonance between her own experiences as a multilingual writer and the experiences of the multilingual participants, while MV was sensitized through her professional background teaching English as an Additional Language.

Using CGT methods of theoretical sampling and sufficiency (Charmaz, 2017), we sought to include more multilingual educators in our sample and achieved theoretical sufficiency (multiple sources of evidence, no new insights) to describe a unique case in our data after 15 participants. Table 1 numbers the multilingual participants and groups them according to their instructional contexts. This serves as a guide for referring to individual quotes in the findings. A focal participant, Shui, has also been given a pseudonym. We do not provide further details about gender, first language, or ethnicity unless these are implicit in participant quotes, as the study did not actively collect this information. The research project received institutional ethics approval, and participants consented to the use of de-identified quotations.

Table 1
Participant Contexts

Contexts	Participant numbers
High school	P1, P2, P3
College/university	P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9
Teacher educator	P10, P11
Adult community English language	P12, P13, P14
Tutor	P15 (Shui)

Analysis

After inductively analyzing patterns in the study to develop broader theory and practice implications for teaching writing in the era of generative AI (Ott et al., forthcoming-a), we re-analyzed the transcripts of the multilingual participants for their specific insights. Despite diverse teaching contexts, these educators connected their identities as multilingual writers to the use of generative AI in their own and student writing. In this way their teaching strategies and approaches connected in critical ways to writing as a social

practice affected by relations of power. For this paper, we applied our social-practices orientation to literacy (Street, 2005, 2017) as an analytic lens to further explore the implications for developing critical AI literacies.

The first author re-read the transcripts of the 15 multilingual educators as a holistic set, coding for themes related to identity and social practices of writing. Drawing from Leander and Boldt's (2013) methodology of strategic sketch, this process of analysis first identified an illustrative story as a way to encapsulate and further analyze prevalent experiences in qualitative data. By highlighting one or more participants whose stories can bring these experiences into focus, the strategic sketch creates for researchers and readers "an alternate means of experiencing data—to think and feel within the possibilities of the data and not 'over' them toward conclusion" (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 26).

The first author treated each participant's interview as a story of their experiences as writers. She identified themes in the interviews about writing identity and pedagogy. After identifying these initial themes in each interview, she chose focal stories that illustrated these themes. After reviewing all the focal stories and themes from each participant and discussing with the research team, we choose to focus on participant 15 (Shui), a multilingual writer working as a tutor in a writing centre at a university. Shui's experiences highlighted patterns observed across this set of interviews which spoke to how identity, context, power, understandings of literacy, and pedagogical choices move in relation to one another. While the focal sketch highlights an experience Shui had as a student, this experience continues to shape their identity as a writer and pedagogy as an educator. Exploring this process through a strategic sketch and the analysis which follows aligns with the methodology of CGT, which emphasizes the need for theory building to happen through close attention to how experience is constructed (Charmaz, 2017). Analyzing this sketch alongside the experiences of other multilingual participants allowed us to explore the connections between socially embedded literacy practices (Street, 2017) and the systems of power in which multilingual educators are living and working (McKnight & Shipp, 2024). While Leander and Boldt's (2013) strategic sketch is a narrative representation of data written by the researchers, the sketch in our findings is a selected, unedited portion of the participant's interview transcript. Research suggests that multilingual educators are silenced when they must change their voices to suit monolingual, monocultural norms (see Ghimire, 2025; McKnight & Shipp, 2024; Payne et al., 2024). Hearing from Shui in their own voice, without "correction" for English grammar, is essential to be able to think with and not over (Leander & Boldt, 2013) the experiences they share.

Findings

To identify how the insights of these multilingual educators have implications for teaching and researching critical AI literacies, we begin with the two central questions of the broader study: What does it mean to be a writer now in the age of generative AI? and What are the purposes of writing? First, we introduce how the 15 multilingual educators interviewed responded to these questions about identity and pedagogy in writing and how this related to their experiences of generative AI. Then we include the strategic sketch focused on participant 15 (Shui) to show how their experience as a multilingual writer informs their pedagogy and subsequent relationship to generative AI. This is done purposefully to draw connections between the multilingual educators' writing identities and pedagogies and their desires for what critical AI literacies could be. Through mapping the relations between participants' writing identities, pedagogies, and concerns about generative AI, we aim to open spaces of praxis to explore how critical AI literacies might begin by *seeing* learners rather than focusing on teaching skills.

Questions instead of Definitions

This study's questions about what it means to be a writer now and the purposes of writing were invitations to explore the dynamic, socially situated ways in which these educators understood themselves as writers. Participant 11 described writing as "always context based," and Participant 8 affirmed, "it's all about context, right?" For this reason, any discussion of critical AI literacies must acknowledge a diversity of writers, purposes for writing, and pedagogical choices, posing questions about these entanglements rather than defining strict boundaries by which people and literacies are understood.

What Does It Mean to Be a Multilingual Writer Now?

Being a writer was a way for multilingual participants to connect to themselves and the world around them: "I always feel like we can learn from the machine about how to write a better sentence, but never about how our connection is to the world" (Shui). Writers were those who were "just writing for myself" (P7) while in conversation with their communities, worlds, and experiences. Connecting to self and world through writing might involve looking for "patterns" (P11), thinking deeply about philosophy, art, and the meaning of life (P1, P6), and self-reflection (P1, P4, P6, P7, P9, P12, P13, P14, P15): "I do a lot of self-reflection when I write... it's easier for me to write my thoughts than to speak" (P9). This self-reflection through writing was a way for these participants to connect to their own identities and map the relationships between their inner and outer worlds. Writing was a "mechanism of understanding things" (P1). It was also a mode of self-expression through humour or an "unpredictable twist" (P12).

Shaped by Linguistic Identity

Deeply intertwined with who they were as writers were the affordances and constraints of their different languages for writing. Their linguistic resources provided spaces to connect in different ways to themselves and to their wider world. For Participant 1, writing in English lacked the depth of other "Latin-based" languages:

At school they ask me to write a specific piece, then I have to do it in English and I'll do it in English, but personally I never use the English language. I prefer to use the other ones that I find a bit more that provide more devices, more stylistic devices, or is probably a sort of bias as well, because probably I find deeper meaning in words that are Latin based.

Participant 9 observed that writing in Farsi afforded them more options for tone and expression: "In English in terms of choice of words, it's mostly academic for me. So, writing a blog for me would be more difficult or writing something in a casual tone in Farsi, obviously it's easier for me because I have everything at my disposal." Participant 7 discussed the strategic choices they had available when writing in different languages:

I do feel like I can play around more with my English structures. Whether it's because I've done more writing in English over a long period of time [compared to] Persian. Occasionally it [Persian] sounds more beautiful and poetic when I write it. But I feel like with my structures, I'm not always feeling comfortable to move them around. (P7)

These writers expressed differences in how they identified with the languages. However, they all expressed how their languages informed and shifted their ability to communicate, whether by restricting

their choices or by opening deeper possibilities for expression. Being a writer involved thinking and self-reflection and fostered a deep appreciation for how “everything’s connected” (P2) to their ways of languaging (Gurney & Demuro, 2022). Critically, the role of *writer* was never considered as only an act of the solitary self but moved in relation to the languages and contexts for writing.

Shaped by Community

The multilingual participants shared a common perspective that there is no purely individual writer languaging on an island apart from the world. Returning to the quotes above, we see their worlds impacting their choices about how to language: “If I have to do it in English then I’ll do it in English” (P1), “I’ve done more writing in English” (P7), “English ... it’s mostly academic for me” (P9). A writer, then, is not only expressing self but also the systems, worlds, and experiences around them. English was described repeatedly as “academic” (P1, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P15), unsurprising given the supremacy of English in academic institutions and their roles as educators (many specifically teaching English) (Mahboob & Szenes, 2010; Olding, 2017).

For Participant 13, being a writer in English academic settings meant seeing their own writing style as “illogical because I think I’m just like, really free flowing” and learning to write differently and “hide that side of you a little bit and then follow certain things.” For some, there was uncertainty about whether they could even claim to be writers: “I published books, and I’m a teacher, so I didn’t know. Does it mean a writer or not?” (P5). Defining what it means to be a writer matters because multilingual writers are in a world that questions their claim (Mahboob & Szenes, 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). For example, despite describing their rich range of contexts for writing—including curriculum development, personal reflective writing, and work, Participant 8 said, “I wouldn’t really see myself as a writer.” Many of the multilingual educators in our study did see themselves as writers, and even good writers, who valued writing as a place of connection and creation. Yet the idea of being a writer was contested, not because of what it meant to them but because of a world that hadn’t recognized them as “legitimate” writers.

Outside the English dominant strictures of academic writing, participants described how being writers was connected to being readers (P3, P6, P15), teachers (P5, P8, P10, P11), and multifaceted (Shui) creators and storytellers (P1, P2, P3, P7). They were content developers, producers of texts (P5, P8, P11, P12, P14), and communicators (P4, P14). While their understandings of writing as a means of connection to the world were as varied, context dependent, and rich as their life experiences, multilingual participants offer a reframed provocation about what it means to be a writer now: What does it mean to be a multilingual writer in community?

What Are the Purposes of Writing?

Just as there was no one clearly defined writer, participants offered no singular purpose for writing. However, as this interview question shifted the conversation to pedagogy, multilingual educators again shared their orientation to writing instruction in relation to context and community:

So I’m just much more flexible when it comes to writing on my own because in my opinion, as long as they can get their ideas out effectively, that’s all they need to do. And but, you know, under different circumstances, I take different approaches. So that’s why that’s what I mean when I say it depends on context. It’s who am I teaching and why am I teaching them. (P8)

Connection over Perfection

This context-dependent understanding of writing informed how they thought about their pedagogical choices (see Table 2). Several multilingual educators understood writing as a process (P1, P5, P7, P13, P14) which prioritized connection over perfection (P3, P7, P8, P11, P15): “Let’s not rush. It’s never going to be perfect. I don’t know any first draft that I’ve written of anything that’s perfect. So, I think, I think that it’s showing them that” (P11). This meant developing relationships with learners and creating learning environments that valued their expression of ideas:

I create an environment of ... trust, let’s say, in my classes. And this way, if we trust each other, if they know that I’m not going to be tough here only because of grammar, because the grammar and punctuation is not right ... they’re not going to lose a lot of mark. So if they write it themselves, I appreciate it more and I always show those instances in my classes. (P9)

Prioritizing connection meant getting to know learners to ensure their writing was coming from the heart first: “We will encourage them to also try to imagine and try to use your heart to think about topics” (Shui); “just throw everything onto the paper, throw everything on, and then go back and use your brain. You know write with your heart first, get it all out and then come back and write with your head” (P11). Educators made pedagogical choices to move beyond writing as a skills-based, cognitive process to one rooted in the “heart,” through conversation with learners about their ideas, slowing down and providing clear explanations for different stages of the writing process, providing models, and focusing less on grammar and punctuation (see Table 2).

They also acknowledged vulnerability (P1, P2, P5, P10, P14, P15), creativity (P1, P2, P6, P10, P14), and deep, critical thought (P1, P3, P6, P7, P9, P10, P15) as a part of writing. These moments of vulnerability, creativity and deep critical thought came together for participant 1 with a student, realizing that the process of writing led to depth they hadn’t expected:

Sometimes ... as a teacher, you have prepared your lesson and you have these preconceived ideas and then you do not expect that that somebody tells ... “I actually believe that love does not exist ... So I’m going to develop my one paragraph today about the fact that love does not exist.” I was like, oh wow. Okay. That sounds like it’s going to be deep. (P1)

Educators shared about the importance of collaboration and connection with peers, and the wisdom of drawing on sources outside themselves for writing including reading and multimodal texts: “So my personal opinion ... writing is an art of creation because, you know, we had the luxury of reading a lot of nice, wonderful things ... the wisdom is there” (P6).

Writing Tools for Living

While multilingual educators created pedagogical environments that sought to include the voices of all their students, their socially situated approach to literacy could not ignore the need for learners to develop writing for different purposes. Writing was also described as a tool (P3, P8): “It’s a tool, but it can also be both a creative tool and a practical tool” (P3). As a practical tool, writing served the function of allowing educators and their learners to access the jobs, opportunities, or spaces they needed for their professional and personal futures. Tensions and possibilities were expressed about AI as another tool in the box for multilingual writers. In a world where their voices are considered “other” (Olding, 2017; Tajrobehkar, 2023), writing is a signal of whether multilingual writers belong in English spaces. For example, participant 16

Table 2
Pedagogical Strategies for Teaching Writing and Valuing Voice

Participants	Pedagogical strategies
P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P10, P11, P15,	Conversation, discussion, and relationship
P1, P2, P6, P8, P11, P12, P14, P15,	Writing rooted in learners' real lives and experiences and interests
P5, P6, P7, P9, P13, P14,	Slowing down and providing clear and detailed expectations for each stage of the writing process
P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P12, P13,	Focus on ideation, creativity, genre, and structure more than grammar and form
P6, P9, P11, P12,	Modelling
P3, P9, P7, P10, P11, P14,	Peer editing, collaboration, critique, and review
P3, P4, P6, P13,	Reading as inspiration for writing
P1, P8, P10, P11, P15,	Multimodality
P6	Acquiring practical real-world skills from which to provide value and connection
P11	Rethinking assessment and evaluation

shared that while grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors were allowed in their classroom, they wondered about teaching the use of generative AI for drafting résumés and cover letters since it can create texts without these mistakes. They posed the question, “Am I going to ask them to put typos back in their work?” They understood that to do so might cost their learners jobs and opportunities in their lives outside the classroom.

While multilingual educators appreciated the purposes of writing as connected to identity, creativity, and connection, all were teaching in systems that valued the product. This meant their pedagogical choices also needed to promise outcomes for learners which met their real-world needs. One participant discussed the importance of teaching structure and genre for those taking international English assessments, while acknowledging it required a significant change in how one thinks:

We’re not like as logical compared to like Western writers because like, you guys always, like, follow the introduction, like you give your thesis and then like, each paragraph you have like a key sentence for each paragraph, right? And for us, it’s like sometimes we like to hide the surprise in the very end. And that drives a lot of examiners crazy because they just they don’t want to wait for that. So, like, definitely, like change they make sure they follow certain structures and kind of like change the way how they think. (P13)

Supporting developing writers meant situating their pedagogies and understandings of literacies within the constraints of a system where they are asked to “follow certain structures” (P13). This even impacts how participant 13 thought about their own writing as “not logical compared to Western writers.” To respond to the reality of these systems where they are dismissed for their ideas (paraphrase of Shui), educators turned to their own creativity and connection with learners. One educator chose to become a licensed paralegal to answer questions and provide insight into the problems newcomers faced (P6), while

another had begun to rethink their assessment practices (P11). These educators valued writing as more than a tool, even when it was serving a functional purpose.

Strategic Sketch: Seeing the Unseen Writers

Shui works as a tutor at a writing centre, and this strategic sketch describes a few of their experiences as a writer and how this has informed their practice as an educator. Shui weaves together their writing identity, experiences, and context and illustrates the situated nature of literacies. Shui shaped and reshaped their literacy and pedagogical practices in relation to the contexts, people, and tools they interacted with (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). These practices of situating writing pedagogy in relationship with their own writing identity is illustrative of how other multilingual educators in this study understood their own relationship to writing, pedagogy, and generative AI. This strategic sketch is intended as a way to “go beyond critique to imagine change, to experiment with possible solutions, and to further optimism and hope about the matters that concern us” (Toohey et al., 2020, p. 1). Shui’s experiences point us toward possibilities for relational pedagogies for writing futures, regardless of technological shifts.

Box 1

Strategic Sketch of Shui’s Situated Writing Practices

I was born and raised in [*country of birth*]. So English writing is never something that I practiced until I went ... to do my first masters.

And so it was a very, very tough year. And I remember one of my professor she pulled ... a lot of international students aside in one of like our gathering ... **She told me, and this has become my philosophy since ... don’t ever feel like because English is not your first language, so you’re not good enough**

And then when I got I did my second master’s degree and I was in a cultural studies program and I didn’t really fully understand that cultural studies program was under English Department ... I was the only international student in the class ... When I talk about something that is outside everyone’s comfort zone, for example, if I talk about something I learned from Taiwan or something that’s related to my research area, which people weren’t very comfortable to talk about, then the professor will start picking on my English.

So I learned that after a while, because at that time **I just was doubting myself a lot**. I was thinking that what’s wrong with my writing or my speaking? Why they are always talking about my English grammar or something. And I even did an experiment because there’s one specific professor every assignment I submit, the feedback would include that you need to improve your English. So I got really upset. And so for the final paper, I hired an English editor to edit all my grammar and structure, so my ideas was the same, but the edits are just due to copy editing so that I don’t have any grammar mistake, but I still received the feedback as your English needs to be better, so I sort of feel like that become just like a label maybe for the professor. They have a specific standard for people, how to write English or how that should be.

But I have to say that experience crushed my confidence for like two years. I wanted to do a PhD much earlier, but after that master's degree, I doubted myself for a very long time. I wasn't sure that if I could really do it because I remember that after receiving the feedback, I went to talk to the professor. I say that I really want to improve my grades. Is there any way that I can maybe submit another make up assignments because I want to apply to a PhD? And the professor was telling me that I don't think this is for you, like you shouldn't continue this path. So that was also really, really hard for me.

But then through all of these experiences, after I graduated, after I talked to other students, racialized students who also experienced similar things, **I understand that maybe that's not about me.** So I started receiving therapy as well. And then I just tried again with PhD application. And luckily, I was accepted to different schools as well. So these experiences made me understand how important it is to also have cultural awareness when I'm talking to students, because not everyone grew up the same as me.

Not everyone experiences literature or context or history same as everyone. So that's something that I always put in consideration when I'm tutoring students or when I'm teaching because I feel like that part is very important. And when people are talking about something that I don't understand doesn't mean that they have bad English. They can express themselves clearly. It's just that maybe it takes me a little bit more time to communicate with them, to understand that what they are really trying to express.

So I think that during our interview, I share a lot of the experience or stories related to students whose first language aren't English. And I think that maybe that's not all the case because a lot of students who are English writer or English speaker because they come to writing center as well. But ... it's the highlight of every time I teach. **I really help a lot of students who were not seen for a very long time because I really heard a lot of feedback for that, that students were sharing me, that they came to a writing center before, but then they were kind of like brush off or they feel even worse about themselves.** So I really wish that this can be something that would be changed in the future for every writing center. Like none of the students will be feeling like more upset than before they came in.

Having their voice and ideas dismissed, diminished, and punished was costly for Shui. They had their confidence "crushed" and experienced years of self-doubt. But these experiences also enabled them to relate to their students: "it's the highlight of every time" they taught. They connected to students' doubts, questions, and experiences of discrimination. It was through Shui's own connections to their community while being an international student that they realized they were "good enough" and that they weren't to blame for the racism and linguistic discrimination they experienced. For Shui, to be a writer and teacher of writing involved slowing down to "understand what they are really trying to express." Shui's pedagogical responses to their students was informed by their own experience of being unseen. They imagine futures where students won't feel "brushed off" or "even worse about themselves." Generative AI is now part of this landscape (Ott et al., forthcoming-a). This sketch invites educators, policymakers, learners, and users of generative AI to begin developing critical AI literacies, not as a set of skills to be mastered, but as a practice of seeing those "who were not seen for a very long time" (Shui). Shui's perspectives are echoed in

the “literacy desirings” (Gutshall Rucker & Kubly, 2020) of the other participants for their multilingual students to feel seen and heard in their writing.

“One of the things that scares me the most is removing voice from writing. I think it’s really important for people to have their own voice. And even if that is not the voice of the majority, that they’re still heard,” participant 10 said. These educators posed questions about how writers felt when they used generative AI and how it impacted their confidence and ability to see themselves in the writing: “Even being a good writer, it’s about being comfortable and gaining confidence in your own skills. Like who’s confident copying and pasting from ChatGPT? I don’t know” (P14). Shui acknowledged “Not everyone experiences literature or context or history same as everyone,” pointing to the colonial and racist systems that still exist for multilingual writers (Ghimire, 2025; Tajrobehkar, 2023; Toohey et al., 2020). In response to these systems, Shui and these other educators emphasized the value of relationally focused approaches to writing (see Table 2). Without this attention to connection, they wondered about how voices might be lost in this age of the machine.

These questions emerge from the pedagogical landscapes of multilingual educators (Ott et al., forthcoming-a). Their questions about generative AI were *relational* questions, not only skill questions. They wanted to know what this tool meant for themselves, their learners, their communities, and their worlds. Shui’s experiences and identity as a writer, their pedagogical practice, and their philosophy about the purposes of writing intersected with their world. Writing, for them, was not only a skill developed over time. It existed in relation to educational structures, their work in the world, their questions about themselves, and their hopes and dreams for community futures. Shui saw writing as a means of both seeing and erasing learners.

Generative AI does not exist in a vacuum. Multilingual educators recognized that fusion is needed to find a path forward but acknowledged that the way forward is unclear: “I don’t know just how to fuse these things and make new literature with that” (P6). What they do know is the importance of understanding literacies in context and in relation to the people they are working to support. It is the *human* they returned to, over and over again.

Discussion

In our conversations with multilingual educators, definitions of writers and writing shifted constantly. As a tool, as an art form, and as a means of connection, these purposes highlight hopeful visions and the realities of the systems where participants teach. The study question about what it means to be a writer cannot be answered with definitive statements. It is instead a space of wondering how writing moves with other socially embedded tools and practices. In imagining literacy futures, these futures now involve generative AI. The understanding of the deeply relational nature of writing shared by participants in this study suggests new questions about critical AI literacies. *What does it mean to be a user of AI? What are our purposes for AI?* There is no one definition, no one way of responding to these questions. What these educators point to, instead, is a need to be aware of the impact of our answers on our identities, communities, and world. Here we consider how a socially embedded and relationally focused approach to critical AI literacies might orient us to ask better questions for research and pedagogy.

Research Implications: Critical AI Literacies as Socially Situated Literacies

Previous research suggests that multilingual writers often shuttle back and forth between contexts, texts, and languages (Canagarajah, 2006), using their linguistic resources at every stage of the writing process to both scaffold and rhetorically enhance their writing (Velasco & García, 2014). In this study, participants’ writing literacies and pedagogies were related to their educational landscapes (Ott et al., forthcoming-a)

but also to larger systems of inequity dominated by monolingual and monocultural norms of writing (Canagarajah, 2006; Ghimire, 2025). Shui's experiences map how experiences of linguisticism can be experienced by multilingual educators and how it can shape their pedagogical practice. The connection between what it means to be a writer and the purposes of writing were ever shifting for these multilingual educators, aligning with social-practices understandings of literacy as contextually embedded and relational (Street, 2005, 2017). Olding (2019) and Tajrobehkar (2023) point to systemic relations of power in how multilingual writers are asked to assimilate into whiteness rather than having their unique identities celebrated. As generative AI emerges in a world where racism and linguisticism persist, this technology exists in relation to the world of inequities and injustice in which it is used (Ghimire, 2025; McKnight & Shipp, 2024). For the educators in our study, this resulted in tensions as they wondered about the implications of using generative AI in a world that demands linguistic perfection over the messiness of the creative process.

Critical AI literacies consider the skills learners need for their lives, but more importantly the worlds they exist within. For many of the educators in our study, a lack of knowledge and skills was not their most pressing problem with generative AI. Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) makes this observation that "racism is not an information problem alone" (p. 9). Similarly, theorists of AI literacy acknowledge that critical skills for using AI will require more than technological aptitude (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2023; Su & Yang, 2023). However, to view critical AI literacy as a set of standards for individual competency would miss the socially embedded nature of both generative AI and literacy practices. Research in critical AI literacies may benefit from moving beyond a functional skills and knowledge approach to addressing the systems, people, places, and materials that perpetuate damaging linguistic and racist paradigms. It is through acknowledging the socially embedded nature of AI literacies that learners and educators could be equipped to navigate the alluring promises of generative AI for their writing and teaching.

Pedagogical Implications: Critical AI Literacies as Relational Literacies

Shui saw teaching writing as a "growing journey" of getting to know learners *through* writing. Multilingual educators' questions and strategies for use of AI in their writing pedagogies were shaped more by their desires for connection than perfectly constructed products (P3, P7, P8, P11, P15). They saw writing not only as a skill to be learned but also as a process of vulnerability, thinking, and creativity (see Table 2). This vision of writing literacies has profound implications for critical AI literacies. Long & Magerko (2020) define AI literacy as "a set of competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies" (p. 2). There is no disagreement about the need for *critical* evaluation of generative AI, and there are a number of frameworks that discuss how this might be accomplished (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2021; Su & Yang, 2023). However, these frameworks start with skills and competencies rather than with people. What participants in our study highlight is the need for critical AI literacies that begin with and return to the human relationship at the centre of writing and teaching.

These multilingual educators had more questions than answers about the role of generative AI in writing pedagogies. Ghimire's (2025) 4P praxis provides a model for responding on an individual level to generative AI. Inspired by multilingual educators in this study, we offer an expansion on 4P praxis oriented to reflect on the socially and relationally embedded nature of AI literacies. We offer the questions in Table 3 as one way to continue centring critical AI literacies around the possibilities for human relationship.

These questions offer educators invitations to think with in connection to their communities, rather than a framework of skills and competencies to be applied across contexts. The answers to these questions are shaped by our literacy communities, technologies, desires, and fears.

Table 3
Relational 4P Praxis Questions

Pause	How is generative AI being used? How am I seeing the impacts of generative AI around me?
Ponder	What does the use of generative AI mean for me, my community, my learners, my world? How does my own use of generative AI retain my voice? How is it being guided by my intent?
Pose	In what ways is generative AI shaping me? How are my values and intent shaping my use of generative AI?
Prioritize	How can generative AI elevate the voices, experiences, needs, and desires of my community? Where can it not accomplish this?

Conclusion

“I’m deeply concerned. I’m hopeful,” (P13). This juxtaposition sums up the emotional core of how multilingual educators in our study felt about teaching writing in the age of generative AI. Their experiences reflect both possibilities and hopes, fears and doubts about the future. The relational entanglements, complications, and nuances in their experiences suggest the need to move beyond a fixed definition of AI literacy. Current understandings of AI literacy discuss it as a set of uniform skills. What the findings and discussion of this study emphasized is the importance of expanding definitions of critical AI literacies to consider the places, people, cultures, and languages in which the use of AI is situated. For researchers, this study foregrounded multilingual educators’ perspectives in constructing new theories of AI literacies and suggested new avenues for research which highlight the relations involved in making meaning with AI. For language and literacy educators, we have offered a set of questions for orienting teachers and learners to become critical users of generative AI in relation with their values, their purposes, and their communities.

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