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Memos and identity in language teacher education

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Abstract

Memos are a popular form of digitally mediated discourse that allow users to express thoughts and emotions, often leaving identity traces of their creators or sharers. This study uses the classroom activity Story by Memos as both a narrative tool for self-presentation in language teacher education and a method for exploring identity representation through memes created by preservice language teachers from two cohorts: the Pedagogy cohort (PC) and the Linguistics cohort (LC). By discursively and thematically analyzing 777 memes from 84 preservice teachers' stories, we capture identity configurations that shape their language learning and teaching dispositions across academic, professional, and personal contexts. Our findings reveal key differences between cohorts: the PC emphasizes language learning experiences, personal affinities, and a vocation for teaching, while the LC focuses on motivations to learn languages, teaching anxieties, and a pragmatic view of teaching as a career. Examining translingual and humorous meme configurations offers deeper insights into identity formation among preservice teachers. These findings suggest that integrating digital literacies like memes could complement traditional reflective journals as well as serve as diagnostic tools for identifying learner needs in both language learning and language teacher education.

Keywords: *Language Teacher Education; Language Teacher Identity; Preservice Language Teachers; Digital Literacy; Memes; Teacher Stories*

Language(s) Learned in This Study: *English, Spanish, Arabic, German, Translanguaged Variations*

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Introduction

Memos, as visual communication tools rich in semiotic, discursive, and rhetorical features (Yus, 2018; Wagener, 2024), have become central to digital communication, crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries. By blending images and text, memes enable the expression of ideas, humor, and emotions, establishing themselves as a prominent genre in digital media.

Memos contribute not only to language development but also to constructing and sharing the (digital) self. Lam (2000) was among the first to show how digital literacy practices help individuals negotiate identity and social positioning. From a postdigital perspective, which acknowledges the ongoing blend of online and offline realms, Gee (2024) notes that “[e]xperiences are made by sensations, feelings, and emotions and are inherently multimodal. To advance our understanding, we must study sensation, emotion, multimodality, and how humans assign meaning to their experiences more thoroughly” (p. 2). Sensations, emotions, and experiences collectively shape the self, and memes—with their adaptable yet pervasive role in digital communication—provide a powerful lens for understanding and reshaping individual and communal identities.

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This study positions memes as valuable tools for exploring identity formation in preservice language teachers. By incorporating meme creation into a teacher training activity, we examine how these digital practices support reflective practice and identity work, contributing to professional growth. Unlike studies that primarily use memes for language learning (Han & Smith, 2023; Pranoto & Kunci, 2020; Ugalingan et al., 2022), this research extends language teacher training by analyzing memes as vehicles for identity construction through the *Story by Memes* activity. This activity is a self-presentational story where preservice language teachers reflect on personal and professional identities within broader educational and societal contexts. To help structure their ideas and present their stories in an engaging and relatable way, they are prompted to make use of memes. The memes incorporated realizations of their past, present, and future identities within different domains (language learning experiences, idealized professional teacher identity, etc.).

Through this activity, we compiled a substantial corpus of memes from two cohorts, each representing distinct pathways to becoming a teacher in Spain (Eurydice, 2024). Secondary and post-secondary teachers typically follow a bachelor's in linguistics or literature, followed by a master's in language teaching, while primary education teachers qualify with a bachelor's in pedagogy specializing in language teaching. These differing educational paths reveal how preservice teachers express their identities through memes, highlighting the interplay between teacher education, personal experience, and digital literacies.

Given the significance of memes in identity representation and language learning, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How do memes reflect preservice language teachers' identities as learners and educators?

RQ2. What variations exist in identity portrayal among preservice language teachers from the pedagogy cohort and the linguistics cohort?

RQ3. What meaning-making resources do preservice language teachers use in memes to convey meaning?

Before exploring the instructional experience and data analysis, we will review the theoretical foundations and relevant literature, focusing on digital literacies, identity work, multimodality, and humor, along with their connections to memes.

Computer-Mediated Discourse, Digital Literacies, and Memes

In participatory digital culture (Beer & Burrows, 2010) and computer-mediated discourse (CMD) (Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015), digital literacies encompass cognitive, social, and cultural competencies beyond technical skills, as outlined by Darvin and Hafner (2022). For instance, digital literacies include engaging, in diverse ways, with digital artifacts like selfies (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018), tweets (Lomicka & Lord, 2012), and memes.

A meme is a multimodal form of communication that combines text, imagery, and cultural references, shared and reshaped through digital platforms to convey humor, critique, or information (Yus, 2018; Wagener, 2024). Originating from Dawkins' (2016) concept of self-replicating cultural units, memes have evolved into digital artifacts characterized by intentional creation, shared features, and widespread circulation and transformation online (Shifman, 2014). Wagener (2024) describes memes as hyper-narrative frames where multiple narratives, cultural markers, and identity indicators converge in a single multimodal unit, integrating visual, textual, and contextual layers that require digital literacy to decode (Yus, 2018). As such, memes serve as tools for identity formation, social bonding, and emotional expression, capturing complex ideas and fostering shared understanding in digital discourse (Han & Smith, 2023; Wagener, 2024). Through their hyper-narrative framing, memes enable identity negotiation, social critique, and cultural commentary within a single digital artifact.

In language education, memes offer opportunities to engage with authentic language, cultural nuances, and colloquialisms, fostering exploration of language, multimodal resources, and cultural contexts (Yus, 2018). Studies highlight their pedagogical value: Ugalingan et al. (2022) found that meme creation enhanced learners' understanding of argumentative fallacies, promoting multiliteracies and critical thinking. Similarly, Han and Smith (2023) introduced the concept of "learner-memers", showing how students in an intercultural Chinese language chat group used memes to support learning, facilitate semiotic exchanges, and encourage dialogic interactions, underscoring memes' role in language acquisition.

In language teacher education, memes also show promise. Frigolé et al. (2023) observed that using memes in English-L2 preservice teacher classrooms boosted engagement and participation through their creative, low-stakes nature. This aligns with Thorne and Reinhardt's (2013) call to integrate informal digital literacies into formal education, positioning memes as a bridge between learners' digital practices and language learning goals. While memes clearly support self-expression and cultural reflection (Han & Smith, 2023), research on their role in language teacher education, particularly from an identity perspective, remains limited.

Identity, Self-Positioning, and Memes as Hyper-Narrative Frames

Identity construction and negotiation are central to language learning and teaching, shaped by ideology, capital, and power dynamics, including those mediated through digital technologies, literacies, and discourses. As Darwin and Norton (2015) argue, identity is fluid and dynamic, continuously reshaped through social interactions and contextual factors, especially in digital spaces where learners navigate the interplay of ideology, capital, and power.

In this context, memes serve as mechanisms of investment (Darwin & Norton, 2015), enabling learners to engage with cultural and linguistic resources to assert, adapt, or challenge their identities within unequal digital landscapes. Through this engagement, individuals accrue symbolic and cultural capital, aligning their identity work with immediate social goals and long-term imagined identities. For example, an EFL learner encountering a meme captioned "When you finally understand the difference between 'present perfect' and 'past simple' after 10 years" might signal emotional and intellectual investment by liking, commenting, or sharing it. This interaction affirms membership in an online EFL learning community, where shared humor and cultural knowledge represent symbolic capital. By creating their own memes, learners or teachers can shape narratives around language education, exercising agency and revealing ideological tensions while aligning their identities with self-aware educational perspectives.

Gee's (2000) framework examines identity construction through four dimensions: (a) nature-identity, (b) institution-identity, (c) discourse-identity, and (d) affinity-identity. Nature-identity refers to inherent traits like shyness or artistic talent, but these require social validation to be recognized. For instance, a "natural storyteller" may excel in supportive classrooms but go unnoticed in rigid, performance-driven settings. Institution-identity stems from roles assigned by institutions, such as "honor roll student" or "experienced teacher," with institutional authority defining and legitimizing these roles. Discourse-identity arises from social recognition in interactions, where confident communication might position a student as a group leader, while others may be labeled as "non-readers" for favoring comics over traditional texts (Aliagas et al., 2009). Affinity-identity emerges from voluntary participation in shared practices, such as identifying as "gamers" through active engagement in YouTube gameplay streaming, promoting minoritized languages and learning English via social media (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2020). These identities interact dynamically, shaping perceptions and influencing how individuals navigate social, academic, and professional spaces. They also become sites of projection, commentary, or critique through digital artifacts like memes (Yus, 2018; Wagener, 2024). With their multimodal and participatory nature, memes amplify identity dynamics, providing spaces to assert, challenge, or reframe identities within broader sociocultural discourses.

Identity is inherently interactionist, emerging through social interactions where individuals are continuously positioned and repositioned by themselves and others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Positioning statements act as linguistic or semiotic markers, shaping self-perception and social interactions. Fong et al. (2016) examined explicit and implicit positioning in computer-mediated discourse (CMD) among ESOL students. Explicit positioning directly states roles or abilities (e.g., “I am good at grammar”), while implicit positioning relies on contextual cues or behaviors (e.g., a teacher’s nod signaling competence during confident participation). Beyond digital spaces, Wortham (2004) highlights the role of positioning in face-to-face classroom interactions. Negative statements (e.g., “I’m not good at writing”) can reinforce oppositional identities, while positive ones (e.g., “I love writing stories!”) affirm capable and motivated learner identities.

Positioning aligns with Gee’s (2000) identity framework, particularly discourse-identity and affinity-identity, where identity emerges from recognition within discourse communities and membership in shared practices and goals. For instance, a student consistently positioned as “quiet” may internalize this label, even if they have strong rhetorical skills, and may avoid oral participation in class. Additionally, institution-identity intersects with positioning when institutional roles (e.g., “ESOL student” or “native language teacher”) are reinforced or contested through classroom discourse.

Varghese et al. (2005) extend the discussion of language teacher identity with the concept of Image-Text, exploring how visual and textual elements interact to shape professional identity. For example, a teacher’s attire, classroom decor, and teaching materials (the image component) combine with written documentation and professional communications (the text component) to create a cohesive professional identity. Similarly, memes act as contemporary Image-Text artifacts, blending visual and textual elements to construct, negotiate, and project identities in digital spaces.

For preservice teachers, memes enable both explicit and implicit positioning, allowing them to express personal stances, signal group belonging, and define professional roles through humor, cultural references, and multimodal cues. Acting as compressed “sites of engagement” (Dooly, 2017, p. 195), memes encapsulate participant histories and insights within a single artifact. Wagener’s (2024) concept of hyper-narrative frames illustrates how memes integrate multiple narratives, cultural markers, and identity indicators into one cohesive frame. This convergence enriches identity work and meaning-making, with humor serving as a key feature of paradigmatic memes.

In essence, identity work—mediated through digital artifacts like memes—reflects a dynamic interplay of investment, positioning, and multimodal meaning-making, offering a unique lens to understand how individuals assert, negotiate, and redefine their roles in educational and social contexts.

Humor and Memes

Humor plays a crucial role in multimodal communication, particularly in memes. Song et al. (2021) suggest that humor in CMD helps negotiate power dynamics and navigate institutional constraints, especially in digital learning environments. This negotiation aligns with identity work, involving the “social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). In language education, humor enables preservice teachers to critique pedagogical practices, challenge institutional roles, and position themselves within educational discourse in playful yet subversive ways.

As humorous artifacts, memes offer a platform to reframe traditional educational practices. For example, a meme critiquing grammar instruction humorously questions the authority of conventional methods, positioning the teacher as an active participant in language education discussions (Gee, 2000). This linguistic and semiotic play, facilitated by the humor and multimodality of memes, supports preservice teachers in navigating tensions between their multiple identities (see [Findings](#) and [Discussion](#)).

Methods

Drawing on short stories (Barkhuizen, 2016) for analyzing language teachers' identities and learners' needs (Macalister, 2012), our introductory lesson in language teacher education courses incorporates the *Story by Memes* activity for multimodal storytelling.

The *Story by Memes* activity is a first-lesson activity where students are tasked to produce a 3-to-5-minute self-presentational multimodal story. The resulting story integrates reflective narratives about participants' language learning and teaching experiences and identities across past, present, and future contexts. The story is complemented and exemplified by memes created or selected by participants.

Pedagogically, the task serves two main purposes:

1. *Creative icebreaker*: As a first lesson activity, it offers a creative alternative to traditional icebreakers, fostering student reflection, participation, and engagement (Anderson et al., 2011). Through meme creation, students interact in a low-stakes environment, encouraging openness and collaborative discussion while aligning with course objectives, such as promoting digital literacies and self-reflection on language pedagogy (see [Contexts and Participants](#)).
2. *Diagnostic tool*: The activity acts as a covert diagnostic tool, enabling instructors to analyze students' memes and narratives for insights into their knowledge, challenges, and beliefs about teaching. This diagnostic approach helps identify areas for growth, allowing instructors to tailor future lessons to address specific needs while maintaining student engagement through an accessible and non-threatening format.

Contexts and Participants

In 2023, participants were required to create and share their meme-aided stories as part of the *Story by Memes* activity. This activity was implemented in two language teacher education courses in a university in Spain ([Table 1](#)).

Table 1

Cohorts and Participants

Cohort	Participants	Program details	Target group	Educational background	Years completed
Pedagogy cohort (PC)	37	Four-year Primary Education degree specializing in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)	Children aged 6-11	General pedagogy, with 15-20% of coursework focused on English language pedagogy for primary education	3.5 years (undergrad)
Linguistics cohort (LC)	47	One-year master's program in Language Education targeting	Secondary education students, aged 12+	Strong backgrounds in linguistics and literature; completed one term of general pedagogy during their master's	4 years (undergrad) + 1 term (master's)

With 84 stories, this dual-cohort structure allows comparisons between the perspectives and pedagogical identities of preservice language teachers across different academic backgrounds and instructional levels of pedagogy training (primary vs. secondary).

Procedure, Prompt, and Materials

The first author taught both PC and LC cohorts, drawing on his successful use of memes during remote teaching in the COVID-19 pandemic to foster participation. In this engaging first-lesson activity, preservice language teachers were prompted to introduce themselves creatively to their peers and instructor through memes and storytelling, while reflecting on their language learning and teaching identities.

The *Story by Memes* activity followed a seven-step pedagogical process: (1) introducing learning outcomes and modeling, (2) brainstorming, (3) organizing ideas and creating memes, (4) elaborating idea-meme pairs and composing a script, (5) revising and practicing narration, (6) preparing a slide-like presentation with video narration, and (7) debriefing and reflecting. This structure ensured participants were effectively onboarded into meme creation and storytelling.

During brainstorming, prompts such as “*What type of language learner have I been?*”, “*How was my language learning process?*”, and “*What type of language teacher do I wish to become?*” guided participants’ reflections. However, they retained freedom in composing their stories, with the primary goal being self-presentation through a multimodal narrative using memes.

These reflections were then transformed into a storyboard, pairing each concept with a meme to visually and humorously represent key moments, reflections, or aspirations in their language learning and teaching journeys. With basic guidelines on meme generators, students could create new or adapt existing memes. As Spanish university students already possessed baseline digital literacy, no additional technical training was required.

This introductory task included one hour of in-class preparation and time for home editing. While ungraded, the instructor provided feedback and facilitated class discussions on selected stories. An initial analysis of the memes highlighted their diagnostic potential for understanding student needs, informing future lessons, and offering insights into preservice language teacher identity. Detailed pedagogical instructions for *Story by Memes* are available in Vazquez-Calvo and York (2024).

Final Corpus

Based on the memes used in the stories, we were able to build a considerable corpus of student-generated memes (Table 2).

Table 2

Corpus of Memes (Total, Median)

	PC	LC	Total
Participants and no. of stories	37	47	84
Memes produced (Σ)	348	429	777
Memes produced (%)	44.79	55.21	100
Memes produced (Mdn.)	8	8	8

Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study was the memes embedded within each story produced by participants during the *Story by Memes* activity. Each meme was analyzed not in isolation but in relation to its accompanying narrative context, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of identity-related issues expressed by participants. The data analysis was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1. Data familiarization; decodification and inferential analysis of memes. We applied Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze memes, examining communication and discourse within digital literacies and treating memes as multimodal representations of “playfully framed social identities” (Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015, p. 140).

Within CDA, various approaches to meme analysis exist (Yus, 2018; Wagener, 2024). Wagener (2024) emphasizes memes’ multimodal and contextual elements, focusing on how cultural references, semiotic design, and social contexts shape their communicative value in political commentary. In contrast, Yus (2018) examines how meme communication impacts user identity, highlighting the processes of encoding, decoding, inferring, and negotiating meaning to shape self-concept and identity. We adopted Yus’s four-step inductive framework for its user-centered, identity-focused approach, aligning with our goal of exploring how memes enable preservice language teachers to express their identities. Following Yus’s “decode and infer” analytical framework (2018, p. 121), we analyzed each meme’s verbal and visual explicatures and implicatures.

1. Verbal explicatures: the text on the image.
2. Visual explicatures: the visible elements in the image.
3. Verbal implicatures: implied connotations suggested by the text.
4. Visual implicatures: additional meanings implied by the images.

As the memes are embedded in video-based self-presentational stories, we reviewed each participant’s video/story to better interpret implicatures, adding a fifth step to our analysis (Table 3). *Story by Memes* aligns with the idea that narratives effectively convey language teachers’ identities (Barkhuizen, 2016), with a unique twist: these narratives are shaped by participants’ meme choices. Given memes’ context-dependent nature, the “decode and infer” analysis was crucial before thematic categorization. This process is illustrated below using a sample meme (Figure 1, Table 3).

Figure 1

Meme to Illustrate the Analysis (Meme 1, Participant 1, LC)



Table 3*5-Step Procedure to Decode and Infer the Meaning of Memes*

Step	Procedure	Explanation	Categorization
1. Verbal explicature	Examine meme text for literal meaning and cultural nuances.	Verbatim text: “I’m going on an adventure!”	
2. Visual explicature	Decode visual elements, identify explicit meanings or references.	A hobbit from Lord of the Rings sets off, as if in a trip or quest.	
3. Verbal implicature	Analyze text for implied meanings, using cultural references.	Studying something new is considered an adventure.	Upon the five steps, the final analytical statement was coded on the basis of meme-emergent identity-related issues, in this case, “Language Learning Experience” as the student recalls her initial steps as a language learner (Appendix A).
4. Visual implicature	Interpret visual content for suggested meanings or subtle connotations.	Enthusiasm for traveling or something new.	
5. Interpretation-yielding combinations of visual-verbal implicatures	Assess interaction between text and visuals for unique, contextual meanings. Reassess meanings based on the video-based composition stories produced by participants.	In the video narration while showcasing the meme in Figure 1, the participant states: “Hello there, I’m Gema, and I’m going to tell you about my journey as an English student and how I became an English teacher-to-be thanks to a boy band.” Reassessment: Experiencing English learning as a journey/process.	

Phase 2. Coding and thematic analysis. Following data familiarization, meme decodification, and inferential analysis, we conducted an inductive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) to identify patterns and themes emerging directly from participants’ memes and stories. The coding process was data-driven, allowing themes to arise organically from the data without preexisting codes or frameworks.

In phases 1 and 2, two researchers independently analyzed the dataset, performing meme decodification, inferential analysis, and assigning categories and themes. A Cohen’s kappa coefficient ($\kappa = 0.81$) indicated strong inter-rater reliability, ensuring consistency in theme and category assignment. Discrepancies were resolved through discussions with a third researcher as adjudicator, mitigating intersubjectivity and ensuring themes accurately summarized the data (Braun et al., 2019). After resolving discrepancies, seven broader themes and 22 categories were identified (Appendix A), with further insights detailed in Findings.

The categories and themes that emerged from this process allowed us to map the domains where the evolving identities of preservice language educators, their experiences with language learning, and their reflections on language teaching developed. We acknowledge that the themes align with Braun et al.’s (2019, p. 846) concept of a “domain summary conceptualization,” which operates at a semantic level to

outline broad thematic patterns, which is often applied to large datasets such as the one presented here. However, we offset this limitation by providing a more interpretative analysis of the findings and cases selected for illustration.

Phase 3. *Quantification of qualitative data.* To assess significant differences in meme category counts between the PC and LC cohorts, we conducted chi-square tests and checked for effect size (Cramér's V) using PSPP (Free Software Foundation, 2024). This analysis compared each cohort's observed meme contributions to expected counts, identifying prevalent themes within each group, likely influenced by educational backgrounds. This quantitative approach had two main goals: (a) to provide a broader numerical overview of the corpus, and (b) to inform our qualitative analysis in selecting representative cases ([Findings](#)). It complements our thematic analysis, serving as “a translator of those speaking the language of qualitative analysis and those speaking the language of quantitative analysis” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii).

Ethics

We followed ethical guidelines by informing participants about the study's purpose, methods, and potential publication, obtaining their consent, and allowing withdrawal at any time. Some participants chose to keep their stories and memes private; these were analyzed but not reported. All data was confidential, anonymized, and handled with care to minimize harm and respect participants' rights (Ethical Committee of the University of Málaga approval document number: 113-2022-H).

Findings

Our discursive and thematic analysis of memes provides a detailed portrayal of pre-service language educators' identities across three key dimensions: (a) language learning and teaching, (2) personal, academic, and professional life, and (c) meme pragmatics. Where relevant, we highlight distinctions between the Pedagogy Cohort (PC), with a stronger pedagogical foundation, and the Linguistics Cohort (LC), with a deeper linguistic and literary background. First, we provide a numerical overview of the corpus.

Numerical Overview

[Table 2](#) presents the corpus of 777 memes, distributed between the Pedagogy Cohort (PC) with 348 memes (44.79%) and the Linguistics Cohort (LC) with 429 memes (55.21%). Double-coding was employed to capture the semantic richness and thematic overlap of the memes, revealing key patterns that articulate preservice teachers' identities and experiences.

To analyze differences in meme category distributions across cohorts, chi-square tests were conducted using PSPP. This non-parametric test was suitable for the categorical nature of the data (theme categories, [Appendix A](#)). Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed violations of normality (PC: $W = 0.847$, $p = 0.0031$; LC: $W = 0.836$, $p < 0.0019$), further supporting the use of chi-square. Cramér's V was calculated to measure effect size, with values interpreted as small (0.1), medium (0.3), or large (0.5) following Cohen's benchmarks (2013). Including effect size ensured findings were evaluated for both statistical significance and practical relevance, offering a nuanced understanding of cohort differences. [Table 4](#) presents the analyses:

Table 4

Chi-Square Analysis of Meme Category Counts between Pedagogy and Linguistics Cohorts, Including Effect Sizes (Cramér's V)

	Category	PC		LC		Chi-square	p-value	Significance ($p < 0.05$)	Cramér's V	Effect size
		n	%	n	%					
Story-by-Memes Etiquette	Introduction	9	2.45	6	1.11	0.1	0.7513	Not Significant		
	Farewell	1	0.27	5	0.92	0.73	0.3927	Not Significant		
Language learning	LL strategies	13	3.54	6	1.11	1.08	0.2992	Not significant		
	LL difficulties	6	1.63	4	0.74	0.02	0.8971	Not significant		
	LL motivation/goals	23	6.27	49	9.06	5.64	0.0176	Significant	0.165	Small
	LL experiences	59	16.08	47	8.69	0.69	0.4047	Not significant		
Language teaching	LT experiences	10	2.72	62	11.46	25.07	0.0	Significant	0.549	Large
	LT methods	23	6.27	28	5.18	0.16	0.6889	Not significant		
	Digital LT	13	3.54	39	7.21	7.92	0.0049	Significant	0.303	Medium
Academic life	University experiences	29	7.9	61	11.28	6.99	0.0082	Significant	0.164	Small
	Learning experiences	20	5.45	10	1.85	1.63	0.2023	Not significant		
Personal life	Personality traits	26	7.08	96	17.74	26.61	0.0	Significant	0.41	Medium
	Family	6	1.63	5	0.92	0.0	1.0	Not significant		
	Affinity/hobbies	29	7.9	9	1.66	6.2	0.0128	Significant	0.275	Small
	Travel experience	12	3.27	27	4.99	3.17	0.0751	Not significant		
	Life experiences	23	6.27	1	0.18	12.88	0.0003	Significant	0.446	Medium
	Feelings	9	2.45	9	1.66	0.0	1.0	Not significant		
	Role model	15	4.09	23	4.25	0.74	0.3881	Not significant		
Professional life	Professional dimension	15	4.09	49	9.06	11.36	0.0008	Significant	0.294	Medium
	Vocation	17	4.63	4	0.74	4.39	0.0363	Significant	0.228	Small
Other	Teacher stereotypes	3	0.82	1	0.18	0.04	836	Not significant		
	Miscellaneous	6	1.63	0	0.0	2.53	0.1116	Not significant		
		367	100	541	100					

In the Language Learning Motivation/Goals category ($p = 0.0176$, Cramér's $V = 0.165$, small effect), LC participants contributed more memes reflecting goal-oriented approaches and self-regulated learning intentions. Although statistically significant, the small effect size suggests a subtle difference rather than a dominant distinction. The Language Teaching Experiences category ($p = 0.000$, Cramér's $V = 0.549$, large effect) shows a strong difference, with LC participants highlighting teaching struggles, limited pedagogical training, and humor-driven coping mechanisms. These memes often expressed insecurity and frustration in connecting theory with practice, reflecting concerns about teaching preparedness. In the Digital Language Teaching category ($p = 0.0049$, Cramér's $V = 0.303$, medium effect), LC participants contributed significantly more memes, frequently referencing digital tools, online resources, and technology integration. This suggests greater digital literacy and reliance on technological resources

among LC participants.

In the Language Learning Motivation/Goals category ($p = 0.0176$, Cramér's $V = 0.165$, small effect), LC participants shared more memes reflecting goal-oriented and self-regulated learning, though the small effect indicates a subtle difference. The Language Teaching Experiences category ($p = 0.000$, Cramér's $V = 0.549$, large effect) showed strong differences, with LC participants highlighting teaching struggles, limited training, and humor-driven coping mechanisms, reflecting insecurity and frustration with teaching preparedness. In the Digital Language Teaching category ($p = 0.0049$, Cramér's $V = 0.303$, medium effect), LC participants contributed more memes referencing digital tools, resources, and technology integration, suggesting greater digital literacy.

For University Experiences ($p = 0.0082$, Cramér's $V = 0.164$, small effect), LC participants addressed academic challenges and institutional constraints, though differences were modest. The Personality Traits category ($p = 0.000$, Cramér's $V = 0.410$, medium effect) revealed LC participants connecting language learning to affective traits like shyness and emotional self-awareness, often humorously. Conversely, PC participants had stronger representation in the Affinity/Hobbies category ($p = 0.0128$, Cramér's $V = 0.275$, small effect), tying language learning to personal interests like pop culture and song lyrics, reflecting intrinsic motivation.

The Life Experiences category ($p = 0.0003$, Cramér's $V = 0.446$, medium effect) was more prominent among PC participants, with memes tied to transformative life events and personal narratives. In the Professional Dimension category ($p = 0.0008$, Cramér's $V = 0.294$, medium effect), LC participants emphasized professional identity, teaching preparedness, and career reflections. However, PC participants exhibited slightly higher representation in the Vocation category ($p = 0.0363$, Cramér's $V = 0.228$, small effect), portraying teaching as a calling and reflecting intrinsic passion.

While some categories show statistically significant differences, effect sizes indicate most differences are subtle or moderate, except for Language Teaching Experiences. This underscores the importance of the qualitative analysis (see [Discussion](#)) to capture the nuanced ways memes represent preservice language teachers' identities and experiences.

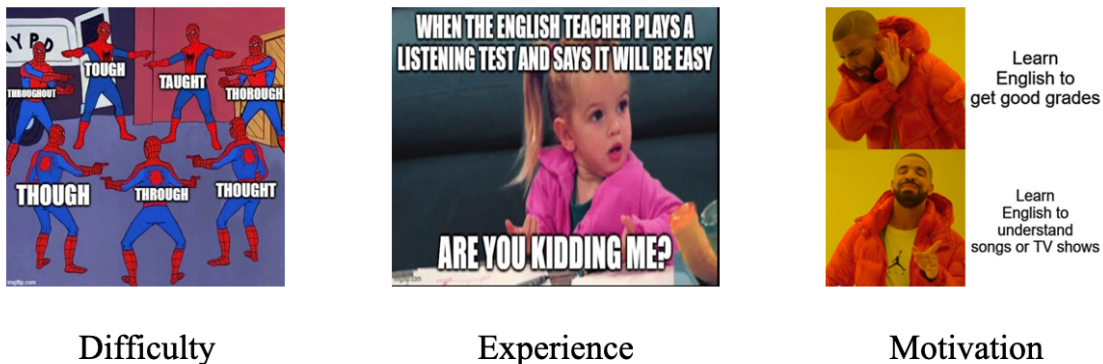
Language Learning and Teaching

[Table 4](#) shows that over 40% of the corpus focuses on language learning and teaching, particularly in the categories of Language Learning Motivations and Goals, Language Learning Experiences, and Language Teaching Methods. Participants 17 (PC) and 32 (LC) were selected for in-depth analysis due to the richness and clarity of their memetic narratives, which reflect both shared and cohort-specific experiences.

Regarding language learning, participants reported difficulties, strategies, motivations, goals, and overall experiences. Participant 17 from the PC navigates most of these categories in illuminating ways ([Figure 2](#)):

Figure 2

PC Participant 17's Memes on Language Learning Difficulties, Experiences, and Motivations



Difficulty

Experience

Motivation

In Figure 2, this preservice language teacher illustrates past and present difficulties, experiences, and motivations in English language learning. The left meme, featuring phonetically similar words (“though,” “through,” etc.), highlights the linguistic challenges, especially with English pronunciation and spelling. The center meme, featuring a child’s shocked expression during an “easy” listening test, highlights the complexity of language comprehension and the challenge of setting appropriately difficult tasks. It reflects students’ emotional responses when expectations misalign with task demands. This dynamic echoes Wortham’s (2004) insights on classroom interactions, where teachers may position students as engaged participants or oppositional forces. Labeling tasks as “easy” or “complex” can unintentionally amplify feelings of inadequacy among struggling students, reinforcing a power dynamic where teachers hold authority, and students may feel deficient as learners. However, the surprised expression and the phrase “Are you kidding me?” introduce humor as an equalizer, softening the hierarchical divide and diffusing tension, while fostering a connection between teachers and students. Although the meme does not show explicit positioning, it demonstrates implicit positioning through the framing of task difficulty.

The right meme reflects dual, conflicting motivations: the desire for good grades (extrinsic motivation) and understanding English-language songs or TV shows (intrinsic motivation). By integrating relevant, interest-based content, such as popular culture, teachers can align curricular goals with students’ personal interests fueling intrinsic, durable motivation. This approach supports the development of affinity identities (Gee, 2000, 2005), driven by personal interests in music, media, or shared activities, which often serve as gateways to different types of language learning engagement.

Similarly, regarding language teaching, Participant 32 from the LC reflects on experiences and envisioned challenges of language teaching.

Figure 3

LC Participant 32's Memes on Language Teaching Methodology, Experiences, and the Digitally Mediated Dimension of Language Learning and Teaching



Methodology



Experiences

Digitally mediated
language teaching
and learning**Transcription:**

Cyborg: “My dynamic ass trying to be innovative and incorporate technology in class”
Girl: “My students tired AF of me”

The left meme, captioned “I have no idea what I’m doing,” reflects the uncertainty preservice language educators experience, particularly those with strong linguistic backgrounds but limited pedagogical training, as seen in the LC Master’s cohort. This cohort’s deep knowledge of linguistics is often not matched by sufficient instruction in language pedagogy, making their two terms of pedagogical training potentially inadequate to meet the demands of teaching practice.

The center meme shows an older person struggling with a computer, captioned “How I feel when I interact with a group of teenagers.” This reflects the Master’s students’ sense of a generational divide, highlighting challenges in engaging with younger learners and staying updated with digital literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2014).

The right meme depicts a cartoon figure weighed down by technology, illustrating the effort to integrate technology in the classroom and the mixed reception from students. It underscores the misconception that innovation solely involves technology use, while true innovation involves adapting pedagogical practices to better meet students’ needs in engaging and meaningful ways.




Two primary overarching themes emerge from memes in [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#): *first*, perceived inadequacies in teacher training; and *second*, the use of self-deprecation as a coping mechanism to reframe identity. Chun (2019) advocates for comprehensive teacher education in Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) that goes beyond basic tool familiarity to build true pedagogical competence, directly addressing the challenges shown in the memes where preservice teachers feel unprepared and equate technology use with innovation. This critique aligns with Tocci et al. (2019) and highlights the need for deeper discussions on genuine pedagogical innovation. The second issue, self-deprecating humor, serves as a coping tool, allowing preservice teachers to manage institutional expectations and reflect on their struggles (Song et al., 2021). These memes thus not only expose gaps in training but also offer insights into identity negotiation and the pressures within teacher education. The visual narratives in [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#) illustrate that language education is inherently social and emotional, often mediated by technology, underscoring the importance of professional development that addresses diverse student needs, adaptive teaching strategies, and the evolving digital landscape to support both educators and learners.

Academic, Professional, and Private Life

Understanding preservice language educators requires examining their individual differences, academic paths, and aspirations. This study found that cohort differences were influenced more by vocational goals and alignment with university expectations than by views on language learning and teaching (Table 4). Memes captured both shared and cohort-specific patterns aligned with key themes.

Figure 4

Examples from University Experiences in Both Cohorts

Pedagogy Cohort		Linguistics Cohort	
<p>Studying an English major to be an english teacher</p> 	<p>Realizing it's not about One Direction</p> 		<p>Transcription:</p> <p>Drowning boy: “Realizing how hard it is to deal with teenagers”</p> <p>Happy girl: “The idea of having personal and economic stability as a teacher”</p> <p>Woman: “Thinking the Master’s degree will be easygoing”</p> <p>Skeleton: “Teachers overwhelming me with tasks and new laws”]</p>
<p>Mismatch between affinities and curricular content</p>		<p>The promise of stability versus the endurance of the Master’s degree</p>	

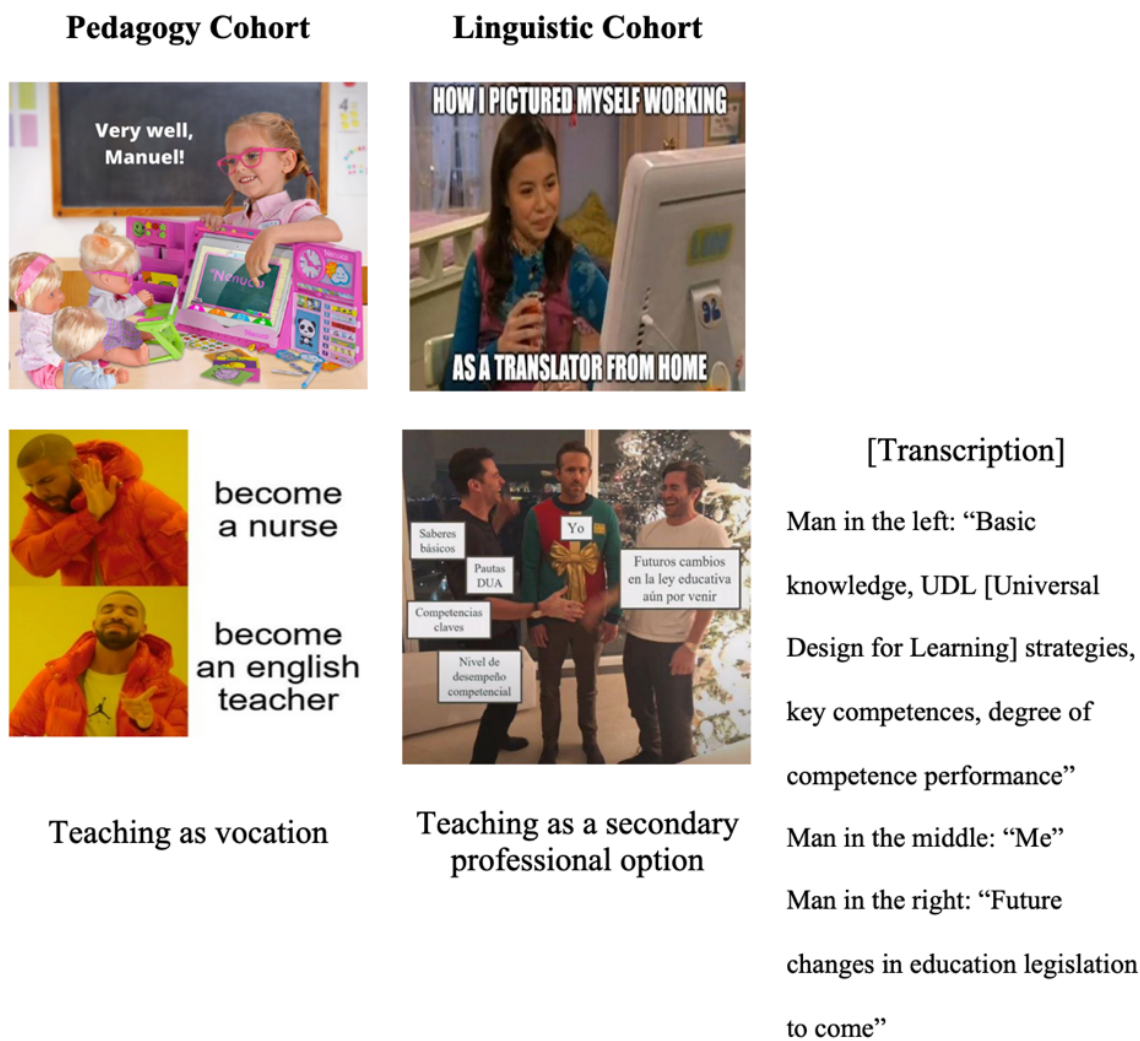
In Figure 4, the meme from the PC cohort expresses frustration with a disconnect between personal interests, such as pop culture influences like One Direction, and the standardized curriculum. This suggests that some career choices are driven more by affinities than by a commitment to teaching English or meeting institutional expectations. In contrast, LC students face intense academic pressures in their master’s program, balancing demanding workloads with the anticipated stability of a teaching career. Their memes reflect struggles with academic demands, often leading to exhaustion and burnout.

The Academic Life category captures varied influences—from social interactions to curriculum engagement—that shape preservice teachers’ professional identities. Comparing PC and LC narratives highlights these dynamics: PC students grapple with aligning personal interests with academic expectations, while LC students take a more pragmatic approach, viewing teaching as a stable career despite the rigorous training. This analysis reveals the complex motivations and identity negotiations in preservice teachers’ academic journeys, shaped by mismatches between personal expectations and curricular realities.

Despite challenges within their programs, students continue, motivated by the prospect of economic stability and job security after graduation. Though not universal, their memes reveal underlying themes of cultural identity, a sense of disconnect, and critiques of their teacher education programs. Through these meme narratives, we gain insight into how aspiring language teachers shape their professional identities while navigating practical career considerations. Their motivations—whether explicit or implied—reflect the complex interplay of personal, professional, and economic factors influencing their paths toward teaching.

Figure 5

Examples from Professional Life in Both Cohorts



Participants from the PC and LC cohorts demonstrate contrasting vocational perspectives (Figure 5). PC students often view teaching as a calling, driven by a strong commitment to education and shaping future generations, with little interest in alternative careers, reflecting a core identity centered on the educator role. In contrast, LC students take a more pragmatic view, often seeing teaching as a fallback option amid limited opportunities in fields like freelance translation. For LC participants, external factors such as job market constraints and educational policies shape a more complex, sometimes reluctant, engagement with the profession. Figure 5 illustrates these differences, contrasting the intrinsic motivations of PC students

with the adaptive, pragmatic outlook of the LC group, highlighting the diverse factors influencing their career choices.

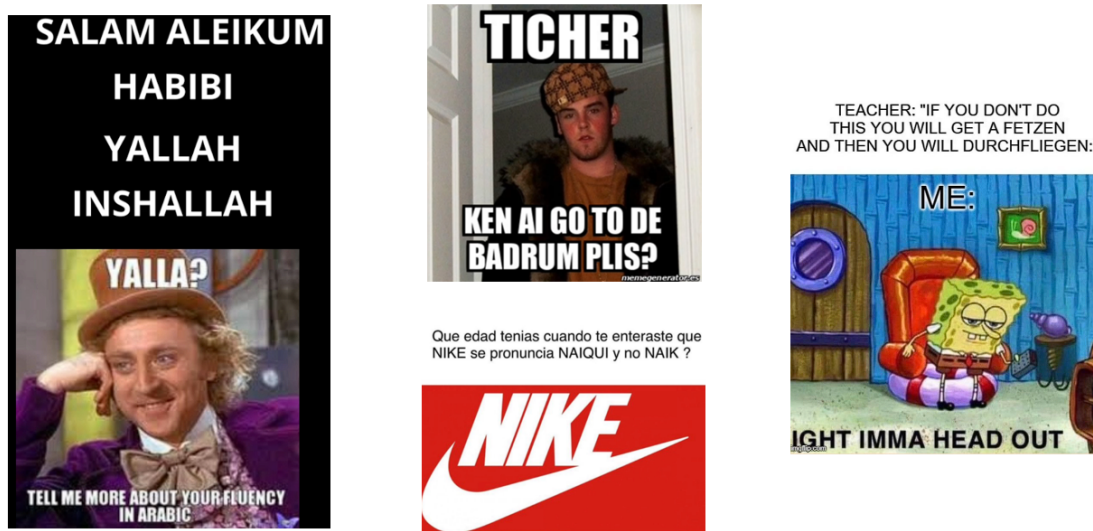
The *Story by Memes* activity acts as a covert needs analysis, revealing cohort differences with implications for language teacher education. These findings suggest a need to reassess curriculum content, incorporate targeted guidance and support, and raise awareness of the socioeconomic challenges facing future language teachers. Addressing these aspects could enhance program relevance and responsiveness, which will be further explored in the [Discussion](#).

Meme Pragmatics for Identity Representation

Analyzing memes to depict preservice language teachers' identities reveals their use of popular formats (e.g., distracted boyfriend, LOLcats, Kombucha girl) rather than self-created ones, reflecting adherence to established meme norms and authentic usage. This conventional meme literacy enabled participants to express their identities within a familiar framework. Linguistically, a key strategy was multilingual and translingual language play, blending languages beyond English and Spanish, such as Russian, Arabic, German, and Spanglish, with 50 memes employing these strategies. This linguistic creativity showcases participants' plurilingual identities, cultural awareness, and stylistic sophistication ([Figure 6](#)).

Figure 6

Examples of Multilingual and Translingual Memes



Arabic language phrases meme English-Spanish interference memes SpongeBob as a German language learner meme

The memes in [Figure 6](#) showcase language remixing and translanguaging, blending Romanized Arabic, Spanglish, phonetic English transcriptions, and informal English and German. These choices reflect the creators' linguistic sophistication, cultural insight, and identity markers, while also highlighting their plurilingual competence—understood as “the ability to call flexibly upon an interrelated, uneven, plurilinguistic repertoire” to bring “the whole of one’s linguistic equipment into play, experimenting with alternative forms of expression” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30).

The Arabic-language-phrases meme uses common Arabic greetings to ironically question the creator's fluency. The teacher-student, a Spanish national of Palestinian descent, often faces stereotypes that she must speak Arabic as her L1 based on her appearance, despite her limited proficiency, as suggested by details shared in her story. Her story and meme highlight how narrow views linking ethnicity and language can affect perceptions of inclusion and belonging, and connecting with the identity of heritage translingual (Kiernan, 2018).

The English-Spanish-interference memes highlight common mistakes in English learning. One meme shows a Spanish-like pronunciation of brands (e.g., realizing Nike is pronounced /'naiki/ instead of /naik/), while another 'mocks' teacher misconceptions about Spanish-speaking students' abilities using exaggerated phonetic spelling. These memes underscore the complexity of language learning and insists on the notion that some participants may view themselves and others as deficient learners (see also [Figure 2](#)), which could lead to an overemphasis on pronunciation accuracy and contribute to accentism in their future teaching roles.

The SpongeBob-as-a-German-language-learner meme humorously depicts a student's desire to escape a difficult German class. The teacher mixes English and informal German, saying, "If you don't do this, you'll get a bad grade [Fetzen] and then you will fail [durchfliegen]." SpongeBob, representing the student, responds with "Ight Imma head out," expressing demotivation. This meme highlights the power of discourse in shaping learner motivation, reflecting studies like Wortham's (2004) and Fong et al.'s (2016) on how teacher-, peer-, and self-positioning influence learners' roles and self-perceptions.

The multilingual and translingual memes created by preservice language teachers offer insight into their identity expression and negotiation, echoing Cenoz and Gorter's (2020) assertion that "[m]ultilingual speakers can be more effective learners and users of a target language if they are allowed to use resources from their whole linguistic repertoire" (p. 304). These memes capture fluid, evolving identities by integrating cultural experiences, addressing stereotypes, and embracing plurilingual identities. They reflect the complex linguistic repertoires that teachers bring to their practice, aligning with plurilingual competence frameworks (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Council of Europe, 2020). Additionally, they highlight the gap between student expectations and the realities of language acquisition, underscoring educators' influence on motivation. In the *Story by Memes* activity, these memes sparked discussions on multilingualism, plurilingualism, and translanguaging, linking informal communication practices with formal pedagogical approaches.

Discussion

Organized by three overarching themes responding to the RQs, the discussion of findings explicates how (a) memes serve as tools for identity negotiation and community affiliation (RQ1), (b) illustrate variations in identity portrayal and humor as a coping mechanism (RQ2, RQ3), and (c) function as hyper-narrative frames to convey complex meanings (RQ3). Together, these lines of discussion highlight the potential of memes to reflect both individual and collective experiences taking stock from the microanalysis conducted while contextualizing findings within broader sociocultural dimensions.

Identity negotiation and community affiliation (RQ1). Memes allow preservice teachers to navigate challenges in language learning and teacher training, providing "instant access to rich frames that are central to emerging meaning" (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017, p. 568) within social communities. This study prompted preservice language educators to become 'learner-memes' as part of a self-presentational story framework. The findings show that memes serve a dual purpose: they enable individual identity negotiation while connecting participants with shared discourses in language learning and professional teaching communities. Memes helped preservice teachers express both individual identities as language learners and a professional affiliation as future educators, aligning with Gee's (2000, 2005) concept of affinity identities, where shared interests create a sense of belonging. Humor-laden memes from the LC cohort reveal internal conflicts in aligning personal and professional identities as language teachers, while

PC cohort memes reflect affinity-driven motivations and insecurities as language learners (Figure 2). Deepening in subtle critiques, LC memes often include subtle, satirical critiques of professional identity, knowledge gaps, generational differences hiding classroom management fears, and skepticism toward pedagogical innovation as mere tool substitution (Figure 3) (Tocci et al., 2019). These memes expose a hidden curriculum where students acknowledge the challenges of applying theoretical knowledge, exacerbated by bureaucratic expectations in Spanish secondary education (Figure 5). This highlights how structural constraints in teacher training may risk transforming teachers' roles from innovative educators to bureaucratic actors.

Variations in identity portrayal, coping strategies, and humor as soft resistance (RQ2, RQ3). The meme analysis reveals distinct identity portrayals between PC and LC cohorts, which are not only explicated by their academic backgrounds but also the systemic ways in which Spain's current legislative framework conceives access to the teaching profession in primary versus secondary education. PC students' memes depict them as confident prospective teachers with vocational commitment but insecure language learners, indicating a divide between pedagogical and content knowledge (Schmid et al., 2021). Their memes reflect confidence in teaching roles but also linguistic anxieties, revealing a separation between their teaching self and language learner self. However, their connection with fandom practices suggests intrinsic motivation for both language learning and becoming teachers. In contrast, LC students' memes emphasize insecurity and a satirical stance on their emerging identities as language educators. Self-deprecating humor in their memes reflects discomfort with teaching roles, perceived pedagogical gaps, and a pragmatic rather than vocational view of the profession.

Humor, particularly self-deprecating humor, acts as "soft resistance" to institutional shortcomings, allowing preservice teachers to critique training, manage identity, and navigate a secure but limiting academic system. Darwin and Norton's (2015) concept of "symbolic capital" sheds light on why LC students critique training models that prioritize theoretical over practical skills. Their humor reveals an expanded "practice shock" (Stokking et al., 2003, p. 330), which refers to the gap between the expectations formed during teacher training and the realities of professional teaching, often characterized by feelings of being overwhelmed, unprepared, and emotionally drained. LC memes reflect such practice shock highlighting the gap between institutional demands such as becoming familiar with legal jargon and unstable legal frames (Figure 5) and individual aspirations for classroom application. While PC students' memes reflect vocational identity, LC students' memes convey insecurity and critique of teacher discourse, positioning themselves as deficient learners based on reported experiences with past teachers, mirroring Wortham's (2004) observations on the power of teacher-led identity positioning in classroom discourse.

LC students use humor and memes as implicit self-positioning statements, analogous to Pinterest posts analyzed in Fong et al. (2016). Through popular meme templates like "I have no idea what I'm doing," LC students acknowledge insecurities while softening them with humor, thus indirectly negotiating their professional identities. This use of humor enables them to manage identity with a degree of detachment from their anxieties.

The LC cohort's persistent "outsider" identity, marked by memes emphasizing confusion and inadequacy, reflects the perception that theoretical knowledge alone does not suffice for practical teaching. This underscores the need for teacher education programs to evaluate training pathways, offering tailored support. Song et al. (2021) suggest that when learners encounter a mismatch between internalized identity and external expectations, humor can mitigate dissonance. LC students demonstrate this through memes that signal a deeper struggle with the training's relevance to teaching needs.

Orchestration of memes to convey multi-layered meaning (RQ3). Memes, functioning as hyper-narrative frames (Wegener, 2024), allow preservice teachers to weave text, imagery, and cultural references into layered messages reflecting personal and professional identity struggles, transitions, and cultural-linguistic dimensions, with two strategies becoming salient: self-deprecation and translingualism.

LC students used culturally resonant and translingual memes, highlighting their bicultural identities (Kramersch, 2006) and presenting themselves as both developing scholars and struggling language learners within the context of classroom discourse (Figure 6). Translingual memes underscore plurilingual identities, functioning as subversive tools to manage perceived identity gaps. By blending humor with language play, these memes challenge perceptions of inadequacy, framing struggles in a humorous, more manageable context. Through creative use of plurilingual abilities, preservice teachers resist deficient identities in teaching and language learning, asserting agency (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Satirical critiques in memes reveal how preservice teachers position themselves within complex power dynamics. Using humor, they assert agency while addressing institutional limitations, reflecting the study by Song et al. (2021), who observed that humor in multimodal tasks fosters engagement and supports creative applications of course concepts.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study highlights the potential of memes as diagnostic and reflective tools in teacher education, complementing the strengths of short stories (Barkhuizen, 2016) and narrative frames (Macalister, 2012). The thematic differences between PC and LC cohorts suggest a need for differentiated training tailored to their specific educational needs. For LC students, humor-infused memes that expose gaps in pedagogical readiness highlight the importance of early practical teaching experiences to prevent a “deficit identity.” Addressing these insights could foster a stronger, practice-based professional identity. In contrast, PC students may benefit from stronger theoretical components to enhance both practical application and reflective capacity. These implications emerge primarily from qualitative analysis, while the quantitative thematic analysis relied on broad domain summaries (Appendix A) due to the dataset’s size and nature, and the inherent complexity of interpreting meme-based encapsulated meaning. To illustrate, the right meme in Figure 2 shows conflicting views on motivation, where intrinsic motivation evokes a positive emotional response and extrinsic motivation a negative one. This example underscores the limitations of defining narrower or more interpretative thematic categories, given the multilayered meanings embedded in one single meme.

Multilingual and translingual memes affirm preservice teachers’ linguistic and cultural repertoires, reinforcing the importance of integrating students’ full linguistic identities within the curriculum. This perspective aligns with Cenoz and Gorter’s (2020) concept of pedagogical translanguaging, which emphasizes that honoring these identities fosters agency and belonging. In this context, memes highlight tensions between students’ linguistic backgrounds, pedagogical beliefs, and institutional norms, encouraging teacher education programs to embrace students’ multilingual identities positively and to accept humor as a pedagogical resource for reinforcing affinity and discourse identities (Gee, 2000) from a supportive, inclusive mindset.

While offering valuable insights, the study’s scope is limited to a specific educational context in Spain. Future research could explore meme-based activities in diverse teacher training settings and their long-term impacts on teacher identity. For instance, early piloting in Japanese EFL contexts highlighted the need to onboard students with Western versus Japanese meme literacies (Vazquez-Calvo & York, 2024). Additionally, longitudinal studies on digital literacies could illuminate how these practices shape teacher identities over time, offering insights into evolving processes of language teaching, learning, and reflective practice.

Drawing on Reinhardt’s (2020) metaphor of “social media as windows,” this study views memes as partial windows into preservice teachers’ identities, which are continuously shaped through interaction. While our analysis connects meme narratives to broader sociocultural issues, memes exist within a wider web of iterative circulation, discussion, and remixing (Wagener, 2024; Yus, 2018). This limits their ability to fully integrate vernacular digital literacies into educational contexts (for a comprehensive Bridging Activities framework, see Reinhardt & Thorne, 2013). As Morgan (2004) highlights, focusing

solely on identity-in-discourse captures only one dimension of teacher identity. Examining identity-as-pedagogy offers deeper insight into the intertextual resources teachers bring to their lessons, revealing additional layers of identity construction and negotiation. Identity-as-pedagogy refers to the dynamic and performative ways teachers' identities are enacted in the classroom, serving as both a pedagogical tool and a reflective space for negotiating meaning and power. Expanding this research with a situated, ethnographic approach could deepen our understanding of preservice language teacher identity using memes as a reflective tool of identity-as-pedagogy during school placements. Additionally, the brevity of memes may limit the depth of identity reflection. Combining them with reflective practices, such as journals or discussions, could provide a more comprehensive platform for preservice teachers to explore, develop, and semiotically contextualize their diverse identities.

Future research could pair memes with narrative journals or discussions from an ethnographic perspective, examining meme-based identity expression over time and across diverse sociocultural contexts. This approach may offer deeper insights into how digital literacies support preservice language teachers' professional growth in global postdigital settings (De Costa & Norton, 2017). Another promising direction is exploring humor-based pedagogies infused with digital literacies and memes to understand their role in framing and developing teacher identities, as well as assessing the acceptability of humor in varied instructional contexts.

Integrating informal digital literacies, such as memes, can bridge personal and professional identities, fostering critical engagement with digital spaces. As diagnostic and reflective tools, memes have the potential to enhance culturally responsive, identity-centered pedagogy, supporting teachers in adapting their approaches to diverse educational contexts.

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Appendix A. Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories	Definition and Example
1. Story-by-Memes Etiquette	Introduction	Memes that serve as an entry point or opening to the story, often setting the tone or introducing the participant. Example: the “ferret in a dressing gown” meme used by PC Participant 28 that says “Primero q nada buenos días” (“First of all, good morning”) to open the story in a casual, conversational tone.
	Farewell	Memes used to wrap up the story, signaling closure. Example: the “Panda relaxing on top of a log” meme used by LC Participant 17 that says, “That’s all folks, seriously that’s all.”
2. Language Learning	LL strategies	Memes depicting approaches, techniques, or tools used by participants to improve language skills. Example: Categorized as well as Affinity/Hobbies, PC Participant 33’s meme that says “My teacher when I was nine” and “All I have learnt thanks to videogames” using the “Buzz explaining to Buddy” meme that showcases how narratives and gameplay was informally used by the participant to learn English.
	LL difficulties	Memes highlighting challenges faced during the language learning process, such as grammar confusion, pronunciation struggles, or cultural misunderstandings. Example: LC Participant 1’s meme related to silent sounds in languages and contrasts the difficulty in pronunciation and spelling between English, Spanish, and French.
	LL motivations and goals	Memes reflecting motivations (both intrinsic and extrinsic) for learning a language and personal goals tied to language learning (such as being able to understand lyrics or achieve good grades or certificates). Example: PC Participant’s 33 meme that uses Gustavo from Breaking Bad fixing its tie and reads “You want the Cambridge C1 to get a good job; I want the Cambridge C1 to get a university title. We are not the same,” indicating an instrumental motivation to obtain an English certificate (it is a prerequisite to graduate).
	LL experiences	Memes capturing personal or shared experiences related to language learning, such as classroom dynamics or study abroad. Example: LC Participant 8 critiques their past language learning experiences by using the “Disaster girl” meme to burn down textbook-based language teaching.
3. Language Teaching	LT experiences	Memes portraying experiences from the perspective of preservice language teachers, including classroom anecdotes, student interactions, or pedagogical challenges and struggles during their limited and initial professional experience (school placements, tutoring, etc.) or reflecting upon past positive and negative language teaching experiences lived as learners. Example: LC Participant 13 shows a nervous man sweating over two buttons labeled “GOED” and “WENT,” mocking his observation of current secondary students’ struggles with grammar knowledge.

	LT methods	Memes portraying or evaluating specific teaching methods, approaches, or strategies used in language education. Example: LC Participant 7's meme uses two contrasting cat images labeled "THE USUAL" and "INNOVATION" to depict traditional teaching methods as boring and innovative methods as engaging and motivating.
	Digital LT	Memes addressing the integration of digital tools and technology into language teaching. Example: the "Young Thug and Lil Durk Troubleshooting" meme used by LC Participant 5, indicating an apparent generational contrast in technology integration and ideal teacher self between "Future me using TikToks in class" versus "Teachers who are close to retiring."
4. Academic Life	University experiences	Memes capturing experiences specific to university students, including lectures, assignments, exams, or campus and student culture. Example: the meme where a pirate throws away a scroll telling LC Participant 39 a hard pill to swallow: how COVID cut their Erasmus experience short.
	Other learning experience	Memes depicting non-linguistic learning experiences. Example: PC Participant 36's meme that recalls initial academic struggles at school when they identified as a 'struggling reader' using the "Pikachu looking shocked" meme.
5. Private Life	Personality traits	Memes reflecting personal characteristics, such as shyness, humor, confidence, self-awareness, openness to diversity, and general identity traits. Example: the "Dory doubts in the middle of the ocean" meme used by LC Participant 34 that reads "Who am I again?" signaling a lack of a strong national identity due to their multicultural (Moroccan, Sahrawi, Spanish) background.
	Feelings	Memes expressing emotions like frustration, excitement, anxiety, or satisfaction in learning or teaching contexts. Example: LC Participant 15's meme expressing frustration due to excessive academic workload, using a cat sadly staring at the camera.
	Family	Memes involving family interactions or influences on learning/teaching experiences. Example: PC Participant 11 shares a meme where they present her reality as the eldest sister of many syblings, signalling the start of her vocation to become a teacher.
	Affinities/hobbies	Memes highlighting personal interests, hobbies, or activities that intersect with informal language learning and language learning motivations and goals. Example: LC Participant 1 shares a meme with a girl surrounded by One Direction merchandise and UK's and Ireland's flags indicating her strong devotion for the boy band, English-speaking countries, and an intrinsic motivation towards language learning.

	Travel experiences	Memes depicting travel-related stories connected to language use or cultural immersion and ways to mitigate the lack of those. Example: LC Participant 19 satirically uses the “Kermit counting money” meme to highlight the benefits of traveling abroad for learning languages and cultures, while also pointing out how technologies can help mitigate the financial barriers associated with such experiences.
	Life experiences	Memes representing vernacular life moments and reflections as well as milestones. Example: PC Participant 26 features Magüi from the Paquita Salas TV show questioning herself with the phrase “¿Quién soy?”, reflecting the self-doubt and introspection often experienced when finding one’s vocation as a teacher while recounting her duty to babysit younger cousins.
	Role models	Memes referencing inspirational mentors or influential individuals in participants’ lives or the wish to become such mentors in their future teaching posts. Example: LC Participant 26 uses Buzz Lightyear tapping Woody on the shoulder to humorously highlight the role of teachers as role models, emphasizing their wish to guide prospective students toward better future opportunities.
6. Professional Life	Professional dimension	Memes reflecting on the professional aspects of (language) education in Spain. Example: the “Kombucha girl” meme from LC Participant 2 says “When I remember I need to spend more years studying before I have a proper job,” signaling the way to become a language educator in Spain.
	Vocation	Memes addressing the passion, dedication, or sense of calling related to teaching and language education. Example: PC Participant 28 uses a meme with a chihuahua inside a heart with an arrow labeled “Me now,” humorously symbolizing self-perception, personal growth, and dedication to doing one’s best as a language teacher after negative experiences in other professional settings.
7. Other	Teacher stereotypes	Memes playing on or critiquing common stereotypes about teachers or teaching practices. Example: PC Participant 1 humorously presents an “English teacher starter pack” meme with stereotypical items like a cassette player, Desigual outfit, water bottle, and a textbook worksheet, highlighting the desire to break away from clichés and develop an individualized language teaching profile.
	Miscellaneous	Memes that do not fit into any of the above categories.

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