

TALK: BALANCING HUMANISTIC GOALS AND UTILITARIAN PRESSURES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION



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In recent years, language programs in higher education have faced increasing pressure to demonstrate their relevance in terms of employability, workforce preparation, and measurable outcomes. Students, administrators, and policymakers increasingly frame language learning as a practical tool that should directly support professional advancement. However, this utilitarian perspective has also raised important questions about the broader mission of language education.

This talk examines the tension between the humanistic foundations of language study and the growing demand for practical, career-oriented outcomes. Historically, language education has played a central role in affirming intercultural understanding, critical thinking, ethical reflection, and engagement with diverse cultural and intellectual traditions. As scholars such as Claire Kramsch (2006; 2009) have argued, language learning is not merely the acquisition of communicative skills but a process of symbolic and cultural meaning-making that shapes how learners understand themselves and others. From this perspective, languages function as spaces of humanistic inquiry within the university.

At the same time, recent work on Languages for Specific Purposes highlights the need to connect language learning to professional domains and real-world applications. Researchers such as Darcy Lear (2021; 2023) emphasize that language programs can respond to institutional and student demands by designing curricula that engage with professional contexts while maintaining intellectual rigor and intercultural depth.

Drawing on these perspectives, the talk explores how educators can balance humanistic and society's utilitarian pressures by integrating symbolic competence, cultural inquiry, and ethical career-oriented applications.



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