

Prompting for justice: generative AI, translanguaging, and the equity imperative in bilingual education

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ABSTRACT

Generative AI (GenAI) is entering bilingual and dual language classrooms faster than theoretical and pedagogical frameworks can respond. Trained predominately on English-dominant data, large language models encode linguistic hierarchies that contradict equity-oriented bilingual education stands for. Drawing on translanguaging theory, critical AI literacy research, and empirical studies of language bias, this paper proposes Equity-Centered Prompting Framework (ECPF). ECPF comprises five principles spanning prompt design, output evaluation, student participation, instructional function, and epistemic authority. Unlike existing critical AI literacy frameworks that address technology broadly, or culturally sustaining pedagogies that do not engage AI specifically, ECPF targets the linguistic structure of GenAI and its consequences for bilingual learners, positioning AI interaction itself as an act of equity-oriented pedagogy. The framework was developed through a four-stage systematic theoretical synthesis: construct identification, literature search and selection, thematic synthesis, and principle formulation and validation based on 20 core sources. The contribution is threefold: a translanguaging-based critique of how GenAI architectures. five actionable principles for equity-centered prompting in actual bilingual classrooms, and a research and policy agenda for linguistically just AI integration.

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Introduction

Consider a fifth-grade dual language teacher who asks a GenAI tool to generate a bilingual science explanation for students whose families speak Spanish at home. The tool returns fluent English text with a Spanish translation characterised by formal Castilian syntax remote from students' Guatemalan-Kaqchikel community speech and a consistent pattern of English-glossing for technical terms. Pressed for time, the teacher uses the material. In this unremarkable exchange lies a structural problem: an instructional technology ostensibly designed to support all learners quietly reproduces the very linguistic hierarchies that equity-orientated bilingual education has spent decades dismantling. This is not an incidental failure of a particular product. It is a predictable consequence of how large language models (LLMs) are built and what ideological assumptions are embedded in their design. Publicly available evidence from open-source models and independent analyses suggests that commercial systems such as GPT-4, Claude, and Gemini are trained on data with similar English-dominant imbalances (Bender et al., 2021; Dodge et al., 2021; Fleisig et al., 2024). However, because these are proprietary systems, exact training compositions are not fully disclosed. The result is a technology that, absent deliberate intervention, marginalises the linguistic practices of precisely the populations that bilingual education is designed to serve.

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