

**TAO, J., & GAO, X. (2021). LANGUAGE TEACHER AGENCY. Cambridge University Press.**

**Review by Yuliandri**

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The concept of agency has been developed, discussed, and researched from a wide range of perspectives including, but not limited to, sociology and general education. Within the field of applied linguistics, research on teacher professional agency has flourished over the last decade. However, despite this growth, teacher agency has received less attention than student agency and is still considered an emerging area of research (i.e., Kayi-Aydar, 2019; White, 2018). This book aims to contribute to this need by providing a comprehensive review of the theoretical concept of language teacher agency (LTA).

The introduction (section one) of the book opens with a discussion of the urgent need to develop a better understanding of LTA and how it works in research and practice. The authors follow this by discussing the concept of agency in general, which they argue needs to be explained in a more accessible way to readers. The organization of the book is detailed in the final part of the introduction. The book, which contains seven sections, is organized in a general-to-specific reversed pyramid style, guided by the use of the question words *what*, *why*, and *how*. The book starts with a more general discussion on the theoretical perspectives of agency; why it (agency/LTA) matters; what other concepts are linked to it; how to foster it; the notion of collective agency; and then concludes by proposing a comprehensive framework for LTA.

Section two of the book discusses the different theoretical approaches to LTA. The authors do not attempt to further theorize or formulate their own definition of agency. Rather they aim to provide readers with a concise overview of the literature in terms of the general features and characteristics of agency. The authors provide a synopsis of the four theoretical approaches to agency: social cognitive, sociocultural, ecological, and discursive/post-structuralist. The epistemological discussion about the theoretical concept of agency helps to serve as a refresher for readers already familiar with these theoretical orientations while providing important background for researchers or readers less familiar with the topic. The authors explain the similarities, differences, and dynamics between the four approaches, and support the discussion with reviews of relevant studies which have adopted the different approaches. The discussion of each approach is enhanced by the inclusion of information about the trends in research methodology associated within each of the

four approaches, which allows readers to see how these approaches have been and can be implemented in LTA research. This will be very beneficial for beginner researchers interested in undertaking their own research in the area of LTA.

The discussion in section three focuses on why (language) teacher agency is an important element in supporting teachers' professional development and in "sustaining desired educational change" (p. 12). The authors organize the discussion according to three layers of perspective: micro; meso; and macro. At the micro-level, the discussion looks at how teacher agency facilitates teachers as individuals in the process of continuous learning to teach. At the meso level, the authors discuss how LTA is crucial in supporting policy implementation at both institutional and national levels. At the macro/societal level, the authors argue that LTA is important in assisting teachers to promote social justice in classrooms through their practice of reflexivity in their teaching. The section concludes with a discussion of the associated multilingual and multicultural realities and the everyday challenges that language teachers face. Through this discussion, the authors illustrate the growing urgency to recognize the importance of LTA as it constitutes the efforts of language teachers to respond to challenges within their specific contexts.

The links between LTA and related theoretical constructs of identity, emotions, beliefs, and knowledge are explored in section four. The authors dedicate specific subsections of the chapter to examine the interrelatedness of LTA to each of these concepts. In doing so, they present and discuss evidence from major studies in these areas. This chapter illustrates clearly to readers why LTA is rarely investigated in isolation. The authors also identify gaps in the current literature, for example, out of the interconnected areas, most research to date has investigated the connections between LTA and teacher identity, while the relationship between LTA and teacher emotions, beliefs, and knowledge have been relatively under-researched.

In the fifth section of the book, the authors discuss the ways to foster LTA. Two main approaches are elaborated here; the first is by establishing a sense of community which will help teachers to change the contextual conditions in their favor. For instance, teachers can be empowered to change the structural conditions for educational policymaking and implementation, or even challenge the existing decisions, collectively. The second approach is to support teachers' professional growth by advocating for the creation of reflective space for teachers in which they can reflect critically on their practices. Through the discussion of a case study from their own research, the authors illuminate that the two approaches can be adopted simultaneously and that both have a positive impact in fostering LTA.

Drawing from the discussions on the importance of teacher communities in fostering LTA in section five, the authors move on to discuss the significance of collective agency in section six. The section highlights how the notion of collective agency aligns with the four theoretical approaches outlined in section two. In this section, again, findings from previous studies as well as cases from the authors' previous study are used. The authors argue that the role of the collective dimension of teacher agency is often underrated in the current literature where teacher agency achievement is generally linked with teachers' individual journeys.

The authors introduce the term 'a trans-perspective in LTA research' in the concluding section (section seven) as a comprehensive framework in which perspectives from the four theoretical approaches as well as related concepts of identity, emotion, belief, and knowledge are integrated. The authors argue that a comprehensive framework for LTA is needed since many previous studies "have relied on particular conceptualizations of agency to inform research design and data interpretation" (p. 53) which may lead to fanaticism and exclusive use of certain theories and neglect of others in conducting research. The authors encourage researchers in the future to keep pushing the boundaries of LTA research to complement existing research, expand the concept of LTA, and to make it more applicable for language learning/applied linguistics research.

Overall, I think this book has achieved its aim of successfully providing a more complete picture of LTA theorization. At the same time, it makes clear links to earlier works through the systematic literature review. The strength of this book lies in its extensive use of the data and findings from both the authors' recent studies and those of earlier works to provide the context for further understanding the issues being discussed. The book will be a valuable resource for postgraduate students and beginner researchers who are newly acquainted with the concept of LTA and wanting to explore it further. Particularly useful is the way it provides examples of how each theoretical approach can be implemented in research. Moreover, the organization and the flow of discussion is relatively easy to follow. In terms of the organization, I would comment that some readers might expect the discussion of why LTA matters (section 3) to appear before the discussions of theoretical approaches (section 2). Nevertheless, I think this book has a lot to offer in terms of elaborating on the concept of LTA and will be useful for both practitioners and researchers at all levels wanting to enhance their understanding of LTA.

## References

- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019). Language teacher agency: Major theoretical considerations, conceptualizations and methodological choices. In H. Kayi-Aydar, X. A. Gao, E. R. Miller, M. Varghese, & G. Vitanova (Eds.), *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (pp. 10-22). Multilingual Matters.
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