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## **“*The moment I realized I am plurilingual*”: Plurilingual tasks for creative representations in EAP at a Canadian university**

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**Abstract:** In many urban settings across the globe, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes are inherently multilingual and provide unique possibilities to explore a wealth of languages and cultures as well as the interactions among them. Although the field of applied linguistics has historically followed monolingual ideologies, a plurilingual approach in EAP can provide insights into language practices that are situated, creative and contextualized. Raising students’ awareness of their own plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire is key to preparing them to make mindful decisions about culture and language use in real-life situations; plurilingual instruction includes *translanguaging*, *validating plurilingual identities*, as well as understanding *pluriculturalism*, all of which can open up possibilities for creativity in culture and language use. While research shows plurilingual-inspired pedagogies can benefit language learning, little is known about the extent to which they can enhance creative representations of language and culture. This article reports results from a study on the effects of plurilingual instruction on creativity in an EAP program. Seven EAP instructors delivered plurilingual tasks to adult students at a Canadian university. Data from demographic questionnaires, *Language Portraits*, student diaries ( $N=28$ ), and classroom observations ( $N=21$ ) were qualitatively analyzed and triangulated. Results suggest that the use of plurilingual tasks afforded a heightened awareness of plurilingual/pluricultural identity and validated the creative use of linguistic and cultural resources, including translanguaging. Suggestions for the inclusion of creative data collection instruments and plurilingual instruction in applied linguistics classroom research are made.

**Keywords:** plurilingual, pluricultural, translanguaging, creativity, identity

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# 1 Introduction

The field of applied linguistics has witnessed a substantive shift in language learning theory and instruction in recent years from monolingualism to multi/plurilingualism (see overview in Conteh and Meier 2014; Kubota 2014). Because of increases in mobility, migration, and globalization, landscapes have become linguistically more diverse, which in turn has demanded that the field consider theories that move away from assumptions about uniformity. Bilingualism (Baker 2011), multilingualism (Cenoz 2013; Cummins 2009), translanguaging (García and Wei 2014; Lewis et al. 2012) and plurilingualism (CoE 2001, CoE 2006, CoE 2007, and CoE 2018; Piccardo 2013) are only a few concepts that have emerged in response to these increasingly diverse social landscapes and, while they may differ from one another, they all hint at individuals' creative use of two or more languages for communication.

Among this array of terms, confusions and misconceptions have arisen and clarifications have been proposed (Marshall and Moore 2018; Otheguy et al. 2015). For many decades, language theorists have argued that, since the world has far more bilingual and plurilingual speakers than monolinguals (Auer and Wei 2007; Baker and Prys-Jones 1998; Crystal 1987), it is paramount that language instruction shift from its traditional monolingual orientation to a more plurilingual one, particularly in English language classes (Cenoz and Gorter 2013), and include the broader repertoire of languages and cultures known by the students. I will focus on two theories that explicitly argue that language practices are fluid and dynamic, which align with linguistic practices of language users in multilingual contexts such as Canada, where the study reported in this article took place. These two theories are translanguaging and plurilingualism, both of which have emerged in response to increasing multilingualism in societies across the globe.

## 2 Translanguaging and plurilingualism

The term translanguaging derives from the concept of 'linguaging', which refers to language learners using language to engage in cognitive activity to make meaning (Lado 1979; Hall 1996; Swain 2006, Swain 2010; Swain et al. 2009). Through linguaging, individuals use language to 'talk through' (Swain and Lapkin 2002) new concepts or ideas, which is often done through the use of a single language. The term 'translanguaging', however, applies the notion of linguaging to situations in which multiple linguistic resources are available to

speakers. First introduced in the bilingual Welsh/English context by Cen Williams (1994, 1996) (and referred to as *trawsieithu*) translanguaging was used as a pedagogical practice in bilingual classrooms in which students would use one language for input and another for output. For example, students might read a text in Welsh and do a presentation about it in English (or vice versa) as a strategy to develop both languages. The term continued to be developed and reconceptualised over the years, as outlined by García and Lin (2017), and has more recently come to represent the notion that multilingual individuals do not ‘have’ or ‘know’ two or more separate languages, but rather have at their disposal a complex linguistic repertoire where languages interact and can be drawn upon fluidly (Otheguy et al. 2015; Wei 2018). This position considers ‘named languages’ such as ‘English’ and ‘Spanish’ as social constructions. In reality, it is argued, various linguistic resources come together in the individual language users’ brain to constitute that individual’s idiolect or repertoire, which he or she can draw upon flexibly and creatively, mixing different resources together and inventing new representations of language. This does not mean these individuals are unaware of or do not think in terms of the socially-constructed nature of the named languages (Wei 2018). What translanguaging focuses on, however, is not so much the way people think about or report upon their own or others’ language use, as much as how they naturally and intuitively *use* language in complex, multilingual and multicultural situations of contemporary life.

Translanguaging is both a theory of language and a pedagogical approach, one that rejects monolingual ideologies. It has been applied in a range of bilingual contexts (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Gort 2015; Gort and Sembiente 2015; Martínez et al. 2015; Palmer et al. 2014; Sayer 2013; Schwarts and Asli 2014), as well as in contexts where more languages are present in the classroom (Canagarajah 2011; Cenoz and Gorter 2015). In bilingual education, translanguaging often, though not always, requires teachers and students to share the same linguistic repertoire, or use the same two languages.

Similarly, plurilingualism is a theory that focuses on the linguistic practices of individuals and offers a unique perspective to observe how language learners use the languages, dialects and cultural knowledge they have available to them (CoE 2018). As consistently discussed in the literature on plurilingualism (Cenoz and Gorter 2013; CoE 2001, CoE 2006, and CoE 2007; Coste et al. 2009; Cummins 2017; Marshall and Moore 2018; Piccardo 2013, Piccardo 2017; Piccardo and Puzos Capron 2015), it encompasses the use of all languages and varieties/dialects within an individual’s repertoire (including varieties which might be considered to belong to the same named language). It is similar to translanguaging in the sense that it considers that individuals have their own repertoires or

idiolects (Otheguy et al. 2015). However, there are three main distinctions: one is that in addition to language use, plurilingualism includes the notion of pluriculturalism (Coste et al. 2009), which refers to cultural knowledge gained due to life experiences and trajectories; a second is that partial competence, or unbalanced and uneven knowledge, in different languages, dialects and cultural knowledge is seen as a natural phenomenon and even a driver of creative language use (CoE 2001); and a third distinction is that plurilingual instruction embraces students' entire repertoire which may include extra-lingual knowledge that is not shared by instructors or other students.

While past literature on translanguaging and plurilingualism suggest individuals naturally engage in creative representations of language (Bradley et al. 2018; Wei 2011, Wei 2018) and embody a wide variety of ideas and concepts which enhances creativity (Piccardo 2016; Piccardo and Puozzo Capron 2013; Skutnabb-Kangas 2002), little is known about the extent to which plurilingual instruction, including translanguaging as a pedagogical practice, can encourage students' creative representations of language and cultural resources. This is the overarching question that motivated this study.

### **3 Plurilingual repertoire: Languages and cultures**

I chose plurilingual instruction as a broader framework as it is congruent with the research site: multilingual English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classrooms in Toronto, which is also a multilingual city. The reasons for this choice are threefold: 1) the focal point is on the individual, rather than society; 2) individuals' repertoires include the interconnection among both languages and cultures; 3) individual's agency in several languages—not only L1 and L2—is emphasized. Given the pedagogical nature of this study, plurilingualism was also chosen as it encompasses several classroom strategies, such as translanguaging, cross-cultural comparisons, and pluricultural awareness (CoE 2018). Following the theoretical underpinnings of plurilingualism posed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, CoE 2001, CoE 2006, CoE 2007, and CoE 2018), plurilingualism focuses on the knowledge of both languages and cultures individuals have acquired as a result of their lived experiences, and their ability to flexibly move between one language/culture and another for effective communication. As noted earlier, languages and cultures are not seen as compartmentalized in one's brain; rather, individuals have a repertoire with both linguistic and cultural knowledge accessible in it.

Both translanguaging and plurilingualism advance the notion of *linguistic repertoire* (see Blackledge and Creese 2010; Otsuji and Pennycook 2010; Blommaert and Backus 2013). Busch (2012) suggests that linguistic repertoire “can be seen as a space both of restrictions and potentialities” (p. 7), and further expands the concept to include feelings of joy, shame, anger and fear experienced through language use (Busch 2015). Linguistic repertoire encompasses individuals’ past, present and future references, including social, historical and biographical dimensions, both at the cognitive and emotional levels, and, therefore, it is inextricably related to people’s identities.

To understand identity presentations of plurilinguals requires analyses that go beyond national boundaries, situating them in social practices where they have agency (or lack thereof) over the way they use language and other cultural resources. Their identities need to be taken into account not only in terms of where they come from or where they live, but in terms of how their self-concepts and self presentations develop over time and across spaces (Norton 2013). In addition, the unique experiences plurilinguals engage in, both face-to-face and online, often transcend national borders and contexts, and so often require a multiplicity of self presentations (Darvin and Norton 2015; Norton 2016). Given the experiences with languages and cultures due to transnational travel, migration, mobility within the same country, education and work, online gaming, art, etc., individuals possess what I call a ‘plurilingual blueprint’ (Galante forthcoming), which might be thought of as unique and exclusive, and a marker of individual identity.

## 4 Plurilingualism and creativity

Creativity is a complex term that can be defined in many ways. Following a definition largely used in research on language and creativity in applied linguistics, creativity is “a property of all language use in that language users do not simply reproduce but recreate, refashion, and recontextualize linguistic and cultural resources in the act of communicating” (Swann and Maybin 2007: 491). While language use is a focus of this study, so are creative representations of individuals’ repertoires, including both linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Accessing one’s entire repertoire and making decisions on which language (s)/dialect(s) and cultural knowledge to use is a complex process often experienced by plurilinguals. As linguistic and cultural knowledge are flexibly used, this complexity is integral to the development of creativity (Piccardo 2016; Piccardo 2017). One complex use of language is translanguaging, which engages

the fluid language use, with no boundaries between languages. Although translanguaging researchers are careful to distinguish their approach from those interested in ‘code-switching’ (since the idea of ‘code-switching’ reinforces the notion of discrete ‘codes’ that are used exclusively at any given moment), some observations from the code-switching literature can be helpful in understanding the creative aspects of translanguaging. Research on code-switching has identified three different ways in which items from different languages might be used: 1) *alternation* is when there is language switch in a conversational turn; 2) *insertion* is when words of another language are inserted in a sentence; and 3) *dense code-switching* is when grammatical information/morphemes of another language are used in the target language when communicating (Green and Wei 2014). For example, I have recently witnessed an exchange with people who shared knowledge of two languages (English and Portuguese) who included dense-code-switching and alternation between one language and another when talking about social media networks: one said *Vou fazer um post e você vai likar a nossa selfiezinha* and the other replied *Só se você tag me in the post*. In the first sentence, the English noun *post* is flexibly inserted in the Portuguese sentence, followed by dense code-switching with the words *likar* and *selfiezinha*, which are created from a mix of English and Portuguese. The English verb *like* is followed by the Portuguese morpheme *ar* (like + ar) indicating base form while the noun *selfiezinha* has the English noun *selfie* followed by the Portuguese morpheme *zinha* (selfie + zinha) indicating small or little. The first speaker establishes a creative way to use language, which is followed by the interlocutor. The response starts in Portuguese and the English verb *tag* is inserted, triggering the speaker to continue the sentence in English. Socially, however—and this is the point that scholars of translanguaging would emphasize—these speakers do not make clear distinctions between Portuguese and English, that is, both named languages are used flexibly and with no boundaries. In this exchange, both language users accessed their complex linguistic repertoires and used language flexibly.

Besides language and culture, plurilinguals possess a wide variety of ideas and concepts, which in turn can enhance creativity and innovative thinking (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002). Knowledge can be accessible in different languages and/or dialects, contributing to different ideas and ways of thinking (Lüdi 2014). In a multilingual class, it is common to witness students from diverse backgrounds using their linguistic and cultural knowledge to solve problems and provide alternate perspectives on a given issue. In the context of economic globalization, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism can help to support what have been considered the “two most valued assets of the twenty-first century citizen, namely, human creativity and human relationships” (Furlong 2009:

366). Diverse ways of thinking that are developed through the interaction with texts or with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds also contribute to creativity.

It follows that plurilingual instruction can offer unique opportunities for the development of cognitive flexibility, linguistic and cultural transfer, and enhanced creative thinking (Boeckmann et al. 2011). In a study with plurilinguals in a Canadian university, Marshall and Moore (2013) focused on students' entire linguistic repertoire to examine their communication patterns. They found that plurilingual students use their repertoire as a resource to communicate in different languages based on the needs of the situation and/or interlocutor. This flexibility to move between languages gives plurilinguals an agentive role, which is both empowering and creative. Another study in two Canadian universities shows how plurilingual instruction can lead to critical understandings of language and culture and shift students' understandings of language from a monolingual to a plurilingual perspective (Galante forthcoming). These studies hint at the potential for using plurilingualism-inspired pedagogies in language classrooms to ultimately benefit the language learner.

This study was designed in response to calls for the inclusion of plurilingual approaches in language classrooms (Cenoz and Gorter 2013; Galante 2018; Marshall and Moore 2013; Wilson and Davies 2017). It reports on the implementation of plurilingual instruction in EAP classes in a Canadian university and its effects on students' creativity. As previously stated, this study aims to explore the creative potential of plurilingual EAP students when representing and using knowledge of language(s), dialect(s), and culture(s).

## 5 The Canadian landscape

Canada has the official status of a bilingual country (English/French) but is actually multilingual and multicultural, with over 200 languages spoken across the country. This diversity is represented by immigrant (e.g. Tagalog, Mandarin, Hindi, Arabic, among others) and Indigenous (e.g. Cree, Ojibway, Innu/Montagnais, among others) languages, and is particularly prevalent in urban settings. Toronto is the most multilingual and multicultural city in Canada, with nearly half of the population speaking a language that is not official (Statistics Canada 2016). Given its status of a vibrant multilingual city with several higher educational institutions from which to choose, many international students choose Toronto as place to study. Canada's International Education Strategy (2014) report notes that in 2012 alone, the country hosted 265,400 international

students, with a forecast that by 2022 this number will nearly double. While Canadian policies such as the Canadian Multicultural Act (Canada 1985) and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Canada 1982) promote linguistic and cultural diversity, this is only partially represented in college and university policies that expect international students to perform monolingually.

The multilingual and multicultural character of social life in Toronto stand in direct contrast to the ways students are expected to use language in educational settings, including EAP programs. Students in these programs were typically educated in their home countries and seek academic language skills in English so they can join a university program. They often have multilingual classes, with classmates who speak their own L1 and may speak an L2 or an L3 that is not English. For example, in these classes it is not uncommon for students to have English as an L4. Thus, monolingual instruction seems to be incompatible with the multilingual reality of the classroom and the Canadian context. This situation creates pressure for international students to choose English as a means of communication even in circumstances in which other languages in their repertoire could be used more effectively. In EAP classrooms, plurilingual instruction has the potential to raise awareness of and reinforce students' status as plurilinguals so they can make creative and mindful decisions about when, how and with whom to use their rich repertoire.

## 6 The present study

This study is part of a larger research project that compared monolingual and plurilingual instruction in an EAP program in a large university located in Toronto, Canada. To investigate the effects of plurilingual tasks on creativity, it made use of data previously collected and included representative sampling. This technique, widely used in qualitative research, allows for the selection of cases that provide rich information on a particular phenomenon of interest (Patton 2015). For the purposes of this study, participants who took part in three plurilingual tasks and completed all data collection process were selected. That is, data from students who were absent when the plurilingual tasks were applied or who did not complete one source of data collection were excluded from the data analyses. In addition, care was taken to include a representative sample of male and female participants from different countries. Data analyses centered on the extent to which the three plurilingual tasks afforded EAP students' creative representations of both language and culture.



## 7 Site and participants

Participants were adult EAP students ( $N=28$ ) who took part in a 4-month intervention that included the delivery of weekly plurilingual tasks in an EAP program. At the time of data collection, seven instructors taught a course called Academic Listening and Speaking (ALS) in an EAP program in a university in Toronto, Canada. All of the instructors had a Master's degree in either Applied Linguistics or Education, one was a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics and one had a PhD in Second Language Education. All of the instructors had a minimum experience of 10 years teaching both in Canada and abroad but despite being highly experienced, none had received prior training in plurilingual instruction.

Two male and two female participants in each classroom were selected to provide a representation of the student population of the program ( $n=14$  male and  $n=14$  female, total  $N=28$ ). The sample includes participants from China ( $n=20$ ), Ecuador ( $n=5$ ), Turkey ( $n=1$ ), Japan ( $n=1$ ) and Taiwan ( $n=1$ ). Participants' age ranged from 18 to 21 years old ( $M=19.5$ ). All participants had international student status in Canada and a conditional offer for an undergraduate program in the university. This offer is for students who have not met the English language requirements of the university. All participants had an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score below 7 at the time of data collection. While both instructors and students participated in the study, data was collected from students only to answer the research question posed by this study.

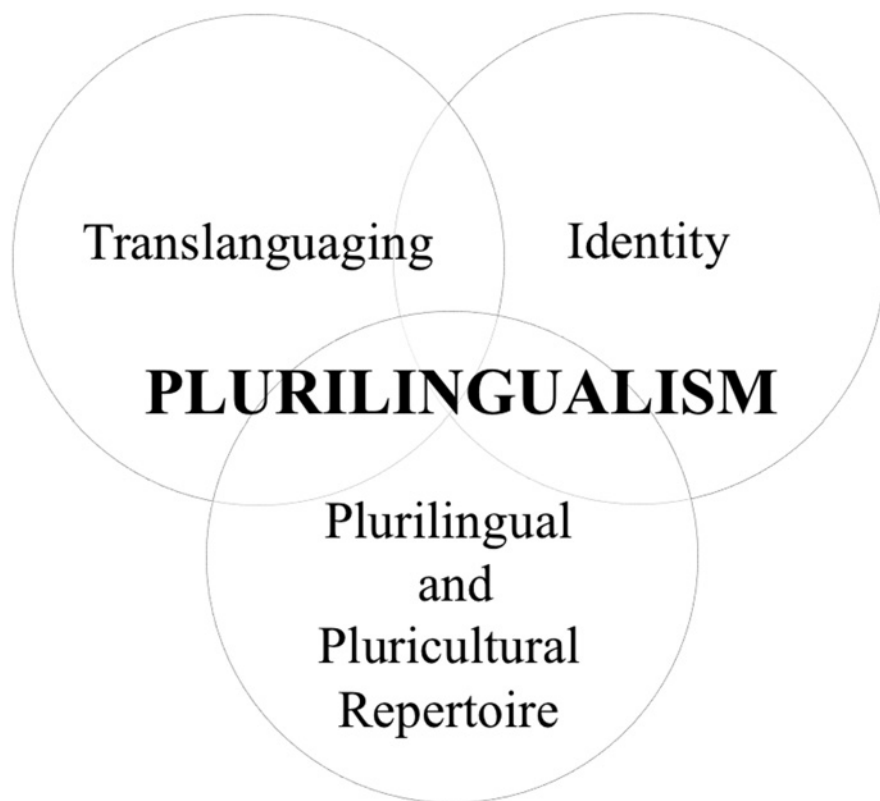
## 8 Plurilingual instruction

Plurilingual instruction included weekly plurilingual and pluricultural tasks delivered over 10 weeks in the EAP program. Following plurilingualism as a theoretical framework (CoE 2001) and informed by plurilingual and pluricultural competence descriptors (CoE 2018), I designed these tasks to fit into the curriculum of the EAP program. These tasks were inspired by the new descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence in the CEFR Companion Volume (CoE 2018). In addition, other CoE documents such as the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (available at [http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/AUTOBIOGRAPHY/AutobiographyTool\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/AUTOBIOGRAPHY/AutobiographyTool_en.asp)), and versions of the *European Language Portfolio* (available at <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio>) also served as references. Finally, *Language Portraits*, a multi-modal autobiographic method (Krum & Jenkins 2001) also inspired the tasks in this study and was used as source material for data collection. These portraits

have been previously used in language classrooms in Canada with both children (Prasad 2014) and adults (Lau 2016) in mapping learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires. Modifications to better represent the context and suit participants' age and interests were made. For example, given participants were residing in Canada at the moment of data collection, tasks included awareness of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country, including immigrant and Indigenous languages. In addition, a template of a body representation that is typically applied with *Language Portrait* was not used in this study. This decision was made because a template might have limited participants' creative representations of themselves and their repertoires. Each task took approximately 40–50 minutes to complete.

This article reports on data gathered during the completion of three of the ten tasks. The rationale for this decision was twofold: it would not be possible to include all the data given the limitations of an article; and, since the focus of the study is on creative representations of languages and cultures, the three most representative tasks to explore the phenomenon were chosen. In addition, the tasks chosen represent some of the main pillars of the concept of plurilingualism, as shown in Figure 1.

The three tasks were: *My Plurilingual Identity*, *Codeswitching* and *Intercultural Encounters*. *My Plurilingual Identity* invited participants to draw a self-portrait and indicate their trajectories with the languages and cultures experienced in their lives. They created self-representations and indicated how languages and cultures contributed to the development of their identity. The process itself did not specifically require professional drawing skills, and participants could represent themselves, along with their linguistic and cultural repertoires, in a creative way. *Codeswitching* invited participants to reflect on reasons why plurilinguals switch from one language to another and use language in a creative way. While the task was presented as 'codeswitching', it really focused on the fluid use of language, or translanguaging. Students were invited to reflect on the flexible use of their linguistic repertoire, in which students often engage without noticing the language that is being used. First, participants watched a video with representations of translanguaging. Second, they discussed some reasons why plurilinguals move fluidly from one language to another and provided personal examples. Finally, participants were asked to role-play, in groups of three, a possible situation in the academic setting that represents authentic use of translanguaging. *Intercultural Encounters* required participants to reflect on encounters, for example in university classrooms, social gatherings and travels, with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the knowledge gained from them. Then, they were allowed a few minutes to reflect on a particular encounter they had experienced and answer a few questions such as *Can you describe where you met and what you were doing?*, *What did you learn about their culture?*, *What did they learn about*



**Figure 1:** Main pillars of plurilingualism.

*your culture?* Finally, participants worked in groups of three or four to share their encounters, listen and take notes on their peers' contributions. The combined tasks focused on the intersections of languages and cultures at the individual and social levels. These and other tasks have been made available in the companion website [www.breakingtheinvisiblewall.com](http://www.breakingtheinvisiblewall.com).

## 9 Data collection and analyses

Four methods of data collection were used to explore the extent to which plurilingual tasks have an effect on EAP students' creative representations of language and culture. The methods were:

- 1) a demographic questionnaire: following typical demographic questionnaires used in Social Sciences, it asked students' basic information such as age, nationality, and years studying English. This questionnaire also asked students to list the languages they had in their repertoire, proficiency levels in each language and each skill (speaking, listening, reading and writing), and how, when and with whom these are used (e.g. online, school, family, etc.);
- 2) multimodal *Language Portraits* (Krumm and Jenkins 2001): these artifacts were collected as part of the task *My Plurilingual Identity*. Students were asked to reflect on their experiences, past, present, and future (Busch 2012, Busch 2015), with both languages and cultures and include them in their multimodal drawings;
- 3) student diaries: students wrote their general impressions, positive or negative, about the three tasks on their diaries. Three entries per student ( $N=28$ ), with a total of 84 entries were collected;
- 4) classroom observations: I observed students at three different times (week 1, week 5, and week 8) while they completed plurilingual tasks. A total of 21 classes were observed. My main goal was to observe instances of creative representations of languages and cultures during the completion of the tasks.

To understand the phenomenon more fully, I used two analytical approaches to triangulate results (Oliver-Hoyo and Allen 2006; Tucket 2005): content and drawing analyses. For content analysis, I chose a cross-case analysis by grouping together answers from all participants ( $N= 28$ ) into the common themes that emerged, presenting the data through a rich description of what students wrote in their diaries, keeping the interpretation as close to their original written text as possible (Patton 2015). For drawing analysis, besides my own interpretation of the students' drawings, I included participants' *own* interpretation of their drawings; thus, students' drawings were complemented by their written commentaries to allow them to have a voice in how their drawings were understood (Mitchell et al. 2011). In addition to the two analytical approaches, my own observation notes of classroom practice were added to either support or refute the phenomenon observed. The data were analyzed inductively and triangulation was done through the inclusion of multiple data sources as a means of improving the rigor of the analysis by assessing the integrity of the interpretations from more than one vantage point (Guba 1981; Leech and Onwuebbuzie 2007). First, I tallied all the demographic information in an Excel file and looked for patterns related to students' representations of languages. Second, I looked into multimodal creative representations of students' linguistic and cultural

repertoires in their *Language Portraits* and also looked for patterns. Third, I manually transcribed the data from the student diaries into a Word file and looked for patterns of creative representations of language and culture, including translanguaging. Finally, I read all classroom observation notes and highlighted instances when students used creative representations of language and culture. I used NVivo, version 11 (QSR International) to facilitate the analysis, focusing on emergent themes related to creative use of linguistic and cultural resources.

In what follows, I discuss common themes that emerged from the data. To provide more comprehensive information about the phenomenon under investigation, in each theme, I triangulated the results by using at least two data sources (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007). The discussion is interwoven with my own interpretation, comments on what I observed, as well as quotes from student diaries to illustrate creative instances under each theme.

## 10 Discussion of results

The results are organized into three main themes: 1) recognizing plurilingual identity: past, present and future; 2) validating translanguaging practices, and 3) building on pluricultural competence.

### 10.1 Recognizing plurilingual identity: Past, present and future

The first theme that emerged from the data refers to the processes through which participants came to recognize their own creative language use through engaging with the *Language Portraits*. Interestingly, this awareness of the richness of their plurilingual repertoires was not present in their responses to the initial demographic questionnaire. That is, the information about languages they provided in the questionnaire did not match the languages represented in students' portraits, and this was the case among all 28 participants. One section of the questionnaire, for example, asked participants to indicate all languages and dialects in their repertoires. Twenty-six participants indicated having only two languages in their repertoire, their L1 and English as an L2, the latter being the target language of the EAP program. Only two reported knowing one more additional language (L3). During the completion of the task *My Plurilingual Identity*, however, students were invited to reflect on their lived experiences and identify how language and cultures played a role in shaping their identity,

which was later creatively represented in their portraits. This creative process helped students recognize language and cultural resources which were left undocumented in the demographic questionnaire. For example, Sheila, a student originally from China, indicated only two languages in her demographic questionnaire: Chinese (L1) and English (L2). However, through the completion and reflection processes, she was able to recognize two more linguistic resources, as indicated in Figure 2.

Sheila adds both Yichang, a dialect from China, and Korean as linguistic resources. Her use of these linguistic resources, of course, was context dependent; Sheila uses Yichang with her family and people in her hometown while Korean is used for entertainment, given her interest in Korean culture. In Canada, she mainly uses English at university but flexibly switches to Chinese when communicating with friends and members of the community. In her diary entry, while Sheila indicates studying Korean for only 3 months, she reports having conversations in Korean with a classmate in her EAP class:

*During the class, Tina and I have the same habits on Korean music and culture. Also, we love the same male artistic group. Therefore, we talked a lot about the experiences about Korean pop stuff, even trying to use Korean to communicate.*

While Sheila has partial proficiency in Korean, she has positive attitudes towards it, which aligns well with the idea advanced in the theory of plurilingualism that partial proficiency in languages is normal and not a deficiency, and even languages that one ‘does not know well’ be claimed as part of their repertoire (CoE 2001, CoE 2018). Given Sheila’s experiences with languages and cultures due to travel, social interactions, interests, and food, she came to understand her own unique plurilingual blueprint (Galante forthcoming), as explained in her diary:

*This task helps me understand monolingual and plurilingual people. I learned the language connected with our interest, the food we eat and place we go. From my previous point of view, I thought that plurilingual people is... someone who are really good at speaking multiple languages and translate them with different languages.*

Sheila’s reflection of her plurilingual identity goes beyond her own individual plurilingualism to include an external reflection of the community at large:

*I think that due to globalization of the world, we are all plurilingual people and can have some knowledge and opportunities to know those cultures through the internet, you can watch different languages movies, eat different foods without leaving the place you live.*

Similar to Sheila, Sunshine, a student originally from Turkey, indicated having only three languages in her repertoire in the demographic questionnaire—



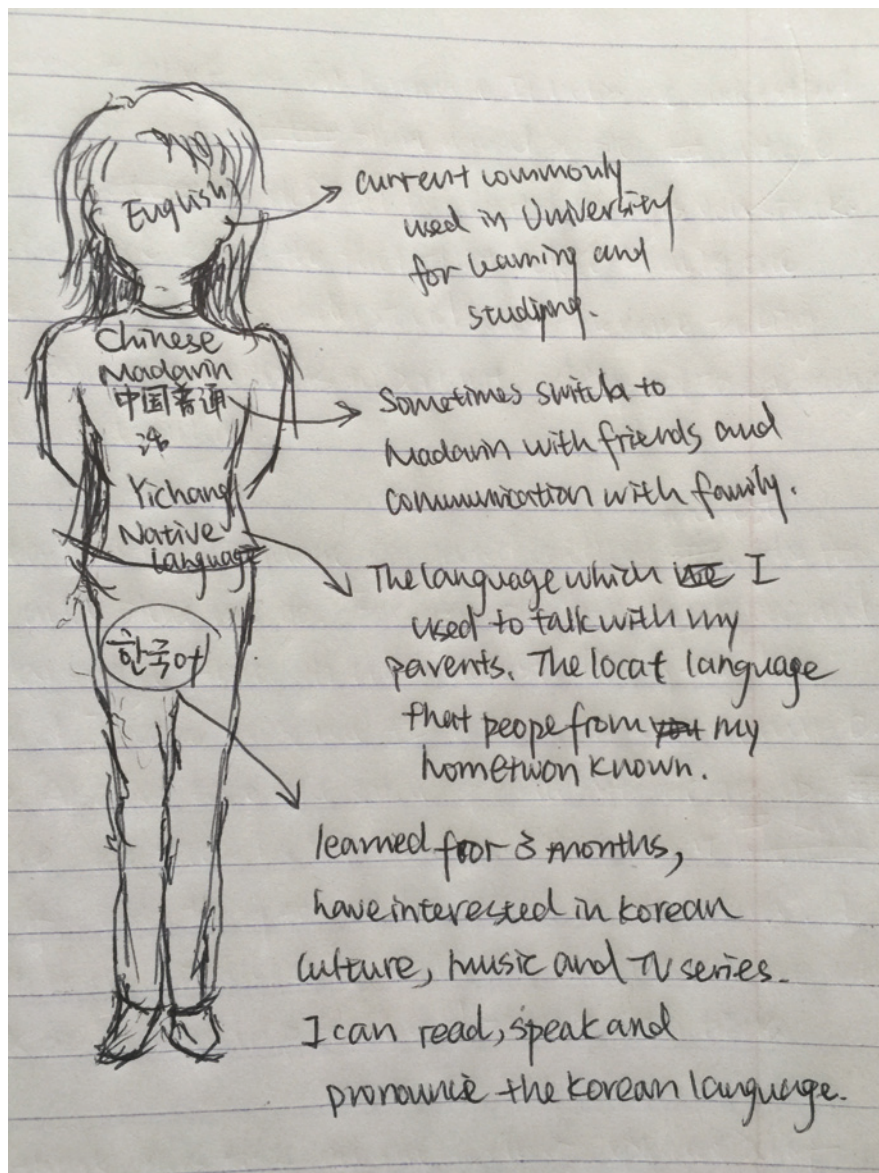
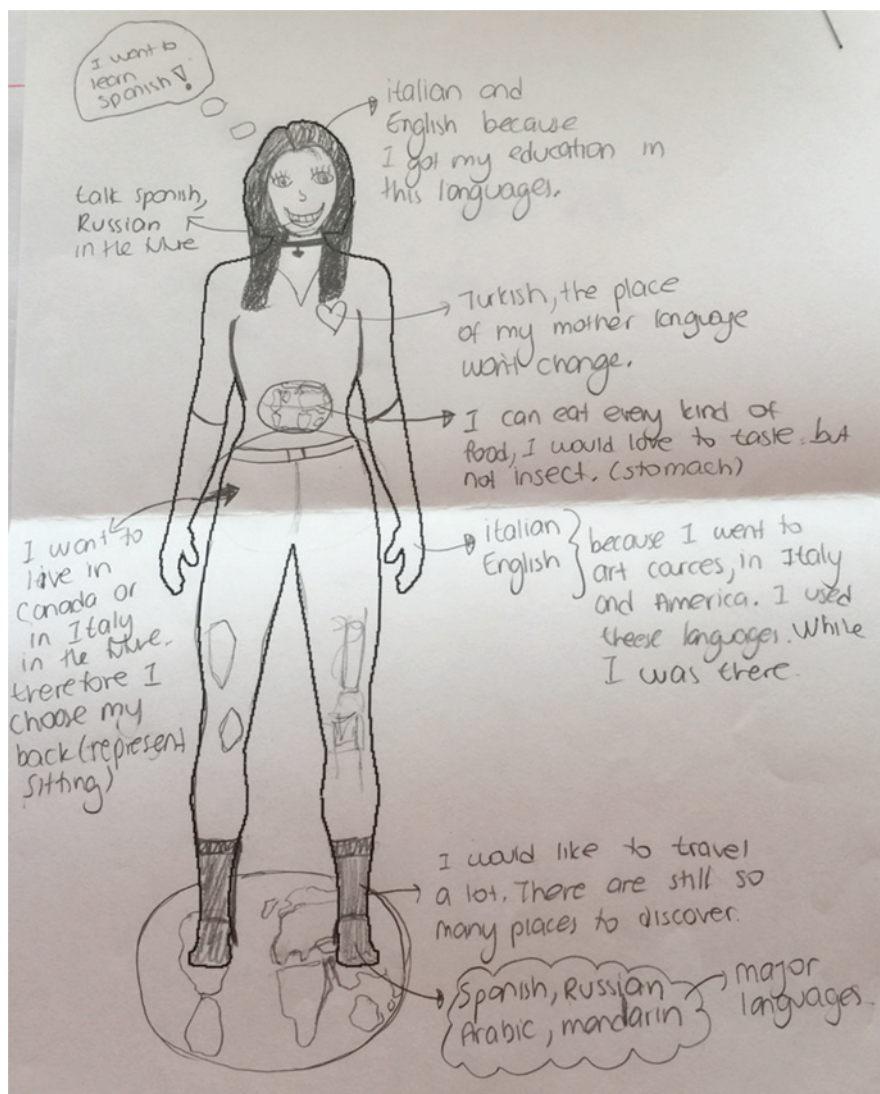


Figure 2: Sheila's language portrait.

Turkish (L1), Italian (L2) and English (L3). In completing the task, however, she includes future languages she wishes to learn, as can be seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Sunshine's language portrait.

Following Busch's (2012, 2015) notion that one's linguistic repertoire also includes potentialities, Sunshine includes languages she has learned in the past, the language she is currently learning, and languages she wishes to learn in the future. Typically, demographic questionnaires only gather information about past and present languages, particularly languages individuals have



high proficiency in, even when they are asked to enter languages in which they have low proficiency levels, which was the case in this study. Sunshine's portrait goes beyond the languages she reported in the demographic questionnaire as she includes Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Mandarin. In class, I observed her justification for this selection: she consciously reflected on the power these languages have on a global level and possibly the opportunities—communication, education, employment—she would have if these languages were included in her repertoire. In her diary, Sunshine indicated her interest in learning other languages, even if partially, which corresponds to a competence in plurilingual theory (CoE 2001, CoE 2018):

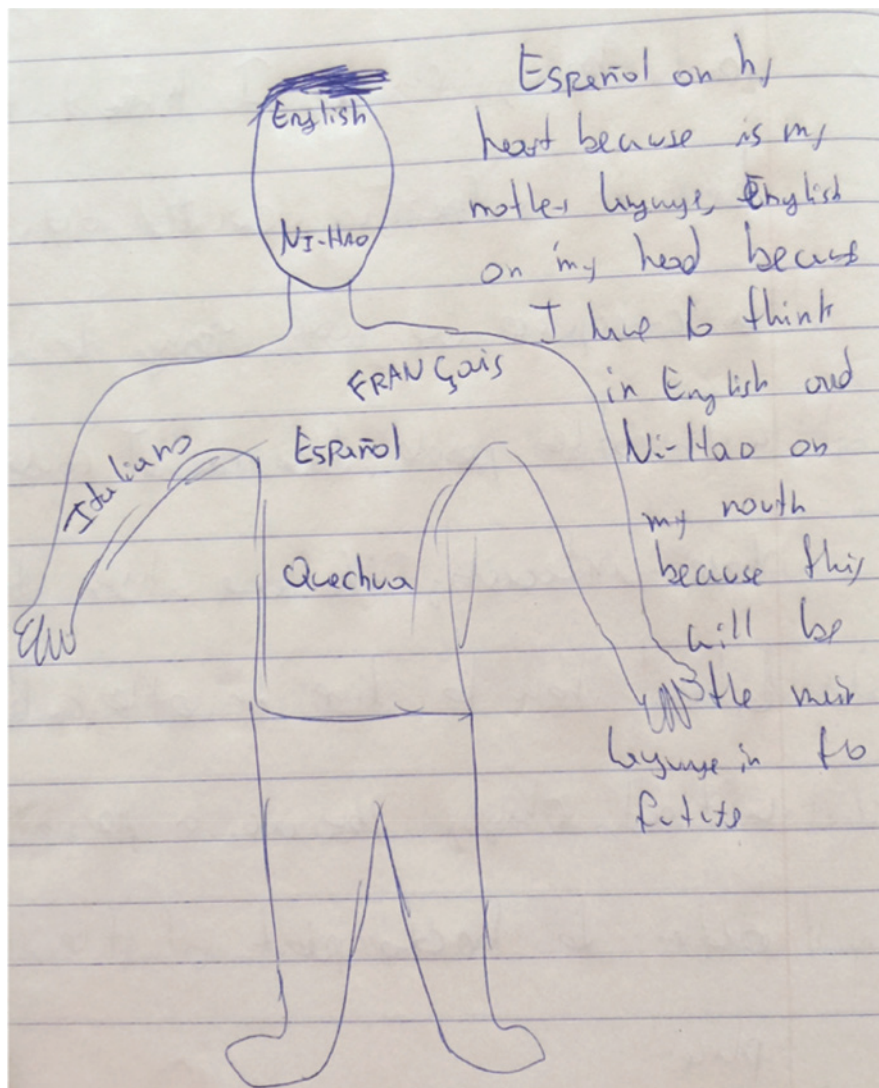
*This task reminded me of so many words from other languages. Learning words from completely different languages like Korean made a bridge between me and my Korean friend after doing this task.*

This excerpt clearly shows that languages spoken by Sunshine's colleague also played an important role in her recognizing her entire repertoire. When language instruction is delivered within a plurilingual framework, not only is the linguistic repertoire validated but it goes beyond to include other languages experienced, either in class (e.g. languages of their peers) or elsewhere (e.g. online).

Students' identities included their unique experiences which transcended national borders and contexts (Darvin and Norton 2015; Norton 2016). As part of these tasks, students engaged in reflections of how their linguistic and cultural resources contributed to their identities in relation to the different contexts in which they found themselves. For example, during the plurilingual tasks students learned about the languages used in Canadian society, including immigrant and Indigenous languages, which might have encouraged them to reflect on other contexts, including the countries where they were born. Zuco, a student from Ecuador, for instance, recognized Quechua, an Indigenous language and culture in his country, as part of his plurilingual and pluricultural identity, as shown in Figure 4.

Languages that are part of individual's linguistic and cultural heritage are sometimes forgotten as a result of colonization. It could be that this task helped revive his sense of identification with the Quechua language and people, especially because this information was not included in his demographic questionnaire. In addition, this task helped Zuco realize that he is, in fact, plurilingual:

*The main idea of this task was emphasize the role of languages in its manifestations such as monolingual and plurilingual, where it was the moment I realized that I am a plurilingual*



**Figure 4:** Zuco's language portrait.

*person because I can speak two languages, English and Spanish, and due to the opportunity of having Chinese friends, I am learning Mandarin a little bit.*

Learning the languages of his peers also contributed to Zuco's rich linguistic repertoire. Obviously, Mandarin was not the target language of instruction but

he indicated that “this will be the next language in the future.” In his diary, Zuco also stated that he was “learning Mandarin a little bit,” which accords well with the notion of valorizing partial competence in an additional language (Coste et al. 2009).

All participants in this study were plurilingual and had more than two languages in their repertoire, but this richness was not well captured by the demographic questionnaire. After the implementation of the task *My Plurilingual Identity*, however, participants explored all of the linguistic and cultural resources that contributed to their identities, including languages learned in the past, present and to be learned. This task was delivered at the start of the program and, during my classroom observation, participants were quite open to exploring their languages. Like Sheila, Sunshine and Zuco, other students had positive attitudes towards their plurilingual repertoires, even when proficiency was limited in some languages or dialects. In addition, I observed instructors encourage students to make use of their entire linguistic repertoire in class, including translanguage practices. For example, instructors encouraged students to discuss tasks in languages other than English, translanguage, and teach others, including the instructor, a few words in languages they knew. In one class I observed in week 1, the instructor asked students to name all the languages and dialects in their repertoires and they responded in English. The instructor then asked if they could repeat their answer but using other languages. Students were hesitant at first as this was not common practice in an English-only classroom, but in a few seconds they started engaging in a plurilingual conversation with languages and dialects, and not only their L1.

Taken together, data from students’ *Language Portrait*, student diaries and classroom observations indicate that plurilingual tasks are effective for facilitating creative representations of language and culture as students are encouraged to draw on linguistic and cultural resources from their entire repertoire, a phenomenon that was not captured by the demographic questionnaire.

## 10.2 Validating translanguage practices

The second theme that emerged from the data was the validation of students’ translanguage practices, which was novel for students since in the EAP program, an English-only environment typically prevailed. While all students recognized themselves as plurilinguals through creative representations, their creative language use had not been previously validated, at least not in the EAP classroom, as academic settings in Canada typically require students to operate in a monolingual way. Following plurilingual theory (CoE 2001, CoE 2018) and

translanguaging practices (Otheguy et al. 2018; Wei 2018), the plurilingual tasks were designed in a way that challenged instructors to think of students' languages as one repertoire, which guided instructors to move from monolingual to a plurilingual paradigm.

During the classroom observations, I noted that students were presently surprised to be asked to use all their linguistic resources during the completion of tasks. Over time, it became commonplace for students to engage in discussions in other languages they shared, for example, two Chinese students fluidly using Chinese and English to communicate. Students also had agency to use all their linguistic resources and read content in other languages, write in their notebooks using a mix of languages and translanguaging for meaning-making.

Allowing a plurilingual space in the classroom helped validate students' translanguaging practices. In their diaries, most students recognized the benefits of translanguaging and considered it a normal and usual practice among plurilinguals in many contexts, including at university, as noted below:

*As international students, we use our native language when we don't know how to explain something very difficult in English. (Melissa)*

*I often use mix language with my classmate and even family. It is normal for us use different language to deliver our meaning, especially in school. (Apple)*

It is important to note that the research site did not have an “English-only” policy and all seven instructors allowed students to use the whole range of their linguistic resources, at least during the plurilingual tasks. During the lessons, I often observed participants translanguaging when a concept or a word in English needed clarification. Because the classes were comprised of a large proportion of Chinese speakers, Chinese was often heard in class. When participants had other languages with no speakers of the same language in class, they often made use of mobile phones or laptops to access information in another language and also engaged in translanguaging for meaning-making. For example, in a class about idioms, Luishino, a participant from Ecuador, made use of his mobile phone to refer to an equivalent expression in Spanish for “I have mixed feelings.” He reported in class that “Tengo sentimientos encontrados” has the same meaning as the English idiom but has slightly different words. He then explained to other participants the meaning of the Spanish words and even helped them learn the Spanish idiom by repeating it multiple times and checking his peers' pronunciation. This action gave Luishino agency over his linguistic repertoire and I observed him smiling in satisfaction.

Translanguaging was also perceived to facilitate communication. When participants shared the same languages, they reported using both languages flexibly to aim for efficiency, as the following diary entries indicate:

*when we translanguage our conversation is more fluent and natural because that's the words we firstly think of. (Fall)*

*For example, “我明天有一个作业要完成”, it means that “tomorrow I have an assignment needs to be done.” It is useful because we don't need to translate the meaning into our own language but other could understand. (Pipi Pig)*

*We talked about (in Chinese) that there was a cliché movie which has published recently. The word cliché is a special word that cannot be fully explained in Chinese. Therefore, in this case, we said, this movie is cliché instead of using several sentences to explain “cliché” in Chinese. (Momo)*

During the classes I observed students translanguage for purposes other than speeding up communication. They also used it to clarify and/or enhance meaning of new concepts and for emotional connections. The emotional dimension of translanguaging is an interesting result, which was also evident in students' diaries:

*I prefer to switch when I want to say Chinese poems or idioms which may lose the original feelings. (Chen)*

*Switching can be humorous, which is essential for building connections with others. People can feel closer to others because of proper jokes or feelings of familiarity. (Esther)*

These accounts show that students sometimes made mindful decisions on one language or another depending on what and with whom they were communicating. Using the L1 was reported to help establish emotional connections with others who speak the same language, as well as for artistic representations using language, such as poetic and humorous language.

Another important aspect of translanguaging recognized by students was the inclusion of dialects in their flexible use of language, which is in line with plurilingual theory (CoE 2001, CoE 2018):

*We have lots of dialects in China. I prefer to speak Mandarin with my friends, however, when I am talking to local friends I usually speak with some dialect to express. Dialect is something that makes me can stress the words. (Wei)*

*I sometimes switch to my dialect if I am in the other city. (Vicky)*

During the classroom observations, many Chinese participants reported the need to use dialects of Chinese as a way to affirm their identities. They reported that while standard Chinese is officially mandated in China, provinces are linguistically diverse and several dialects are present in the Chinese landscape. The use of one dialect or another is a choice of the plurilingual speaker and depends on context, topic and interlocutors.

Another interesting finding was the widespread practice of participants learning the languages of their peers and including them in their linguistic repertoire, as stated by two participants from China:

*Moving to this task, I was attracted by the topic when I saw it, because I speak three languages, so that means I'm always codeswitching. When I talk to Isabella, she suddenly speaks something I don't know but I'll ask her 'what's that mean?' so I can learn something in Spanish. (Sunny)*

*This task helps me to know some basic expression in other languages. For example, Japanese and Korean. My colleagues said many words in other languages, and they discussed during the class. I learned some Korean, Japanese and Turkish words during the class. (Andy)*

Often, this phenomenon was present in the classes I observed. Participants discussed academic topics in groups and often asked one another how to say a certain word or expression in their languages. In addition, they exchanged knowledge about concepts and whether these concepts were represented similarly or differently in their countries of origin.

Overall, data from both classroom observations and student diaries indicate translanguaging practices were validated as they serve unique purposes such as meaning-making, emotional connections, and language learning.

### 10.3 Building on pluricultural competence

The third major theme that emerged from the data refers to building on students' pluricultural competence. All participants reported that the plurilingual tasks offered opportunities to learn about other people's cultural backgrounds, which is an important finding as this indicates that plurilingual tasks can also include critical discussions of culture and intercultural understandings. One of the most commonly reported themes was the need to understand and respect cultures. This is represented by the diary entries below:

*Learn others culture tell me how to communicate with them and respect them. (Apple)*

*It is important to learn different cultural background because sometimes your language or action might hurt other people who come from different country and have different cultural background. But actually you don't mean to hurt them. (Pipi Pig)*

*Everyone shared some exciting experiences of cross-cultural encounters; it made me feel that everyone should try to understand other's culture more and respectfully. (Camille)*

These accounts indicate that participants understand the importance of respect for other cultures when having intercultural encounters. During class, I heard several examples, one being discussions about the importance of knowing how to greet a person from a different background when you meet. One Chinese student reported that when greeting a Brazilian friend, she liked to kiss her on the cheek as this is a sign of understanding and respect. Other examples included values, beliefs and ideas that need to be respected. Respect for other

cultures is an important dimension of pluricultural knowledge—which is part of plurilingual theory— (Coste et al. 2009) and was rightly identified by these participants.

Recognizing the importance of knowing different cultures, particularly in multilingual settings such as Toronto, where participants lived at the moment of data collection, was also frequently reported.

*As a person in Toronto, it is important to know the different races as common sense. Diversity can bring tons of benefits. (Baba)*

*Something common in your culture may be rude in other cultures, so learn different culture is important, especially for people in Toronto. Toronto is a multicultural city, so we need to communicate with people from different cultures. (Apple)*

*Toronto is a multicultural city. People can meet many students from other countries in the university. We are in a globalization era, we have to adapt the differences. (Sheila)*

While awareness of the multilingual and multicultural city landscape was not necessarily required to complete *Intercultural Encounters*, it was often reported. This is an important finding since many EAP programs in Canada focus on teaching a local dominant culture, whereas, in this case, the reality that participants' reported as residents of Toronto was more complex. Complexity is not negative; it is, in fact, natural for plurilinguals who use different languages and cultural knowledge in context-specific situations (Piccardo 2016).

Criticality and knowledge development through cultural understandings was present in many classes. Often, I observed participants work in groups and discuss real-life social problems such as discrimination based on background, race, and sex. During these discussions, participants' biases emerged and meaning was negotiated. For example, one participant from China recognized that his bias against Japanese people was mainly because he had been raised in a context where he had been taught to hate the Japanese. He emotionally reported that this hate discourse had been repeated by his grandfather—who had fought in a war against Japan—the media, and even in Chinese schools. Plurilingual tasks such as *Intercultural Encounters* opened up possibilities for participants to develop critical understandings of culture and how it influences one's biases. Understanding other viewpoints, which aligns with plurilingual theory (CoE 2001, CoE 2018), was also reported by other participants:

*The importance of learning about the different cultural background is that it helps me understand... when others say something different from my perspective. People from the different culture has different thinking method and lifestyle. It could be hard for me to understand the reason why people did something differently with me because I will understand their thinking and actions from my culture perspective (Mavis)*



*Learning more cultures can expand our horizons, which benefit us a lot. I used to have no ideas of other countries such as Iran. After coming here, I met Lara and I learnt that her cultural background is totally different from ours. There are small wars in her homeland, so she usually misses her family and friends. And her values about many things are different. She is passionate about everything because she knows how precious life is. (Esther)*

Reflecting on *Intercultural Encounters* allowed participants to broaden their cultural perspectives. Diversity in values, behaviors and emotions are rightly captured by participants as important dimensions of cultural understanding.

Results from classroom observations and student diaries indicate that students engaged in discussions and opened up (inter)cultural understandings. Plurilingual tasks helped participants “embody a wide variety of ideas and concepts” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002) as well as creative and critical thinking. Knowledge was accessible through discussions with plurilingual participants who had a wide range of different knowledge, contributing to different ways of thinking and ideas, as noted by Lüdi (2014).

## 11 Conclusion

Research in applied linguistics has witnessed a shift from monolingual to multi/plurilingual ideologies and has recognized the need to implement pedagogies that are linguistically and culturally relevant to multilingual and multicultural settings (Kubota 2014; Conteh and Meier 2014). This shift is congruent with the multilingual realities of many urban contexts (Piccardo 2013), including Toronto, where international students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds enrol in EAP programs. While these students’ main goal is to reach higher levels of proficiency in English, instruction that values their linguistic and cultural repertoire and encourages its creative and flexible use can be enormously beneficial.

This article reported results from a qualitative study investigating the extent to which plurilingual instruction in an EAP program in a university in Toronto, Canada, has an effect on students’ ability to creatively represent their linguistic practices. For the purposes of this study, creativity was regarded as flexibility in the use of language and cultural resources (Swann and Maybin 2007), including dialects. Altogether, results suggest that plurilingual instruction enhances EAP students’ sense of their plurilingual identities, from the recognition of the multiple languages and cultures within their repertoires to their creative representations of their linguistic and cultural resources. In addition, translanguaging practices were seen as natural and effortless phenomena which participants



creatively engaged for distinct purposes: meaning-making, clarification, learning new concepts, and emotional connections. It is important to note that dialects were included in participants' repertoire and language use, an observation that is sometimes ignored in the plurilingual literature. Finally, plurilingual instruction afforded discussions that invited different cultural viewpoints, which contributed new knowledge and enhanced pluricultural competence.

The fact that participants' creative representations were helpful in the recognition of their entire repertoires, a phenomenon not captured by the demographic questionnaire, raises questions as to whether formal elicitation methods such as questionnaires alone can capture plurilinguals' entire linguistic repertoires. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of creative methods of demographic data collection. From a pedagogical point of view, plurilingual instruction can be particularly beneficial among international students in university settings, as they will likely need to use their linguistic and cultural resources to make meaning in a new language and interact with colleagues from several cultural backgrounds in both academic and social settings. Future research can make use of similar types of plurilingual instruction to investigate its effects in other multilingual settings.

Admittedly, the study reported here has limitations: plurilingual instruction was limited to 10 tasks rather than permeating the entire program; sampling techniques, although carefully done, were limited; the sample size was small; and analysis of creativity was limited to language use and cultural resources. While results cannot be generalized to other language programs or populations, this study provides evidence to suggest that plurilingual tasks can enhance creativity and encourage participants to (re)claim their status as plurilinguals. When EAP students "recreate, refashion, and recontextualize linguistic and cultural resources" (Swann and Maybin 2007: 491) creativity can be enhanced and possibly transferred to other contexts, outside of the classroom. In diverse settings, such as Canada, creativity is a resource that should be highly valued and promoted not only in EAP programs but in other classrooms.

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