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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Full-Body Language Portraits: A Creativity-Based Method to Explore Embodied Multilingualism

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Abstract

This study investigates the application of full-body language portraits (fLPs), a creative and multimodal pedagogical method rooted in the embodied multilingualism's framework. Conducted during a Blended Intensive Program (BIP) workshop with university students from diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds, the research explores how participants represent and narrate their multilingual repertoires through fLPs and small language biographies. A visual and narrative analysis reveals that, despite their privileged academic backgrounds, the participants often experienced linguistic trauma, especially after moving to new settings, resulting in instigated, inherited, or deliberate (momentary) language shifts. Furthermore, the research highlights the methodological value of fLPs as a tool for fostering sociolinguistic awareness in educational contexts. While English predominated as the lingua franca in the storytelling sessions, the creative activities encouraged participants to mobilize their full language repertoires, thereby enhancing self-expression and collective reflection on their language resources. Thus, this study demonstrates the transformative potential of combining embodied and multimodal approaches in education, advocating for their broader integration to support students and future teachers in exploring and affirming their multilingual identities.

Keywords

creativity-based methods; embodied multilingualism; full-body language portrait; language autobiographies; linguistic trauma; multimodal pedagogies

INTRODUCTION

This paper[1] is situated within the framework of embodied multilingualism (Busch, 2013; Coffey, 2015; Jager et al., 2016; Kuster & De Meulder, 2019; Lupica Spagnolo, 2016; 2019)

[1] This paper was collaboratively written. Marta Lupica Spagnolo authored the introduction section; the third subsection of the theoretical framework; the third subsection of the methods section; and the first and third subsections of the findings section, and she was responsible for the overall revision and coherence of the manuscript. Cecilia Bartoli contributed the first and second subsections of the theoretical framework; the first subsection of the methods section; and the second subsection of the findings section. Kristýna Lorenzová wrote the second subsection of the methods section and the fourth subsection of the findings section and prepared the data overview in Excel. Discussion and conclusion sections were co-authored by Marta Lupica Spagnolo and Cecilia Bartoli. During the BIP school, Cecilia Bartoli led the first workshop, "Linguistic repertoires in motion," followed by Marta Lupica Spagnolo's workshop, "Embodied multilingualism: narrating migration and languages." All three authors assisted in conducting both workshops.

and multimodal, creativity-based pedagogy (Bartoli & Lotano, 2024; Bartoli, 2025; Block, 2014; Fontana & Mignosi, 2023; Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019; Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva & Correa Gomes, 2019; Molinié, 2009). It explores how students participating in a linguistics workshop on multilingualism represent and negotiate their own language repertoires through painting and narrating their language portraits within the context of narrative group activities.

These approaches pursue two primary goals. First, they aim to explore and refine the role of emic (i.e., from the insider's perspective) factors in language learning and use, thereby amplifying the voices of individual learners and speakers. In doing so, they emphasise the importance of the body, the emotions, and the historical-political context in determining how individuals represent their present and past multilingualism[2] (Busch, 2013; 2020). Second, they foster participants' creative expression as an integral part of the process of developing sociolinguistic awareness, giving individuals the space to reflect on and engage with the language resources that constitute their repertoires, and to share and discuss their reflections with peers (Cognigni, 2014).

This paper uses a variant of the language portraits method, recently introduced in sociolinguistic research by the *ITASTRA* School in Palermo and the association *APS Asinitas* in Rome, known as whole-body or full-body language portraits (hereafter: fLPs). Unlike traditional language portraits, which are based on a predefined A4-sized silhouette (Busch, 2012; Krumm & Jenkins, 2001), fLPs involve participants drawing life-sized outlines of their own bodies. This approach establishes a deeper connection between the participants and their portraits and fosters emotional investment in self-representation (Jager et al., 2016). Participants can, for example, choose how they want to depict their body posture (e.g., crouching, jubilating with two arms raised, or playing basketball; see the three photos in Figure 1, respectively) and incorporate personal details (e.g., hair, clothes, or shoes) into the outlines.

The use of fLPs aligns strongly with embodied multilingualism approaches, as it emphasizes the integration of sensory-physical and emotional dimensions in representing language repertoires. Coupled with multimodal pedagogy, this method encourages the use of diverse expressive materials—colors, shapes, and textures—as tools for self-representation and introspection, while also promoting physical and verbal interactions among participants.

[2] While we acknowledge the distinction often drawn between "multilingualism" (the social co-presence of multiple languages) and "plurilingualism" (individual language repertoires), we only use the term "multilingualism" in this paper to maintain consistency with prevailing usage in our field's literature.

Figure 1. Different Body Postures of the fLPs in the BIPortrait Corpus

After co-drawing their fLPs (in both pair and individual activities), participants are invited to narrate their language autobiographies in the form of "small stories" (henceforth: smallLAs; see Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008), that are short anecdotes about everyday linguistic practices or brief accounts of language learning and use (Lupica Spagnolo, 2019; 2022) as they emerge from their portraits. This takes place within narrative group activities conducted in a narrative circle, primarily composed of peers alongside one or two researchers. In a final step, selected fLPs are analyzed by student groups using narrative analysis techniques (previously introduced by the teachers) and then discussed collectively in a plenary session. Thus, by "putting bodies and stories into communication" and providing a supportive space to share language experiences, fLPs serve as a creative pedagogical tool through which individuals can explore their own and others' language repertoires and resources holistically and make sense of them for themselves and *vis-à-vis* a trusted audience.

The practical application of fLPs is demonstrated in this paper through an exemplary analysis of data from the BIPortrait corpus, collected during a workshop at Masaryk University (Czech Republic) as part of a Blended Intensive Program (BIP) in collaboration with the University of Bergen and Østfold University College (Norway), Boğaziçi University (Türkiye), University of Cyprus (Cyprus), University of Porto (Portugal), and University of Potsdam

(Germany). This workshop brought together university students in linguistics and language teacher education programs[3] from diverse (socio)linguistic backgrounds, many of whom had experienced mobility as children with their families or on their own for study or work.

Our analysis focuses on how workshop participants used fLPs to explore and articulate the impact of migration and mobility on their multilingual identities. An unexpected descriptive finding reveals that several participants—despite being university students from relatively privileged milieus (in the sense that they can afford higher education and have not been forced to migrate due to war, labor conditions, or other crises)—faced more or less severe forms of "linguistic trauma" (Busch & McNamara, 2020; Busch & Reddemann, 2013) and sociocultural tensions related to their family and/or community language varieties, particularly after relocating to new settings. By "linguistic trauma", we refer to harm or distress caused by language-related experiences, such as the use of certain words, sounds, or even silence, which can be re-triggered by analogous experiences even many years later (Busch & McNamara, 2020, pp. 327–328).[4] What makes the term "trauma" appropriate in this context is not only the severity of single events, but also the repetitive and cumulative nature of their effects, which can significantly impact a person's self-perception, relational capacity, and sense of agency in the world.

Through embodied practices during the laboratory workshop, students were encouraged to reflect on how their experiences shaped their acceptance or (partial) rejection of their language repertoires. For many, this reflective process proved transformative: it allowed them to express their voices and reclaim agency over their smallLAs, as well as reintegrate previously marginalized aspects of their linguistic identities, thereby embracing the multifaceted nature of their multilingualism. Building on this, the second applied aim of this paper is to highlight the potential of fLPs and smallLAs in educational settings to enhance students' sociolinguistic awareness. By combining embodied and multimodal approaches, these methods provide a platform for learners to critically engage with their language resources, fostering both creativity and self-awareness.

Against this backdrop, this paper pursues the following research goals:

[3] At the participants' universities, some courses are open to both linguistics students and pre-service language teachers.
[4] In addition to language-related traumatic experiences, which are the focus of this paper, Busch and McNamara (2020) also highlight the role of languages in the discursive construction and narrative processing of trauma.

1. To describe how participants visually represent and orally narrate their language repertoires, focusing on recurring themes or patterns in terms of content, linguistic forms, and visual expression, while highlighting the bodily, emotional, and historical-political dimensions of linguistic experiences.
2. To assess the effectiveness of a creativity-based method combining fLPs and smallLAs in fostering participants' sociolinguistic awareness and transformative processing of language-related experiences, including linguistic trauma.

This paper is structured as follows. We first outline the research framework and analytical tools used to examine the painted fLPs and accompanying narrated smallLAs. Then, we introduce the methods and corpus, while the later section explores recurring and unexpected themes that emerged during participants' accounts of their language repertoires. Finally, we summarize our findings and discuss their pedagogical implications, as well as provide some concluding remarks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EMBODIED LANGUAGE REPERTOIRES IN MOTION

Language repertoires, also referred to as communicative-semiotic repertoires, encompass the full range of language and semiotic resources available to individuals. These include language varieties, dialects, registers, (trans)languaging practices, and fragments or bits of codes (e.g., García & Wei, 2014), as well as gestures and facial expressions (e.g., Fontana & Mignosi, 2023). These resources interact dynamically with those considered usable, imaginable, or desirable within the communities in which individuals live (e.g., Gumperz, 1964, pp. 137–138). While speakers have the agency to draw from their full range of language resources, their choices are shaped—and at times constrained—by social norms and language ideologies that circulate at the community level.

Importantly, language repertoires extend beyond what individuals actively use to include codes that are lost, rejected, or aspired to and are therefore inscribed in the subjects' bodies (Busch, 2012). Furthermore, repertoires are profoundly influenced by both spatial and temporal factors, including experiences of mobility and overall life trajectories (Blommaert, 2009). This section situates our research within the framework of embodied multilingualism and creativity-driven, multimodal pedagogy, and outlines our methods for collecting and analyzing fLPs and smallLAs.

Speaking Bodies: Full-Body Language Portraits

Multimodal biographical methods were introduced by the *Spracherleben* research group at the Institute of Linguistics at the University of Vienna since its formation in 2005. The most widely used tool within this framework is the Language Portrait, which originated in 1990s research on language awareness in elementary education (Gogolin & Neumann, 1991; Krumm & Jenkins, 2001). With the growing interest in both biographical approaches (Busch 2013; 2017; 2020) and visual methods (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019; Reavey & Johnson, 2017), Language Portraits have gained international recognition as a research tool for enabling a multimodal exploration of language repertoires. Currently, they are applied in several contexts, including education and training (Coffey, 2015; Prasad, 2014), and therapeutic settings (Busch & Reddemann, 2013).

Specifically, the increasing interest in visual tools in language education (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019; Molinié, 2009) is motivated by the fact that images are powerful ways to gain new insights into the beliefs, emotional landscapes, and lived experiences of the multilingual self (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). These approaches align with David Block's (2014) call to move "beyond the linguistic" by delving into learners' and speakers' identities, passions, and visions, thereby generating new types of "data." Image-making not only fosters creative expression but also supports the emergence of metaphors, which are especially valuable in research, as they convey deep, holistic understandings and beliefs (Coffey, 2015, p. 503; see also Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer, 2019; Kramsch, 2013; Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva & Correa Gomes, 2019; Molinié, 2009).

Standard language portrait silhouettes have been used to narrate and reflect on emic relationships not only with national languages, but also with dialects, varieties, codes, and communicative practices. The traditional approach is to provide an A4-size silhouette, which is usually a schematic, pre-defined outline of the human body, neutral in terms of gender and clothing. This silhouette provides a frame and can be interpreted in various ways as a self-portrait. For this paper, however, we did not use the standard silhouette. Instead, we opted for using a body mapping technique (Jager et al., 2016, for an overview) to create full-body language portraits (fLPs). In this technique, participants are arranged in pairs: one person lies down on a large sheet of paper in the position in which they wish to be represented, while their partner traces the outline of their body with a marker (see Figure 2). Each participant then receives their full-body silhouette and is asked to fill it in with color. Unlike other approaches,

we favor using fluid colors, as they enable artists to work quickly on large surfaces and to represent both clear boundaries and shades.

Figure 2. Laboratory Activities to Jointly Create and Individually Paint the fLPs

The body mapping method has long been used to visualise lived experience and stimulate processes of personal reflection in groups. Jager et al. (2016) trace the method's development back to the 1980s. The studies they review, mainly conducted in therapeutic and educational contexts, cover topics such as health, trauma, social inequality, migration, community development, and education. The main purpose of body mapping is to bring the subjects' experiential perspectives to the fore in a collaborative process with a sense of self-responsibility. The metaphorical transformation of the body into an image facilitates a momentum of self-distancing that makes it possible to experience oneself as one's counterpart—from a phenomenological perspective, the possibility of being a subject-body and having an object-body (Lindemann, 1994, p. 80).

Observing one's reflected image can foster self-awareness and support the recomposition of lived experiences—bringing together what may be internally felt as fragmented or broken into a unified image. We hypothesize that this process also applies to the language repertoire and, in this, relies on the transformative potential of this creativity-based method. Since 2010, the association *APS Asinitas* in Rome has introduced body mapping as an activity in Italian classes for refugees, offering a creative medium for self-representation that complements storytelling in multilingual contexts. At the *ItaStra* School of Italian Language for Foreigners at the University of Palermo, this technique has been adapted for use in sociolinguistics, specifically for the collaborative construction of fLPs (Di Benedetto & Tiranno, 2016).

Colors and Shapes of Language Resources: Visual Analysis of fLPs

Traditionally, body parts are metaphorically linked to expressions of feelings: an emotionally significant language can be placed in the heart, while a language useful in everyday life is placed in the hands. Another metaphorical process involves color, where each color represents a different language and may be combined with others, featuring stronger or weaker tones, sharp or blurred boundaries. Of course, no absolute values apply, but these are clarified in the portraitist's later narrative account (or smallLA) of the painted image. Colors can be interpreted in different ways, with cultural, personal, and conventional aspects playing an important role.

Image reading can be a reference horizon when looking at fLPs. There are three interrelated systems in composition that define the meanings of an image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 177):

> (I) "Information value", i.e., the placement of elements in specific areas of the image (upper left or lower right);
> (II) "Salience", i.e., (additional) drawn elements that attract the viewer's attention on different levels;
> (III) "Framing", i.e., the presence or absence of structural elements that separate or connect items in the image.

The first dimension can be seen in the way colors are used, for instance, more on the left or right of the body. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the left side represents what has passed and the right side represents what is new; this idea, which is widespread in drawing analysis, needs to be examined more closely in multicultural contexts, as the temporal idea seems to come from the direction of writing and could be completely reversed in the case of Arabic or Japanese speakers. The upper and lower sides represent what is associated with imagination, thought, ideas, abstraction, and spirituality (top), as well as concrete aspects of life, origin, and roots (bottom).

As for the salience dimension, it is interesting to note whether additional elements have been drawn inside the outline of the body (e.g., mouth, ears, heart, clothing, etc.), and as for the framing dimension, it is possible to note whether certain body parts have been left blank, whether there are color matches, or whether a connection has been established through additional symbols (e.g., lines or arrows). While the topographical structure of the language portraits may remain opaque to the viewer, it provides a reference for following in-depth narratives with the authors. As Cognigni (2014, p. 10) emphasizes, "the narrative that accompanies the graphic expression is certainly more important than the semiotic value of the

drawing itself: what is more interesting is the interpretation that the learner makes of it through verbal reconstruction" (our translation).

Zanasi et al. (2023) note that significant languages often appear in the head, but the associated metaphors are polyvalent: the head can be associated with spontaneous thinking in a language, but it may also represent languages that require effort to master. Eyes, ears, and mouth are common details. The neck, which anatomically connects the head to the torso, retains the meaning of passage in students' metaphors. It often represents a threshold—a space where something is about to emerge but remains held back, or a conduit linking the inner world (such as emotions and affectivity) with the outer world (such as social interactions and expectations). Kuster and De Meulder (2019), who analyzed 23 portraits of Italian Sign Language signers, showed the importance given to hands (for marking speech and writing) and eyes. Several authors (Cognigni, 2014; Zanasi et al., 2023) detect in the torso or heart area connotations of the seat of feelings and emotions.

In the heart are the language resources most loved by students, whether in learning, use, or desire. The heart often becomes a metaphor for the family history and attachment to origins. The abdomen generally takes on the connotation of a place where all those irrational manifestations that we feel are instinctual begin and take shape (Peña Cervel, 2001), but it can also refer to the metaphor of digestion, of that which is metabolized. In the four limbs and their extremities, the multiplicity of meanings is even more pronounced than in the other body parts. The arms seem to be assigned linguistic resources with instrumental value.

The fLP image is a different mode of meaning-making than the verbal mode. Selection and interpretation occur in both modes, which are intertwined and influenced by the context in which the portrait is produced and narrated (Busch, 2017). The verbal narrative is structured in a linear and sequential manner, favoring diachronic continuity and synchronic coherence. By contrast, the visual mode directs the gaze towards the 'whole' (*Gestalt*) and the relationship between the parts, allowing for contradictions, fractures, and overlaps to express a more complete experience in relation to one's semiotic communicative linguistic repertoire. This suggests that body metaphors in fLPs depend on the speakers' bodily experience of language codes.

Stories about Language Resources: Narrative Analysis of fLPs

After the creative phase, participants are invited to narrate their language autobiographies as depicted in their fLPs. Language (auto)biographies are defined by Pavlenko (2007, p. 165) as

"life histories that focus on the languages of the speaker and discuss how and why these languages were acquired, used, or abandoned" (see also Franceschini, 2003; 2022).

The stories told in our workshop are shared in group settings—referred to as narrative circles (see next section for more details)—and within a limited timeframe. Therefore, they are more akin to "small stories" than to the "big stories" usually collected in autobiographical studies (see Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, for this distinction). In fact, they lack the prototypical features of long autobiographical narratives, or "big stories", which typically recount extraordinary past events organized around a clear narrative climax. Instead, they tend to focus on short anecdotes about everyday linguistic practices or brief accounts of language learning and use, sometimes spanning several years (see also Lupica Spagnolo, 2022). While these stories follow a general narrative orientation, they also often include several descriptive and, at times, argumentative sequences. In this paper, we define, therefore, the narratives emerging from fLPs as small language autobiographies (smallLAs).

In this study, we conduct a narrative analysis of the content and form of selected smallLAs, focusing particularly on the "positioning acts" of both speakers and listeners (see Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2004 for details on this analytical method). Positioning acts encompass all discursive practices through which interaction partners—explicitly or implicitly—assign and negotiate identity categories for themselves and others within a conversation (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004). Crucially, positioning is an inherently dynamic and interactionally embedded process: individual positioning acts can be ratified, rejected, or further elaborated upon by the addressees or by the speakers themselves in subsequent turns (see also Deppermann, 2013).

Narrative sequences typically reveal multiple levels of positioning (Bamberg, 1997; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Deppermann, 2013; Franceschini, 2003; Lupica Spagnolo, 2019; 2022). This occurs because, when telling a story, narrators report (past or imagined) events that constitute the story world but simultaneously co-construct the narrated episodes in interaction with specific interlocutors in the here and now of a particular interaction. Building on Franceschini's (2003) framework, we distinguish between two main levels of positioning: the presentational and the interactional.

The presentational level concerns *what* is narrated. It includes references to events, circumstances, and emotions rooted in the narrator's individual experiences, as well as collective patterns of meaning-making and trans(con)textual references (e.g., intertextual

references to other texts, but also to political events, socio-historical theories, etc.). In contrast, the interactional level addresses *how* events are narrated within the specific interactional micro-context, that is, considering concrete communicative goals and the effects of "recipient design" on the organization of the story (Franceschini, 2003, paragraphs 12–18). This includes the analysis of specific linguistic features that have emerged as relevant in previous research, such as the alternation of personal pronouns, active/passive voice, specific prosodic features, as well as code-switching and translanguaging practices (Pavlenko, 2007; Lupica Spagnolo, 2019; 2022).

While the presentational and interactional levels are deeply interconnected (Franceschini, 2003), their analytical distinction provides a useful heuristic for exploring language biographies in general, and smallLAs in particular. Specifically, our analysis focuses on how participants, through positioning acts at both the presentational and interactional levels, represent and negotiate their "voices"—that is, their distinctive past and present perspectives, shaped by individual experiences and collective discourses surrounding their language resources (Bakhtin, 1981)—as well as their "agency"—defined as their ability to control and self-determine their language choices and behaviour across time (De Fina, 2003)—when recounting their smallLAs. In addition, drawing on Busch (2013, pp. 24–32), we complement our content- and form-based examination of smallLAs with an analysis of the dynamic relationship between smallLAs and the corresponding fLPs. Our approach considers three key dimensions that shape individual language repertoires and help identify the impact of linguistic trauma and potential resilience processes (see also Busch and Reddemann, 2013, pp. 30–32).

First, the "bodily" (in German: *leiblich*) dimension, a term rooted in the phenomenological philosophical tradition, refers to "linguistic habitus(es)" (Bourdieu, 1982). This concept encompasses the set of largely unconscious dispositions transmitted to speakers, for example, through socialization, which are deeply ingrained in their bodies and predispose them to behave and (re)act linguistically in certain ways. Precisely because these dispositions are incarnated, their analysis is fundamental to the embodied multilingualism approach adopted in this paper. Moreover, as these dispositions operate outside of conscious control, their unintended surfacing—such as through an accent or interjection—may re-trigger traumatic experiences (Busch & Reddemann, 2013).

Second, the "emotional" (or biographical) dimension relates to how individuals' experiences—whether positive or negative—accumulated over a lifetime affect their relationships to their language resources and may influence their decision to use or avoid them.

In some cases, specific language varieties—or the absence thereof—may be tied to lived experiences of emotional safety and belonging or, conversely, to memories of exclusion, such as homophobic bullying or rejection, and are therefore either actively sought or rejected.

Finally, the "historical-political" dimension addresses how language ideologies—understood as dominant discourses about languages and varieties circulating in the sociolinguistic environments where speakers live—impact individual language repertoires, as well as how individuals may resist them (Busch, 2013; see also Bourdieu, 1982; Foucault, 1969; for the theoretical framework). For instance, displacement into a new sociolinguistic context may expose individuals to a different configuration of language ideologies or "language regimes", potentially producing a sense of linguistic inadequacy and the feeling of "no longer having the right language to speak" (Busch & Reddemann, 2013, p. 32; our translation).

Ultimately, the very act of narrating a (traumatic) experience can have a transformative function, supporting the processing and reintegration of the event into the speaker's self-understanding (Busch & McNamara, 2020, pp. 328–330). When verbal narration is not possible, creative methods such as the fLP may still provide opportunities for reflective and reparative engagement with language-related trauma.

METHODOLOGY

Conducting a Creativity-based Workshop: Preliminary Observations

The exploration of language repertoires in a workshop context requires the creation of an environment that facilitates listening and exchange, giving relevance to the multimodal dimension of expressive communication (Bartoli & Lotano, 2024; Bartoli, 2025; Schwarz-Friesel, 2015).[5] There is a growing recognition in cognitive linguistics that the mind is inherently embodied and rooted in sensorimotor experience and emotionally shared intersubjective relationships (Schwarz-Friesel, 2015).

Our work begins by eliminating the frontal classroom setting, preparing a space where participants can move through activities that set bodies, gazes, and voices in motion, creating intimacy. At the workshop's beginning, we exchange greetings in our preferred language, introduce ourselves with a gesture, re-enact the walking mannerisms of loved ones: we observe

[5] The embodied, intersubjective, multimodal and multilingual dimensions of the laboratory management used in the workshop is borrowed from the methodology developed by the Asinitas Association (see Bartoli & Lotano, 2024; Bartoli 2025).

each other, imitate each other, make fun of each other, and focus on our memories. We pause with our eyes closed to recall a typical phrase from our family, then from a school or life teacher, in the languages in which we heard it. We share them by whispering them into each other's ears, without translation, like strange, unintelligible secrets. The room fills with tongues, surprise, embarrassed laughter, and emotion. The purpose of this activity is to tune into linguistic memories, to mobilize each person's multilingual repertoire, and to create an intersubjective fabric that facilitates subsequent expressive-narrative activities.

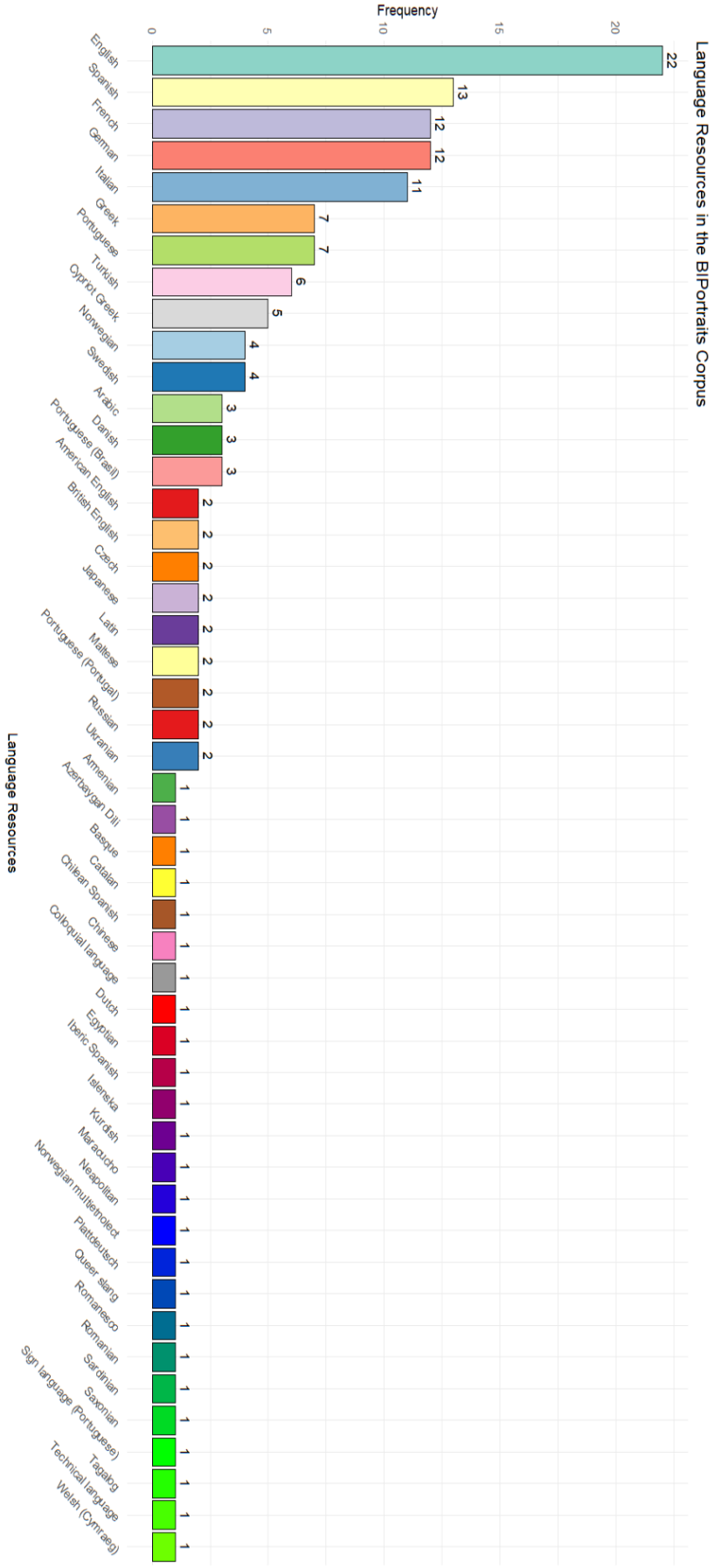
The next activity is graphic-symbolic, using drawing and color to represent one's multilingual repertoire and relationship to it, of particular interest for accessing communicative immediacy and the emotional-affective dimension. The task is usually of this type: "Can you color the silhouette with your languages, dialects, and other ways of speaking or communicating, assigning colors to the areas of the body where you feel these language resources? Then, add a legend." We intentionally provided no interpretive criteria or suggested methods, allowing metaphors to emerge as spontaneously as possible, guided solely by the authors' expressive intent.

Data and Context

The data of the BIPortrait corpus was collected from two workshops and follow-up interviews conducted during the in-person phase of the International School *Language and literacy in migration context*, organized at the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures of Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic) in collaboration the University of Bergen and Østfold University College (Norway), Boğaziçi University (Türkiye), University of Cyprus (Cyprus), University of Porto (Portugal), and University of Potsdam (Germany) within the Erasmus Blended Intensive Program (BIP) 2023-2024, from June 3 to 7, 2024. This in-person phase was preceded by a virtual phase, held from April 22 to 30, 2024. Both sessions explored the theme of language, literacy, and migration from different perspectives (theoretical, sociolinguistic, and educational).

The first workshop, "Linguistic repertoires in motion", was centred entirely on the co-construction and narration of fLPs within a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. After drawing their portraits, participants were asked to describe their fLPs and narrate their own smallLAs in two *narrative circles.* The second workshop, "Embodied multilingualism: narrating migration and languages," additionally involved analyzing selected portraits in student groups using narrative analysis techniques, followed by collective discussion in a plenary session.

Figure 3. Language Resources in the BIPortraits Corpus (Standardized Names)



A total of 26 participants took part in the data collection (22 socialized as female, 4 as male), with an average age of 30 years (min. 20, max. 68). The entire sample included bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students in linguistics or language teacher education programs with highly diverse language repertoires and backgrounds. In total, 25 fLPs were collected (with two participants collaborating on one fLP). As shown in Figure 3 above, the fLPs feature a total of 48 language resources, with participants averaging 6.2 language resources per fLP (ranging from 3 to 12).[6]

After completing their fLPs, participants were divided into two groups: the first one (Group A), led by one researcher, comprised 12 participants (as mentioned above, two participants worked together on one fLP), while the second (Group B), co-moderated by two researchers, had 14 participants. The task was to describe their language portrait and narrate, in front of the others in a circle, their smallLA in their preferred language. Although this option was explicitly given, almost all participants chose English as their *lingua franca*. Both sessions, each lasting approximately one hour, were audio-recorded, transcribed (first with the help of the artificial-intelligence-based transcription software TurboScribe and then manually edited), and subsequently examined.

Participants' Language Diversity and Mobility Experiences: An Overview

As shown in Figure 3, in co-constructing and narrating their fLPs, participants in the BIPortraits corpus not only refer to a wide range of language resources but also include several local and regional varieties and more or less institutionalized communicative practices. This diversity of individual language repertoires stems partly from personal or familiar experiences of both long- and short-term mobility, ranging from permanent migration to new countries to temporary stays abroad for study purposes. It also reflects a general interest in linguistic topics and language learning. This finding is probably not unexpected given that participants are graduate and postgraduate students in linguistics or language teacher candidates. Nevertheless, it points to an overall high level of sociolinguistic awareness and sensitivity to linguistic variation among the students.

[6] The language names in Figure 3 are standardized, but the endonyms used by the participants are provided in the next sections. In Figure 3, we only included the language resources depicted in the fLPs, although some participants added additional language resources when narrating their smallLAs later.

For example, all students from diglossic Cyprus emphasise the distinctions between "Greek" (or: Standard Modern Greek) and "Cyprish/Cyprus Greek" (or: Cypriot Greek)[7] in their portraits. Participants also refer to different varieties of Spanish (e.g., Castilian, Chilean), Portuguese (including European, Brazilian, and Portuguese Sign Language), British and American English, Egyptian Arabic, as well as local codes, such as Neapolitan and Romanesco (two Italo-Romance varieties from Naples and Rome, respectively), or "Saxonian" (also: Saxon) and *Plattdeutsch* ('Low German') varieties from Germany. Minority or minoritized languages such as Catalan, Basque, Sardinian, Kurdish, Welsh (Cymraeg), and Maracucho (a local language in Venezuela) are also featured, along with the Norwegian multiethnolect "Kebabnorsk" and the international "queer slang."

Following a preliminary analysis of all fLPs and smallLAs in our corpus, we selected five key studies for in-depth qualitative discussion. Individual follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant to gain further insight into their language autobiographies. Additionally, participants reviewed the analysis of their portraits and smallLAs presented in this paper and generally agreed with it (except for Ce. and At., who could not be recontacted). These five cases were selected because they exemplify three distinct ways of coping with mobility experiences and language-related challenges, including linguistic trauma. They also effectively illustrate the transformative potential of our creativity-based method.

FINDINGS

Instigated Language Shift: (Momentary) Abandonment of Diatopic Varieties

Variation is usually represented in positive terms by the participants in the BIPortrait corpus in both narrative circles. Nevertheless, some students share with their groups ambiguous, if not negative, experiences related to using one language variety or variant over another. These negative experiences often occur after moving to new sociolinguistic environments, where the habitual way(s) of speaking may not be legitimate (or less so). In some cases, these negative experiences eventually lead to a reorganization of the language hierarchies that are latently inscribed in the participants' repertoires in the bodily dimension, as well as to a rejection of identification with a monolingual identity and an embrace of translanguaging practices at the representational and, at times, interactional levels.

[7] In this and following sections, we report the glottonyms used by the participants in drawing and narrating their fLPs, with the "official" names of the language resources in brackets.

An illustrative example is provided in the extract 1, taken from the smallLA of Bo. (Potsdam; language resources: 11; age: 32), a woman who was born in Houston, Texas to German-speaking parents and spoke mainly American English until the age of three. In the extract 1, Bo. recounts an experience in an English class at school after moving back to Germany with her family, where she received a lower grade on an English test because she used an American English variant instead of a British one (see Appendix A for the basis transcription conventions):

> and then British English (.) I don't know why it went black[8] but (.) *ja:* (.) it is somehow (.) and it's: (.) I ha+ (.) *ja:* (.) I (have) sort of started (.) started learning British English pretty in high school because ehm ((pause)) I had more connection to American English and then I had to learn the vocabulary (.) another vocabulary (.) so I remember a situation where I had a point less in a vocabulary test because I used the American word and not the British [Extract 1]

In this short sequence, recounted during the narrative circle, Bo.'s voice and agency are expressed indirectly. The teller refrains from taking an explicit stance or position regarding the recounted event, either in the story words or in the interactional situation. This is suggested, for example, by the absence of a story's evaluative coda or the use of hedges such as "somehow", "sort of", "pretty," and hesitations (see also Lupica Spagnolo, 2022).

In a follow-up interview conducted in German, however, Bo. recounts a longer version of the same episode. In this version, she represents her narrated self in the story world—and, indirectly, her actual self at the interactional level—taking a more explicit and committed position against the teacher's decision: 'and that made me very angry at the time I found it not good ((laugh)) ((pause)) yes / because the word itself was correct only in / yeah / *American English* wasn't *British English*'[9]. This shift may be partly influenced by the different communicative contexts (narrative circle vs. individual interview). Nevertheless, the new way in which Bo. reframes a past experience that had felt "traumatic"—precisely because it is associated with feelings of shame and inadequacy—into a more agentive narrative highlights the transformative potential of the fLP method.

In both narrative circle and follow-up interviews, Bo. further argues that she began "step by step" to prefer British English (emotional dimension) and even reports losing her strong American English accent (bodily dimension), attributing this change to her teenage fascination

[8] Bo. is referring to the color assigned to British English in her fLP, which is black (see Figure 4).
[9] Original (in German): "und das hat mich damals sehr geärgert also das fand ich nicht gut ((laugh)) ((pause)) ja / weil die Vokabel an sich eben richtig waren nur in / ja / *American English* war nicht *British English*."

with British literature ("especially Harry Potter") and frequent trips to London to visit a close friend.

Figure 4. Bo.'s fLP (Language Resources: 11)

This tension between British and American English—evident in some sequences of Bo.'s smallLA—appears to be resolved visually in her painted fLP (see Figure 4 above). In it, British and American English cover a similar body portion, each depicted on one of the two legs, suggesting a sense of balance. However, the feet—which tend to be associated with the speaker's own origin and familial roots (Zanasi et al., 2023)—are filled with American English and *Plattdeutsch* ('Low German'), respectively. The latter is the language spoken by Bo.'s grandparents, who live in north-eastern Germany, and of which she claims to have only tokenized competence: she knows only a few words or phrases, such as *nich lang schnackn, Kopp in´n Nacken* 'don't talk for long, put your head back' or nouns referring to food.

Overall, Bo.'s fLP is one of the most multilingual portraits of the corpus (see also Pa.'s portraits in Figure 5). The woman not only mentions several varieties but also draws the boundaries between them as fluid: see, for instance, the skirt where *Castellano* 'Castilian'[10] and Chilean Spanish (yellow/orange), as well as Portuguese (green tones) resources are mixed together. Moreover, Bo. positions at the top of her silhouette, that is, on her hat—added as an

[10] Apart from English, the language of communication, Bo. only uses the original language names for *Castillano* and *Plattdeutsch*. This, together with clues from her smallLA, suggests close connections to these codes, as well as an awareness of issues concerning glottonyms at the historical-political level.

extra and, therefore, possibly salient element to the usual body silhouette (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006)—"the languages that I / learned but that I do not use anymore really", namely Dutch, Latin, Basque, and French. In keeping with this visual representation, Bo. sometimes engages in code-switching and translanguaging at the interactional level. See, for instance, the possible use of the German discourse marker *ja* /ja/ ('yeah' /jɛ/) in extract 1, or the functional incorporation of English stylistic insertions into German during her follow-up interview, such as in "Märchengeschichten auf Englisch / so *Disney fairy tales* / [..] das habe ich immer auf Englisch vorgelesen bekommen" 'so fairy-tale stories in English / like *Disney fairy tales* / [..] I was always read to in English.'

Similar ambiguous, if not negative, experiences involving the use of local varieties and variants outside of their habitual settings are, for instance, described by Pa. (Potsdam; language resources: 12; age: 27). In particular, the participant reports having "turned off my dialect"—a "funny" "subversion" of Saxonian intertwined with Czech—after relocating to a neighbouring region for university studies. Pa. explains that he adjusted his speech because other students had difficulty understanding him: "to be able to communicate with the others and / make them understand what I was saying."

Figure 5. Pa.'s fLP (Language Resources: 12)

Despite this (temporary) language shift, the "Saxonian dialect of German" continues to have deep emotional value for Pa., as suggested by his fLP in Figure 5 above. This code is represented as the red language resource in the narrator's heart and feet, both colors and

positions associated with affectivity in traditional western symbology (Cogorni & Thüne, 2022).

Notably, in contrast to Bo.'s fLP in Figure 4, many areas of Pa.'s silhouette are left blank. The student explains the use of multiple colors, with none clearly dominating his portrait, as reflecting his own comfort in "translanguaging situations and between languages", thereby intertextually referring to linguistic theories (historical-political dimension).

Accordingly, the visual image of his repertoire suggests that Pa. rejects identification with a single variety. This may be due to the linguistic delegitimization he has experienced or—as Pa. himself points out in a follow-up exchange—to a deliberate refusal to remain within one category and to limit himself to a single linguistic perspective. For him, engaging with several languages and "switching the vocabulary [he] use[s]" means "receiving a new perspective on a situation" and "reinventing [himself]" beyond categorization.

Thus, depending on context and function, different languages may occupy a central role in Pa.'s repertoire. Consider, for example, the green German belly, which, according to Pa., represents his "tummy feeling" (likely derived from German *Bauchgefühl* 'gut instinct'), that is, an embodied predisposition to (re)act when "startle[d]" or unexpectedly interpellated, and as such, a reflection of his habitus at the bodily level (Busch, 2013). See also the blue English face, which represents his professional life (Pa. was studying to become an English teacher before 2020, though he actually reoriented himself to applied linguistics) and, more broadly, the vehicular code he uses to present himself to the world.

In short, like Bo.'s portrait, Pa.'s fLP incorporates a wide range of language resources (his hands are multicolored, and the legend is very rich), suggesting a repertoire shaped by flexibility, responsiveness, and contextual adaptability, rather than by fixed alignment with a single linguistic variety and identity.

Inheriting Language Shift: Linguistic Desire as a Recovery of Transgenerational Identities

Another recurring topic in the BIPortrait corpus is the interrupted intergenerational transmission of a family or heritage language, due to experiences not directly lived by the participants themselves, but by previous generations. The reasons behind these decisions were usually not explicitly communicated by parents or grandparents and are instead reconstructed

retrospectively by the now-grown children. In response, participants express a strong desire to (re)learn the heritage language that was lost or acquired only in a tokenized way.

Figure 6. Ce.'s fLP (Language Resources: 5)

An example of this experience is provided by the smallLA of Ce., a woman studying at the University of Bergen (language resources: 5; age 31). Ce.'s smallLA is closely linked to the fLP she produced (Figure 6), even though she states that she consciously gave meaning above all to the colors: "some of the colors mean something to me / so I can say something about that." In her smallLA, Ce. repeatedly refers to both the colors and their positioning in the parts of the body and the figure. The silhouette appears to us to be clearly divided in two, with two important intermediate zones. In her smallLA, she confirms her two main linguistic worlds as separate, but equally significant, since both feature important dimensions of how she feels and thinks, being her "two first languages":

> one part is orange […] that part is mmh: represents (.) mmh: American English (.) because as you can tell (.) I speak American English (.) because my dad is American (.) and the other part of me (.) is or (.) parts of (.) half of me is blue (.) because of my Norwegian language (.) I grew up in Norway but I was born in the U.S. (.) so (.) I feel very (.) DIVIDED (.) I don't want to choose (.) the're (.) important parts of things I get DONE (.) and the way I THINK (.) and FEEL [Extract 2]

Ce. claims to have assigned the color orange/brown to American English "because it is a strong color." By contrast, her interpretation of why she chose blue for Norwegian gathers all her

emotional, in some cases, traumatic experiences in relation to a language acquired in the country where she grew up. Norwegian is for Ce. the language in which she studies and works, the most spoken language in her life, but with respect to which she has also experienced discomfort and estrangement, especially due to social judgment of her Boston American English accent considered by Norwegians as strange or incorrect, which still today immediately defines her as a foreigner (see extract 3 in Appendix B).

As Ce. explains, her discomfort with Norwegian on an emotional level is partially rooted in an experience she perceived as linguistically discriminatory, stemming from her Boston accent, which "not everyone finds beautiful" (see extract 3 in Appendix B and also Bo's smallLA in the earlier subsection). This experience is burdened by language ideologies at the socio-historical level claiming that British English is the only correct variety, relegating speakers of other varieties to a perceived state of error. Because of this, even though Norwegian is the language Ce. grew up with, the language she lives with, her process of acquiring and using it is marked by feelings of sadness and ambivalence, which she symbolically represents with the color blue.

Ce's migratory experience is vividly depicted in the central areas of her fLP. In line with findings by Zanasi et al. (2023), who note that affective languages—those tied to family history or personal desires—are more frequently represented in the chest, Ce. positions Italian as a language of desire, in particular the desire to reconnect with her migrant origins on the father's side.

As a linguistics student and a foreign language teacher to foreign adults, but also as a person with a migratory background herself, Ce. is sensitive to and easily identifies with the language denied to her father by her Italian migrant grandparents in America. The educational policy of the latter was more oriented towards learning the language of the host country rather than maintaining the heritage language, so her father acquired a poor vocabulary in Italian, but it still always aroused her curiosity. Ce. feels in this inherited language shift a great linguistic and cultural loss and views learning Italian as an opportunity to recover an important part of herself because Italian is "the cultural part I know / chaos / a lot of people / food. It's all about those things but it's lacking the language aspect."

During our follow-up interview, Ce. underlines the pleasure of having been able to represent Italian during the laboratory workshop, which aimed to capture the language repertoire in a broad sense, including the aspects of desire. As Ce. highlighted, participating in

the workshop enabled her to acknowledge the significance of Italian, a language she usually does not mention as "her own language" in her curriculum, not having a high level of competence. However, through the workshop activities and their transformative potential, she came to recognize the deep personal relevance of this (lost) heritage language, placing it at the centre of her portrait and describing it as her "language of the heart" (see extract 4).

> I chose to put mmh: red (.) in my chest area (.) because (.) I didn't make a heart (.) because I (.) I don't think I would be able to (.) but mmh: that represents Italian (.) because mmh: my mmh: family in the U.S. are Italian immigrants (.) I don't practice the language I only know just a little bit (.) but I grew up with words and mmh: and it's an important mmh: part of me (.) because I'm not so familiar with it and I'm learning Italian now so mmh: it's opening DOORS to me [...] it's like the language OF the heart (.) in Norwegian we have an expression we call it " hjertets språk" so it's + to me mmh: [Extract 4]

In the central black area of her fLP, Ce. also represents something that has to do with her migratory background. In the belly, she places the Norwegian of immigrants, the multiethnolect, which has a specific name in the Norwegian language (i.e., Kebabnorsk). However, she writes and then erases this name on her portrait (see Figure 6), explaining that, in reality, the name is derogatory and therefore she does not want to use it. This choice further demonstrates her empathy for the migratory experience and her sensitivity to linguistic discrimination. Ce. does not comment on the use of the black color. However, this area is both large and central, confirming her strong identification with her migratory background since she was a child. It also reflects her identification with a social-class dimension that she shares with second-generation children and teenagers, being a daughter of a working-class family, even though she considers her father privileged due to his American origins. Ce. shows us how the collection of fLPs and smallLAs inevitably also reveals the various layers of community belonging that shape individuals' identities.

> we use (.) this multiethnolect because (.) it has like mmh: it is mostly used by immigrant adolescents (.) but as an adolescent I also used it (.) even though I am not from the Middle East because this is also something that's used (.) mmh: among children with immigrant backgrounds people (.) but it's also like a social thing (.) like social class and I am from a working-class family and (.) we were just (.) I don't know (.) connected somehow by class and also those were the kids that I played well with because they had an immigrant background and even though my dad is maybe like more privileged immigrant from the U.S. [Extract 5]

Once again, the dimension of lack and desire returns:

> we still had something in common (.) like some piece of you that you're searching for (.) so (.) this is also related to it I think (.) in a way. […] I felt like I was expressing (.) my background using this multiethnolect because I didn't know Italian right? yes (.) but everyone knows English and it's not so

special either (.) so this was also something that I felt like it didn't express who I was because everyone speaks English [Extract 6]

In narrating her smallLA, Ce. realises that it was precisely this class identification with multi-ethnic groups and with a migrant background that perhaps put in her heart the desire for Italian as a reconnection to her origins. After all, she did not have a true home language to return to within the domestic walls, hers being a variety, but of a very widely spoken language (English): "So I think that's maybe why I also used that [the multiethnolect] and also felt so closely emotionally connected to Italian even though I didn't really speak it." Ce. also includes Spanish in her fLP, represented in brown within a small area on one side. She notes that she has studied it a little and loves the language not only because it has helped her to make friends, but also and above all for its assonance with Italian.

To sum up, Ce. conveys through her fLP and smallLA her difficult experiences due to linguistic discrimination, expressing her identifications and her belongings, giving ample space to her desire. The internal area of her body is strongly characterized by meanings connected to her migratory background which this laboratory itself seems an opportunity for reworking through the focus on languages.

Deliberate Language Shift: Language Acquisition and Self-expression

The pursuit of new language resources—while maintaining connections to existing ones—can be a deliberate choice for some participants in the BIPortrait corpus. In such cases, learning new languages serves as a pathway to discovering, developing, and expressing one's own multifaceted identities.

One illustrative case is that of At. (Bergen; language resources: 3; age unspecified), a young man from Greece, who moved to Norway to pursue his Master's studies after spending six months in Sweden as an Erasmus student. For At., acquiring Norwegian, and English during his teenage years, had a profound and transformative impact on his personal biography and self-development.

In recounting his fLP (Figure 7), At. foregrounds the bodily and emotional-biographical dimensions of language learning, describing how these sometimes clash with societal norms and expectations, leading to varying degrees of linguistic traumas. Thus, at the beginning of his smallLA, At. depicts himself as a "sleeping, probably dreaming" figure, lying face down

on his bed. In this position, he identifies three primary language resources in his repertoires, namely, in this order, Greek, *Norsk* (also referred to as Norwegian), and British English.[11]

Figure 7. At.'s fLP (Language Resources: 3)

At.'s choice of colors to represent each language reflects both cultural (socio-historical) and personal (emotional-biographical) associations. For instance, he mentions the role played by the national flags of Greece, Norway, and the UK in informing his color choice. However, he also explicitly reframes his description by further mentioning personal associations with these colors: for instance, light blue evokes to him the Greek sky, while red symbolizes high performance and determination in relation to *Norsk*. In this respect, At.'s use of the endonym "Norsk" instead of the exonym "Norwegian" on his fLP underscores his personal connection to this language. As he explains in a follow-up interview, he is familiar with both written standards (Bokmål and Nynorsk) and is keen to learn local variants.

The significance of Norsk/Norwegian in At.'s language repertoire, as well as his complex relationship with Greek (referred to as the "native language" spoken with family and friends), is also evident in how these two language resources are positioned in his fLP.

[11] In a follow-up interview, the participant states that if he could paint his portrait again, he would probably add "something in my hair like small lines / ((laugh)) on my head / between the English" to represent his fragmentary competence in Swedish.

On the one hand, At.'s heart—which is very salient on his fLP—is visually "split" into two halves, thereby suggesting a tension between the two codes on an emotional level (the contrast is, however, less strong than in the case of Ce. discussed in the earlier subsection). As explained by the narrator (and in line with the left-right symbology discussed by Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), the light-blue Greek side on the left represents his past, "where I come from." By contrast, the red Norsk/Norwegian side on the right is his present, "the place where I have chosen to go" and where "I feel like I have improved SO MUCH personally [...] I have fixed something that I thought wasn't working for me."

On the other hand, this sharp division, which may partly reflect dominant monolingual ideologies that push identification only with one single language (see Busch, 2012), is softened visually by the fact that the two colors are inverted in At.'s torso and reinverted again in his head. This alternation represents, according to the narrator, how his way of thinking is influenced "by the two languages I speak and I interact ((pause)) the two cultures that I have lived in." To represent this, At. also avoids drawing strict lines on his fLP. Rather, he prefers curves to symbolize smooth transitions between the language resources in his repertoire, as well as the possible change of proportions over time.

In addition to Greek and Norsk/Norwegian, another key language resource in At.'s repertoire is British English (also referred to as English). Although this language is mentioned last in his smallLA, its acquisition began much earlier, during At.'s childhood, making it chronologically his "first foreign language." British English holds a deeply personal significance for At., closely tied to the bodily dimension of "self-discovery." He describes it as his "greatest" language and embodies it in the pelvis area of his fLP. Using an adjective borrowed from Greek, he refers to this region as the "erotogenic zone", explaining that through English, he "discovered more about [his] sexuality."

In a follow-up interview, At. elaborates on this emotional-biographical connection with English:

> this positive attitude towards English started during my (.) as a + as a teenager (.) a:nd it's interesting because this is when I started understanding (.) about my attraction about people of the same sex ((pause)) a:nd (.) then ((pause)) ehm: because there was no representation in the Greek society (.) e:hm I found this representation in + in another culture in the British culture ((pause)) with series (.) and romance a:nd (.) yeah (.) in general like ACCEptance ((pause)) accepting speech no? [...] so I decided to:: (.) paint this part in blue because it opened a new door about me exploring my sexuality in a HEALthy way [Extract 7]

As expressed in the extract 7, the acquisition of English—and the cultural references these language skills unlocked to him—was therefore fundamental to At.'s self-acceptance. This stands in contrast to a pervasive sense of *ενοχή* (*enochí*; 'guilt(-feeling)')—the second and last Greek word used by the narrator in his smallLA—a feeling, which, he explains, is often felt by people of the same sexual orientation in his birth country.

In addition, and closely tied to this, At. depicts both his hair and feet in dark blue on his fLP. In accordance with the up/down symbolics discussed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), he claims that his hair represents "an extension to imagination" which was possible by the use of English, while his feet symbolize his travel experiences, facilitated by the use of English as a *lingua franca*.

Overall, during the telling of his smallLA, At.'s voice and agency are clearly expressed at both the interactional and representational levels, that is, with respect to how the participant positions himself *vis-à-vis* his audience in the *hic et nunc* of the interaction and how he positions his figure in the story world. On the one hand, at the start of the recording (At.'s portrait is the first narrated in group B), the narrator explicitly states that he wants to speak English so that everybody understands, because he has a specific message to communicate with his fLP. On the other hand, he portrays his narrated self as having overcome past struggles and as someone now confidently navigating his multilingual repertoire and multifaceted identities: "now my heart is split in two / but not really split in a way that I cannot choose / like / my heart is BOTH."

Finally, the expression of his own voice and agency is also achieved through linguistic means. Thus, linguistically, At. predominantly uses active verb forms conjugated in the first-person singular in his oral account (compare, on the contrary, Bo.; see also Lupica Spagnolo, 2022). The only exception is when he speaks about his color choice for Greek, where he employs the first-person plural personal pronoun: 'it's typical of our flag—and the most vivid image about Greece comes from our islands.'

The role of acquiring new language resources in self-expression and self-development, especially after moving to another country, is also highlighted by other participants in the BIPortrait corpus. In these accounts, the bodily dimension—together with the emotional-biographical ones—often plays a central role in how participants represent themselves as actively resisting dominant norms of living and speaking. While in these cases, the transformative effect may not stem directly from the fLP method itself but rather from prior

language learning experiences, the workshop setting creates a safe and supportive space in which these experiences can be shared. In turn, this can become transformative for other participants navigating similar challenges.

Figure 8. Ma.'s fLP (Language Resources: 7)

For instance, Ma., a 28-year-old non-binary person (socialized as a man) from Italy, currently studying in Potsdam (language resources: 7), portrays themselves as dancing between and by means of several language resources (see the multicolored legs and arms in Figure 8). Among these, there is the yellow "queer slang" which can be "in any language, so Italian, English, or Spanish", and with which Ma. particularly came into contact after moving to Berlin (Germany). Apart from on Ma.'s legs, arms, and head, this resource is located all around Ma.'s heart and is described as a "a very poppy thing / like with / ehm sun rays kind of / because I just + ((pause)) it's not that I change personality but I feel more free when I'm surrounded by queer people and I can just express myself in / like both with the body and the language."

Multilingual Repertoires in Interaction

The narrative circles were divided into two groups (A and B), but only the interaction in group A will be analyzed in this subsection. This group, moderated by one researcher, comprised twelve participants sharing their smallLAs, resulting in 16 narratives, twelve told in the first round and four in the second round.

The session began with the researcher's presentation and instructions: "Please place your language portrait in the centre of the circle so everyone can see it and try to describe it." The researcher then extended an explicit invitation: "And please, at the very beginning of your narration, introduce yourself and describe your linguistic portrait in the language you prefer."

Despite this specific request, the first participant started speaking immediately in English, without even addressing this language choice. After his talk, the student explicitly asked if anyone had any questions. This led to a very friendly debate, which deepened his personal narrative even further. The talk ended with a collective applause, and the spirit was then carried on by other participants. This included, however, maintaining English as the common language.

Even in a context that promoted multilingualism, using one's own language repertoire was challenging. The preference for English was due to its role as a vehicular language, ensuring better collective understanding. Its dominance was confirmed by the participants themselves, who, for instance, state, "it is the lingua franca, so you can say 'hi' to everybody."

However, one participant (Ma., see Figure 8) was an exception, because they began their speech in English, stating that they would try to follow the researcher's advice to use more languages. In doing so, Ma. used the strategy of "translanguaging" (e.g., García & Wei, 2014, inter al.), but only in the case of Spanish and Italian (between * in the extract 8):

> So (.) the first thing that I was sure about was mmh: the legs so this orange outside with the movements mmh: *porque me gusta bailar latino america e tambien* mmh: so (.) mmh: I like to dance to mmh: reggaeton °for example° (.) so it's really enjoyable for me so it was for sure on the legs maybe also on the pelvis [...] for Italian mmh: (.) *è sulle mani (.) perché: lo associo con i gesti (.) e: con (.) la cucina* mmh: I like to cook (.) like cooking is one of my love languages [...] then there is Neapolitan which can be considered as a dialect °although it's a bit problematic to say that (.) sometimes° [...] and it's in my heart (.) because my family speaks mainly mmh: Neapolitan to me so: I associate that with love [Extract 8]

As shown in the extract 8, Ma. does not use translanguaging for Neapolitan, the dialect connected with their family, nor for other language resources in their multilingual repertoires (7 languages, see 4.3). The dominance of English remains high, as evidenced by his immediate attempt to explain the phrases in Spanish and Italian.

As there was some time left, the researcher asked the participants to try a second round and narrate their smallLA in their first language or another language. This invitation was intended to provide a space for connecting with other cultures and backgrounds, fostering a

better understanding of individuality, and highlighting the belief that multilingualism is a path to understanding.

It ended up being four narratives in different language resources (Greek and Cypriot Greek, "Heavy" Cypriot Greek, Turkish, Arabic), accompanied by a very animated discussion of whether anyone understood some of it or caught some key words, or whether there were some similarities with other languages. Every narration, as in the previous round, was concluded with a sense of gratitude—applause.

Indeed, interest in the chosen language resources began with the first story told in Greek/Cypriot Greek. Immediately, one participant asked about the variety of Greek spoken by the teller, followed by curiosity to hear the same sentence in Greek and Cypriot Greek. Other participants from the same background joined in and provided more details on the pronunciation, differences, similarities, and contexts of use of the two varieties (e.g., "when I speak to people who I don't know I use Greek mostly, but with my friends and my family or people in my hometown, I use Cyprus Greek").

The relaxed atmosphere encouraged even one participant who had not drawn her own fLP to share her smallLA in Turkish. Another speaker of the same language then asked: "how about Turkish sounds to you guys?" This again sparked a discussion about the common and different features, varieties, and uniqueness of the writing system. A similar conversation was initiated by a subsequent narrative in Arabic. In other words, the interaction and lively curiosity of the participants confirm fLPs and smallLAs as tools not only for the exploration of one's own repertoire but also for the development of sociolinguistic awareness and intercultural exchange.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of fLPs and smallLAs yielded two main findings. Firstly, from a descriptive perspective, the data highlighted the profound influence of bodily, emotional, and historical-political dimensions on individual language repertoires and autobiographies. Notably, "linguistic traumas" (Busch & McNamara, 2020; Busch & Reddemann, 2013) emerged unexpectedly, despite participants' seemingly "privileged" linguistic backgrounds. By "privileged backgrounds," we mean that they do not speak overtly stigmatized language varieties or were not directly forced to migrate.

The reported traumas involved 1) delegitimized language resources that were concealed or abandoned after migration due to losing legitimacy in the new contexts of residence, which

sometimes resulted in identification with multilingual identities and translanguaging practices, 2) untransmitted language resources that were not passed down intergenerationally due to inherited language shift, leading to a (delayed) desire to learn them, or 3) identity-limited language resources that are perceived as inadequate for expressing certain dimensions of self (e.g., sexuality), prompting a deliberate shift to other languages, multilingual varieties, or slangs.

Secondly, from a methodological perspective, this study demonstrated the value of creativity-based, multimodal methods of data collection. These approaches elicit spontaneous, insider-perspective data while enhancing sociolinguistic awareness. As our analysis shown, such methods can be transformative: by offering a safe and supportive space, they enable participants to gain new insights into their multilingual selves—sometimes, reconstructing fragmented aspects of their identity, or, sometimes, providing peers with new ways of reinterpreting their own challenging linguistic experiences.

In particular, during the workshops, participants' language repertoires were set in motion by means of theatrical and body-mapping activities. This mobilization extended to the storytelling phase at the representational level, since numerous language resources (from national languages to dialects, multiethnolects, and slangs) were included in several fLPs. However, with a few exceptions in group A and Bo.'s portraits, the participants' language resources were largely frozen and not utilized during the telling activity at the interactional level. Despite our invitation to use all the language resources participants wanted, English was predominantly chosen as the *lingua franca*. The possible reasons for this choice are varied. They range from the need or desire to communicate a message to the possible influence of the academic context, and to the fact that English is nonetheless an integral part of participants' repertoires. Specifically, considering the entire BIPortrait corpus (25 fLPs; multiple locations of language resources are possible), English tends to appear in extremities, i.e., the hands (9 fLPs) and legs (8 fLPs), as well as in the head (10 fLPs). This distribution is expected, given its role as an international *lingua franca* and a language for academic communication, respectively. However, English also appears in more emotionally charged body areas (Cognigni, 2014; Zanasi et al., 2023), such as the belly (5 fLPs), hair and feet (1 fLP), and chest (1 fLP), or even blended across the entire body (4 fLPs).[12]

[12] We did not distinguish between varieties of English for this analysis.

As a final point, it should be noted that using fLPs in educational contexts presents both challenges and opportunities. One challenge lies in structuring the setting, which requires adequate space and time and often necessitates rearranging furniture. However, reconfiguring traditional layouts fosters relational possibilities, enhancing communication, contact, and collaboration among students. Though initially disorienting, students often become curious and cooperative as they grasp the value of the embodied lived experiences in their learning process, transitioning from passive recipients to active co-constructors of collective (trans)languaging knowledge in the classroom (Bartoli & Lotano, 2024; Bartoli, 2025).

Another challenge involves the choice of materials, as some tools or substances may cause discomfort or difficulty for participants unfamiliar with their use. However, the use of liquid paints, despite their higher practical demands, is recommended because they have proven effective in representing the fluid and nuanced nature of language repertoires. This contrasts with "dry" materials such as colored paper or markers, which tend to impose rigid boundaries between language resources. Additionally, the physical involvement required in body mapping may be perceived as intimidating by some participants due to its intimate nature. Therefore, it is important to schedule warm-up activities that foster a friendly relational climate and gradually prepare participants for the mobilization of their multilingual repertoires.

In this regard, educators must remain open to accommodating diverse modes of participation to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage in a way that suits them personally, promoting inclusivity. For example, in our workshop, one participant initially declined to lie down for body tracing because she found the activity uncomfortable. Instead, she chose to create a joint fLP with a friend, actively supporting her in painting. Later, in the second narrative round of group A, she decided to narrate her language repertoire in Turkish, sharing intimate reflections in a way that she felt personally comfortable.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined full-body language portraits (fLPs) created and narrated by university students enrolled in linguistics and language teacher education programs during a multilingualism workshop at a summer school. In line with research on embodied multilingualism, our findings underscore the profound bodily and emotional dimensions of language learning and use, and their strong connection to acts of positioning towards collective identities, power dynamics, and language ideologies circulating in a society (first research goal). Furthermore, this study highlights the transformative potential of creativity-based

methods of data collection, which foster active engagement and collective reflection on language resources and related linguistic identities (second research goal).

While creating a multilingual environment is undeniably challenging for educators, it significantly expands students' expressive possibilities and facilitates mobility within their repertoires. By combining embodied and multimodal approaches, these activities provide a platform for learners to critically engage with their language resources, fostering both creativity and self-awareness. They also contribute to co-constructing the classroom as a space where individuals can freely express themselves through both their bodies and their stories. Finally, our findings advocate for further exploration of the language resource dynamics in multilingual settings, and the role of English as a lingua franca in shaping language choices within multilingual academic contexts.

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APPENDIX A

Transcription Conventions (adapted from Jefferson, 2004)

sign	meaning
: , ::, :::	final vowel or consonant lengthening, depending on duration
|	change in the morphosyntactic project, self-correction
"ciao"	direct speech
CIAO	emphasis
mhmh, ah, ehm	hesitations, interjections
!	exclamation
°ciao°	pronounced fragment with low intensity
((laugh))	transcriber's glosses and comments
?	interrogative
[...]	omissions
abcd+	interrupted segment
(xxx)	unintelligible or dubious word or segment
hey	word or segment in a different language
(.)	brief pause
((pause))	longer pause

APPENDIX B

Extract 3 [taken from the interview with Ce.]

I did some things unconsciously because blue to me is very much like (.) mmh: how do you say? like mmh: (.) ambivalent but it has a lot of + you know the expression to feel blue? (.) you know (.) like a bit like a mmh: upset or sad or… and I associate that color with that kind of feeling [...] I don't know how to explain it but it's like some kind of mmh: not resent or anything but like this a kind of (.) SADNESS attached to Norwegian as well that I ((pause)) I don't know why (.) but it's maybe just because (.) you know (.) growing

up in Norway and (.) moving from the US as three years old (.) I didn’t speak Norwegian at first (.) but then it became my dominant language even though I consider myself (.) that I have TWO first languages (.) Norwegian AND American English (.) but it’s still my like that language that has + (.) I’ve used the most (.) because of practical reasons (.) so also I think (.) sometimes I don’t feel like I... I’ve had comments [...] they tell me like "oh, where are you from? you have a strong American accent it’s not British English!" but they can’t + they say like I they can't understand WHERE in the U.S. you’re from (.) because you have like a STANDARD variety (.) that would also upset me a lot because I’m from Boston so (.) it’s like New York (.) kind of a (.) noisy accent (.) and some people consider it not so nice... But they couldn’t tell that I was from (.) Boston and that also upset me a lot I think (.) so then I just (.) I'm stuck with Norwegian (.) which I am fluent in and that you can hear where I'm from (.) but these other languages are not quite... they don't feel are mine entirely (.) even though I have a certain connection to it (.) so maybe that's why I chose this color that I (.) LIKE but it has like big ambiguity (.) it's like an ambivalent relationship