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Teaching Reading to Afghan Women with Emergent Textual Literacy: A Plurilingual Approach

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Abstract

This plurilingual intervention in a LESLLA class in the US with six adult female students from Afghanistan investigated the extent to which learner biographies presented "Rosetta Stone" style in Dari, Pashto, and English in the Latin alphabet could develop reading fluency. Our hypothesis was that learners could more fluently decode words they already knew in L1, which could scaffold L2 decoding. Over eight weekly 1.5-hour sessions, we collected each individual's best English reading time in seconds per word. Findings for all six learners showed no changes in reading times over eight weeks. Additionally, making bi/multilingual flashcards of key vocabulary in the texts did not improve vocabulary scores over time. However, transcripts of bi/multilingual classroom talk showed that students often took the lead rather than repeating after the teacher when reading aloud, with student-centered turn-taking as learners offered spontaneous responses to texts. Moreover, one student interview suggested that reading in L1 promoted comprehension of the text

in English. We conclude that plurilingual pedagogies are unlikely to lead to reading fluency *in themselves* without systematic phonics instruction and extensive out-of-class reading practice, but such pedagogies have affordances for students' cognitive and affective engagement, which can indirectly benefit SLA.

Keywords: plurilingualism, identity texts, reading fluency, vocabulary, classroom discourse

Introduction

While trans/plurilingual pedagogies have garnered exponential research interest in language teaching since the 2010s (Prilutskaya, 2021), they have attracted limited attention in the LESLLA field until recently. In the agenda for future LESLLA research, LESLLA founder Jeanne Kurvers called for the study of the impact of L1 use (Kurvers, 2024), and a plurilingual approach to language teaching was the first section of the LESLLA Manifesto (LESLLA, 2025).

Notwithstanding a few projects involving plurilingual approaches to teaching LESLLA learners, such as Language-Independent Literacies for Inclusive Education in Multilingual Areas (LILIEMA) in Senegal (Lüpke et al., 2021) and ItaStra in Italy (D'Agostino et al., 2024), research in this area remains limited. Our study seeks to fill the gap by documenting a plurilingual text-decoding pedagogy over eight weeks. We frame this study at the intersection of three fields: LESLLA literacy development (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Kurvers et al., 2010; van de Craats & Peeters, 2013), identity texts and learner investment (Cummins & Early, 2010; Norton, 2013), and plurilingual approaches to language pedagogy (Payant & Galante, 2022; Piccardo, 2013). Our study is triangulated, with transcripts of classroom talk that show reading speed in class over time, vocabulary quiz scores after studying with bi/multilingual flashcards, and interactional and affective aspects of plurilingual pedagogies from class transcripts and learner interviews. We investigated what plurilingual pedagogies can accomplish and where they need to be supplemented with other teaching approaches.

Literature Review

LESLLA Literacy Development

Literacy teaching in LESLLA classes presents a unique challenge. Unlike adult learners who finished their compulsory schooling and can leverage first-language literacy to acquire a second language, LESLLA learners are often acquiring basic print literacy and the L2 simultaneously (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). Literacy in this context is widely understood not merely as a technical skill but as a social practice shaped by power dynamics and lived experiences (Newman, 2006). As Pettitt (2023) notes, the definition of literacy has expanded to include multimodal and digital practices, requiring instruction that bridges the gap between oral traditions and the text-heavy demands of Western educational and employment systems.

The trajectory of additional language and literacy acquisition for LESLLA learners is slow and laborious. Familiarity with an alphabetic writing system, in particular, is essential for phonemic awareness (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006). Huettig (2015) and Mishra et al. (2012) highlight that print literacy significantly impacts cognitive processes such as phonological processing, visual scanning, and predictive language processing. Consequently, LESLLA learners often struggle with the anticipatory eye movements required for fluent reading, highlighting the need for specialized instruction that explicitly addresses these processing difficulties rather than

assuming they will develop naturally through exposure. Gonzalves (2023) further demonstrates that decoding challenges persist even at higher proficiency levels. Her miscue analysis shows that beginner high LESLLA learners continue to struggle with phoneme accuracy, consonant clusters, multisyllabic words, and visually similar forms, indicating that decoding issues do not resolve automatically with increased oral proficiency. These findings reinforce the need for targeted decoding instruction across all levels.

Effective literacy instruction for this population requires a balanced approach that integrates bottom-up skills with top-down meaning-making. Bigelow and Vinogradov (2011) argue that instruction must be contextualized and age-appropriate, avoiding materials designed for children. They advocate for a "Whole-Part-Whole" instructional approach (Vinogradov, 2010), in which learners begin with meaningful whole texts (e.g., a story or dialogue), deconstruct them to focus on specific phonics and word recognition skills, and then return to the whole text for comprehension. This ensures that the mechanical aspects of reading do not divorce language learning from meaning. Christenson (2023, 2025) demonstrates that LESLLA learners benefit from explicit, systematic phonics instruction grounded in a Structured Literacy Approach that builds decoding skills progressively from simple CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) patterns to more complex word structures. She also calls for explicit modeling, guided practice, and assessment-based pacing.

We next come to studies about drawing on learners' full linguistic repertoires through critical multilingual pedagogies, including the use of identity texts, which can enhance motivation and validate learners' lived experiences.

Identity Texts and Learner Investment

Identity texts, defined as "the products of students' creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space" (Cummins & Early, 2010, p. 3), function as powerful tools for supporting learners' second language development. They guide educators in recalibrating instruction to align with learners' existing knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences, ensuring that the learning process is relevant, meaningful, and responsive (Slaughter & Choi, 2025). They also support learners' ongoing meaning-making and learning processes. When students create multimodal texts that reflect their identities, they not only connect more with new information, produce more complex literacy work, and develop awareness of academic language, but also strengthen the relationship between their L1 and L2 resources (Cummins & Early, 2010). Such identity-affirming practices validate learners' sense of self and strengthen their agency as well as their use of the target language (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2010), which also aligns with work showing how identity texts can create supportive conditions for adult refugees. Likewise, Kyrligkitsi and Mouti (2023) demonstrate how identity-focused pedagogies open space for learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires.

Since identity texts emerge from learners' personal experiences, they have been shown to foster a stronger sense of belonging (Zapata & Ribota, 2021). This personal relevance creates space for learners to see their identities recognized within the learning environment. Vinogradov's (2010) observation that "learner-generated texts immediately provide relevant, meaningful, level and age-appropriate reading material" (p. 6) highlights why identity texts are particularly valuable for adult learners developing foundational literacy. Research on identity-affirming pedagogies demonstrates that such practices encourage learners to invest more in their identities as capable language users, enhancing self-perception (Bernhard et al., 2006) and supporting increased engagement (Norton, 2013).

In other words, identity texts create the socially meaningful and validating contexts in which learners are more likely to invest in their learning processes (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Norton's (2013) theorization of investment highlights that learners' willingness to participate is inseparable from the identities they negotiate in relation to power, legitimacy, and access. Learners' engagement also depends on how they interpret the affordances, constraints, and ideological structures that characterize their learning environments. Teng (2019) shows that as learners move across communities, their shifting identities directly influence their investment; recognition and access to valued capital tend to support participation, while marginalized identities often lead to disinvestment. When identity texts affirm learners' lived experiences, linguistic resources, and personal histories, they enable learners to reposition themselves as legitimate contributors to the curriculum. Overall, identity texts offer a powerful pedagogical approach for fostering and sustaining learner investment.

Plurilingual Pedagogies

In this paper, we use the term "plurilingualism" rather than "translanguaging" because as a theoretical construct, translanguaging questions whether distinct languages are cognitively real or whether what every individual speaks is simply their own individual language, a claim we find empirically untenable (see discussions in Cummins, 2021; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2024; Otheguy et al., 2015) as even young children are aware of distinct languages. For example, bilingual children who have not yet started school suppress one language in their repertoire when they perceive an interlocutor only speaks their other language (Genesee, 2022). In contrast, the construct of plurilingualism recognizes languages in the individual repertoire as having porous borders, for example lexical borrowings, while individuals are aware of distinct languages. Both plurilingual and translanguaging theories see people combining linguistic resources from different languages in their cognition and to achieve communicative ends. Additionally, both trans- and plurilingual pedagogies (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025) call for using the learner's whole language repertoire to teach and learn, restructuring unequal power relations exemplified by "target language only" classrooms where students cannot say anything unless it is in a language they might only be starting to grasp.

Specifically, in this study, we wished to find out what plurilingual pedagogies can offer adult learners with beginning phonics/print literacy being acquired in L2 rather than L1. That said, many different kinds of activities can constitute plurilingual pedagogies; Treffers-Daller (2024, p. 66) lists some, which include reading a text in one language and discussing it orally in another, free flow of languages in a session, examining cognate vocabulary, doing contrastive analysis of grammar or phonology, vocabulary teaching through translation/glosses, using students' L1 or a mix of languages to have discussions about grammar and develop metalinguistic awareness, engaging in wordplay, etc. In our study, we focus on using plurilingual translations and transliterations with the aim of developing reading fluency in LESLLA learners.

Children starting school acquire print literacy for the first time in a language in which they are already fluent (their L1), albeit with a lexis limited by their age. Therefore, most of the words they decode already exist in their lexicon, so that most of their attention can be dedicated to phonics learning, seeing what sounds individual letters and consonant-vowel clusters make. The same can be said for adult learners acquiring print literacy for the first time in their L1 (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011), even though adult learners learning to read or write for the first time need adult-appropriate texts representing their adult experiences (Auerbach, 1992; Elson & Krygowski, 2011). The issue with learning to read and write for the first time in a language in which one is a

beginner is that most decoded words have no meaning, preventing the smooth flow of the top-down and bottom-up learning-to-read cycle (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011). Hence, we hypothesized that if Latin letters could be used to represent words our learners knew in their L1s, even if those are not typically written with the Latin alphabet, this challenge could be alleviated.

Methods

Our intervention involved an eight-week plurilingual pedagogical activity, in which learners read texts in English side-by-side with Pashto and Dari translations in the Latin alphabet rather than in the abjad used to write these languages. We hypothesized that if learners practiced decoding the Latin alphabet using texts whose meaning they could understand immediately, this might support decoding fluency of words written in the Latin alphabet. Over eight weeks, we measured (1) reading fluency, defined as best reading time in each class, in seconds per word (spw), and (2) weekly vocabulary quiz scores out of 10, based on 10 key words in the previous lesson's text. In each week's reading, there were 10 words highlighted in the text, for which students made bi/multilingual flashcards with the English word on one side and whatever students wanted to put on the other side (the Pashto/Dari translation in abjad or the Latin alphabet, or an illustration). We also analyzed class flow/engagement, assessed via learner interviews and transcripts of classroom talk.

Originally, we intended to replicate Norton's (2013) study on identity and language learning involving five immigrant women in Toronto, Canada, in the 1990s. Norton's multiple case study consisted of three phases: background interviews, the main phase (in which the participants kept diaries for several months detailing how they used English outside of class, and Norton analyzed changes in their positioning as English users across time and space), and follow-up interviews six months after the main phase to capture any further changes in their identity and investment in English learning.

The first part of our study went as planned: we conducted background interviews about each woman's immigration story, with questions about their goals and aspirations for English learning. The fourth author interpreted for Dari L1 participants and teenage children did so for Pashto L1 participants. Norton's research participants had an intermediate English proficiency and could write diaries in English, but this was not possible for our learners, so they were asked to audio-record their diary entries in Dari and/or Pashto and text them to the research team's WhatsApp group over eight weeks. Similar to Norton (2013), we would meet weekly to discuss learners' experiences using English.

However, the next part of our study did not go as planned: one week, and then another, passed in which no stories were texted to the WhatsApp group. Either the learners were uncomfortable sharing these with us, or there was not much English use outside of class. During the background interviews, Kaamla said she asked for directions once, when lost, and Sahar said she engaged in small talk in English with other women at the mosque who were not from Afghanistan. No other students provided examples of oral English practice outside of class, suggesting that only Sahar, who had upper elementary oral communicative proficiency, spoke English outside of class regularly. Thus, it became clear that we would have difficulty replicating Norton (2013).

Due to the inability to use "the past week's experiences using English" as the content to analyze and discuss during class, we decided instead to make the class content a series of readings based on the beginning-of-study interviews. We turned each interview into a 300-word

immigration story, then decided on a different research aim: to investigate the affordances of plurilingual pedagogy to teach *reading fluency* and *vocabulary retention*.

After we failed to collect any stories of English use beyond the classroom for several weeks, we then spent eight weeks teaching a 1.5-hour English class per week, each centered on a different person's 300-word immigration story, including some from this study's authors. During the learner interviews, we had taken notes in English about each woman's immigration story. We wrote 300-word stories based on these notes. Some teachers also contributed their own 300-word stories. We used ChatGPT to translate the 300-word stories into Dari and Pashto (Table 1), in the Latin alphabet, and the fourth author corrected errors in the Dari versions. During class, the students were presented with the same story in three languages, "Rosetta Stone" style. Thus, the study made use of both *translation* across languages and *transliteration* (what is said/written in a language is presented in a different alphabet or script). Although students reported that the Pashto translations were not good, nobody on the research team had the language knowledge to fix them. In contrast, students voiced no complaints about the Dari translations which appeared in the Latin alphabet.

Table 1
Dari–Pashto–English Stories

Dari	Pashto	English
Elif aslīan az Türkiye ast, ammā wāledayn-ash **beyn-al-melalī**[1] hastand. Mādar-ash Rus ast, ke dar Kemerovo bedonya āmad wa bar āmad shoda, wa pedar-ash yak Tork-e-Bolghārī ast ke dar dahe-ye 1980 be Türkiye **mohājerat kard**[2]. Elif be zabān-e Rusi, Turki (ke zabān-e māderī-ash ast), wa Englisi ham sohbat mikonad.	Elif aslīan da Türkiye da, kho walidaye-ye de **beyn-al-melali**[1] di. Mor-ye de Rus da, che pa Kemerovo ke pa dunya raaghlay ao palar-ye de yaw Turk-e-Bolghari da che pa 1980 yīm kaluno ke Türkiye ta **muhajirat kare**[2]. Elif pa zabān-e Rusi, Turki (che da morī zabān de), ao Englisi ham harf kai.	Elif is originally from Türkiye, but her parents are **international**[1]. Her mother is Russian, born and raised in Kemerovo, while her father is a Turkish-Bulgarian who **immigrated**[2] to Türkiye in the 1980s. Elif speaks Russian, Turkish as her mother tongue and English as an additional language.

In these translations, cognate words tended to be borrowings (e.g., names of countries/nationalities in the above story) and were likely easy for our learners to recognize. False cognates ("false friends") between the target language and learners' L1s were rare, as English is unrelated to Dari and Pashto.

Each lesson began with a review of 10 underlined words from the last week's story. It then proceeded to a trilingual "read-aloud" of the current week's story with comprehension-checking questions and elicited personal responses or related discussions. In the last 20 minutes of class, students made bi/multilingual flashcards for the highlighted words in the current week's story. During the flashcard-making phase at the end of each class, we pulled students aside individually for the weekly vocabulary quiz based on the previous week's words. We awarded 1 point for the right word, even if morphologically incorrect (e.g., "invade" instead of "invaded"; "relax" instead

of "relaxing"), 0.5 points for a partially correct response (e.g., "prose" instead of "process") and 0 points for not being able to remember the word.

In the weeks that followed each lesson, we replayed audio-recordings of the lesson and transcribed when each student read a few sentences of text. We calculated reading speed in seconds per word (SPW) based on each student's best reading time for that lesson. In this way, we were able to chart reading fluency over eight weeks. Our assessment practices for reading and vocabulary retention reflect our belief that the most valid indicators of language learning for LESLLA learners do not come from formal assessments but from quantitative and qualitative data collected naturally in class (Pettitt & Tarone, 2015; van de Craats & Peeters, 2013).

Additionally, lesson transcripts revealed interactional dynamics during class, and learner interviews allowed us to gain some insight into their views on plurilingual pedagogies. The point about interactional dynamics we were interested in investigating was whether reading in Dari or Pashto would break up the typical pattern of teacher-led reading and students following after the teacher when reading in English – and it did. A classroom policy that welcomed use of other languages led to more spontaneous student-to-student talk which was, as far as we could tell, still on topic (e.g., explaining words or responding to story content). Finally, one student's interview (Kaamla's) provided direct evidence that the student found these plurilingual approaches valuable, and nobody requested an "English only" classroom language policy or English monolingual materials.

Study Participants

Our six learners (Table 2) were proficient in Dari, the dominant language in Afghanistan, which is mutually intelligible with Farsi/Persian. Some participants spoke Pashto as an L1 in addition to Dari; that is, Pashto speakers from the mountainous regions of Afghanistan tended to be Dari speakers as well, though not native speakers. On the other hand, Dari speakers, including the fourth author (an undergraduate research assistant (RA) from Afghanistan), had limited knowledge of Pashto.

Table 2
Participants in the Study

Name	Age	Years in the US	L1	Education	English proficiency	Literacy experience	Work experience
Wafa	50s	2	Dari	High school	Conversational A1	Literate in L1	Retired teacher
Sahar	30s	6	Pashto	Elementary	Conversational A2	Limited literacy experience	Former restaurant owner
Halima	30s	7	Pashto	Elementary	Beginner A1	Limited literacy experience	Former restaurant owner
Asma	30s	2.5	Pashto	Elementary	Beginner A1	Limited literacy experience	Homemaker
Yasmeen	30s	3	Dari	Elementary	Beginner A1	Limited literacy experience	Homemaker
Kaamla	30s	<1 year	Dari/Farsi bilingual; grew up in Iran; married a Dari L1 man at 19 or 20 and moved to Afghanistan	Elementary	Conversational A1	Literate in L1	Homemaker

When it comes to previous literacy experience, Dari L1 students had higher levels of schooling and knowledge of print literacy (in Dari), especially if they were older and raised before the Taliban (Wafa) or grew up outside of Afghanistan (Kaamla).

Findings and Discussion

Decoding Fluency and Vocabulary Retention

The six students showed no gains or losses in reading fluency or vocabulary quiz scores over eight weeks (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Best Reading Times (SPW) in English

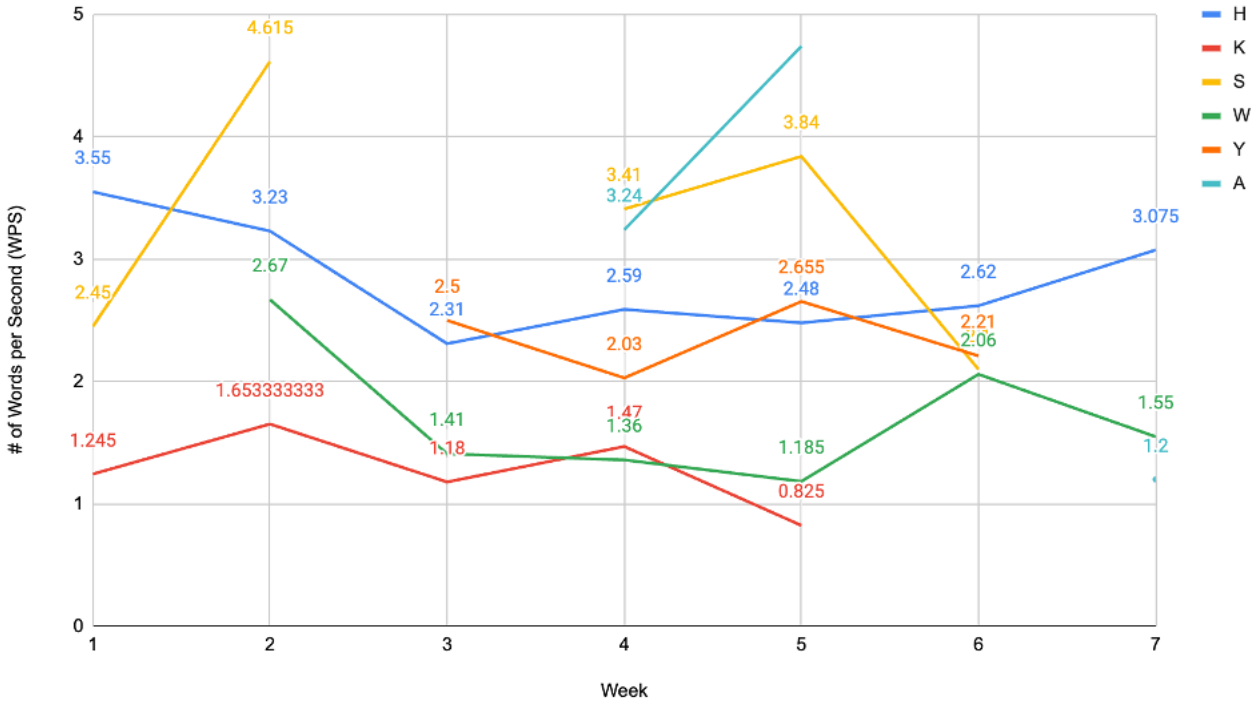
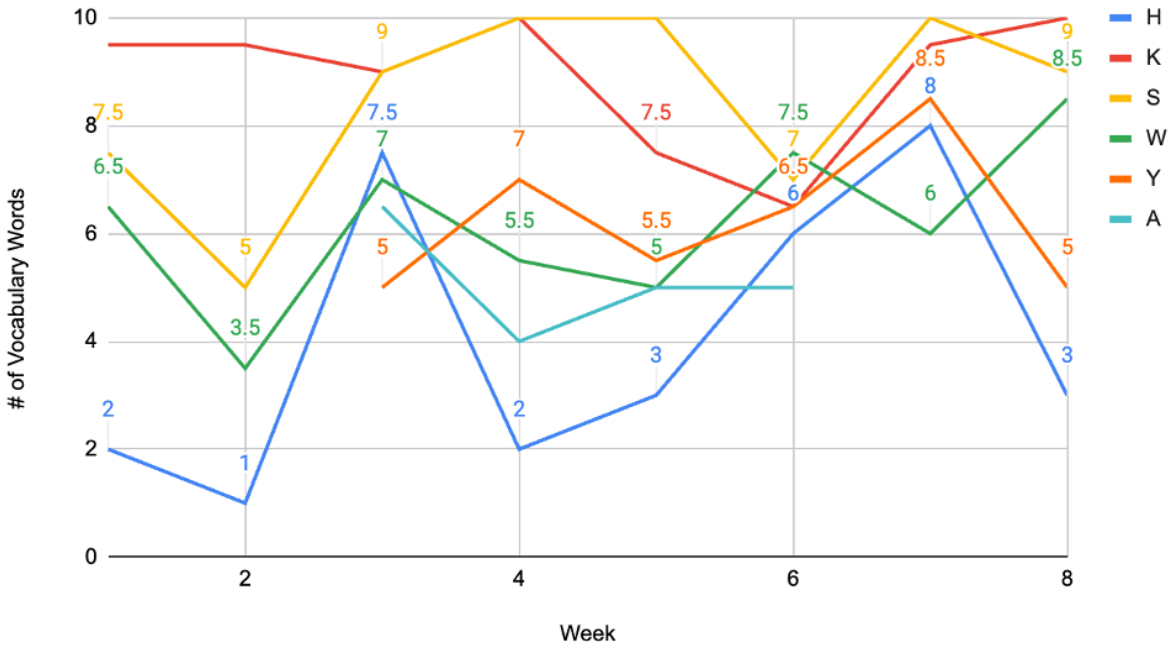


Figure 2
Vocabulary Quiz Scores



In Figure 1, two students, Kaamla and Wafa, who could decode the Latin alphabet, did so at 1–2 spw for English. The others were noticeably slower. Although we hypothesized that learners would read slower in L2 than in L1 and that as L1 reading speed increased, so would L2 reading speed (a step behind), this was not the case. For Kaamla and Wafa, they would read in *both* L1 and L2 at a speed of 1–2 spw, or slightly over 2 spw, in a way that was qualitatively different depending on the language. We demonstrate the qualitative difference using a hypothetical example rather than a transcribed excerpt due to article word limits (see "Transcription Conventions" at the end of the paper):

Reading in L1/Dari/Farsi: (slowly) "<robā:::h-e qa:::hwa:::'i:::-ye čā::la:::k a:::z bā:::lā-ye sag-e tan:::bal:::: meparad.>" (repeats rapidly) ">robāh-e qahwa'i-ye čālak az bālā-ye sag-e tanbal meparad.<" (1–2 spw when slow and fast times are averaged)

Reading in L2/English: (neither quickly nor slowly, but steadily) "The qui::ck (.) brow::n fox:: ju::mps over the la::zy dog." (1–2 spw)

In other words, while not accustomed to decoding their L1 in the Latin alphabet, Kaamla and Wafa have *both* the decoding fluency *and* the working memory to "hold the sentence" in their minds as they first read it very slowly – which is hard to do in L2, i.e., read a sentence very slowly and still hold it in your mind – then, repeat it quickly. They then decode the L2 at a "jog," neither fast nor slow, getting most of the meaning. Other learners read very slowly and needed help decoding most of the words, regardless of whether the text was in L1 or L2.

For vocabulary scores (Figure 2), Kaamla and Wafa were high- and mid-scorers, respectively, but Sahar, who had the highest oral proficiency, was not as fluent a reader, but was a high-scorer for vocabulary.

After examining the data, we think that one reason why the intervention did not lead to increased reading fluency was the lack of intensive phonics instruction during these weeks (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Christenson, 2023; Lee & Irvan, 2019). Moreover, there was no guarantee that learners would practice reading the stories aloud outside of class. Other factors may include learners' prior L1 literacy (those who were most literate in L1, Wafa and Kaamla, performed the best), the level-appropriateness of the reading materials, which may have been challenging for some learners, and the bad AI translations for Pashto reported by Pashto L1 students like Sahar.

As for vocabulary quiz scores, they seemed related most to voluntary self-study rather than anything else (Sanaoui, 1995).

Even though the quantitative data did not support a link between plurilingual pedagogies and language acquisition, plurilingual approaches appeared to yield interactional affordances that could have a bearing on language acquisition, which we discuss next.

Classroom Flow and Student Engagement

One of the affordances of plurilingual reading was that students did not always repeat the text after the teacher (Excerpt 1), which tends to happen in beginner language classes.

Excerpt 1. Student Takes the Lead in a Transliterated Text

1	**Anna (teacher):**	Can anybody uh… can anybody, does anybody read Pashto here?
2	**Sahar:**	Read? Yeah.
3	**Anna:**	Can you (.) correct me? Eh (.) salaam.
4	**Sahar:**	Salaam [za Asal *Hello. [I'm Asal*
5	**Anna:**	[Za. Asal – *[I'm Asal –*
6	**Sahar:**	yam
7	**Anna:**	=yam
8	**Sahar:**	Ze –
9	**Anna:**	Ze da
10	**Sahar:**	Ze da [Illinois University… *at [Illinois University*
11	**Anna:**	[Illinois University da *[at Illinois University*
12	**Sahar:**	da
13	**Anna:**	driyam

third (year)

14 **Sahar:** driyam
third (year)

This excerpt took place in the first of the eight lessons, and already we see one student, Sahar, taking the lead in reading aloud rather than simply repeating after the teacher. In this reading involving the Pashto transliteration of the story, knowledge is more balanced: Anna is more fluent in decoding Latin letters, but Sahar knows how to pronounce the words and what their meaning is. Anna positions Pashto students as the experts in line 1, asking, "does anybody read Pashto here?" and Sahar as the expert after she volunteers to read, with "Can you (.) correct me [my pronunciation]?" (l. 3). Then, Anna lets Sahar say each word first (ll. 4–8), repeating after her. In line 9, Anna reads "da" for Sahar, but lets Sahar take the lead again for a few lines until "driyam" (l. 13). We discovered through this activity that such transliterations can let students become more involved in actively decoding words in L1 that they will immediately recognize, in addition to previewing the meaning of the English text.

The plurilingual reading approach, however, had some drawbacks, especially if the ChatGPT translation was of inconsistent quality, which we found with a minoritized language like Pashto. That is, we found that if the learner read something different from what was written (whether a vowel change, a morphological change, or a lexical substitution), the teacher, not knowing the learner's L1, could not know if the learner was mixing up the sounds of two vowels (which would require a correction), or whether the vowel was read differently in Dari/Pashto versus English; whether ChatGPT's translation was wrong (for example, the word ending should be different or a different word was more appropriate) or whether the learner was not reading well and simply guessing what was written. These situations call for different courses of action, and not being able to tell whether it was the student or the text that was wrong made it hard for us to know what, if any, feedback to give the student.

Moreover, the plurilingual approach seemed to most benefit those who could already decode the Latin alphabet relatively fluently (see findings for Wafa and Kaamla in Figure 1). It is therefore important to note that plurilingual pedagogy, especially when applied to parallel textual translations, can exacerbate inequities between students with different amounts of prior formal schooling, as well as inequities between students who speak more/less commonly taught languages as L1s, due to the poorer translations with less commonly taught languages.

Of course, these drawbacks were no reason *not* to present the plurilingual transliterations as a learning affordance, as everyone could understand the Dari text when read aloud even if they could not decode it. Kaamla, in particular, appreciated this trilingual reading activity.

Excerpt 2
Affordance of Previewing the Text in L1

1 **Asal (interpreting for Kaamla):** She also said that the stories help a lot. … She said that because it's translated and you know what it's saying, it's easier to learn and remember it. I guess it's like the whole idea of like, learning something in a deeper meaning, it's easier to like learn it.

2 **Anna:** Mm-hm. Did she say that?

3 **Asal:** No. (1.0) Sorry, that was me.

4	**Anna:**	That's OK.
5	**Kaamla:**	*Dastana majgoor mikone ke adama begarde as posh te az oon chizi ke yad nadari peyda koni ke manasho befami ke oon chiz manzoor be dashte.* The stories force people to learn the things (vocabulary) that they don't know, so they can find the meanings to understand what meaning it has.
6	**Asal:**	'Cause like (.) she said that (3.0) sorry I'm trying to understand how to translate this. (to Kaamla) *Yek dageye dige mitoonin beguyin (.) farsiye man kheyli bade, bebakhshin.* Can you say that one more time? (.) My Farsi is not great, sorry.
7	**Kaamla:**	*… da in dastana migam in (X) mishe ke adam chizi ke yadnadare bayad oo ro ke ta yad nadare oo nemishe bayad poshte oon begarde, na? [Asal: Oh] Oo manaye az oon ra befame ke in chiz mana dara, na? [Asal: Ohhhh] Manaye az oon ra ke peydakard fekardem ke komak mikone be adam mifame story ra.* … in these stories I am saying (X). If a person doesn't know the things (vocabulary) until they learn it, they can't do anything; they have to learn it, no? [Asal: Oh] They have to learn the meaning so that the thing has a meaning, right? [Asal: Ohhhh] When they understand the meaning, it helps the person understand the story.
8	**Anna:**	OK, she said that the English story has no meaning to it (.) if you're reading it and not understanding it. But because there's a translation and (.) you can go back and forth, read it, understand it, and (it) has a deeper meaning. It's like easier to follow.

In this excerpt, Kaamla describes how needing to understand the story "forces" people to pay attention to, and potentially learn, the vocabulary they do not know (ll. 5, 7), as they check across the L1 and L2 texts to get the meaning. This learning strategy was not mentioned by other students. This does not mean that they did not also find the trilingual texts an affordance, but we find it telling that Kaamla was the one to voice appreciation of them, since Kaamla was one of the few students who could already decode the Latin alphabet. For other students, even if the text was in L1, being in the beginning stages of decoding and not being able to recognize what sounds letters make would mean that they would still struggle. Thus, plurilingual identity texts are no substitute for systematic top-down and bottom-up phonics instruction.

On the other hand, plurilingual texts positively affected the flow of authentic discussions, as seen in Excerpt 3, from the week we read the immigration story of Joel, the other undergraduate RA besides Asal. Underlined words/phrases were target vocabulary that would appear on the quizzes.

Excerpt 3
Bi/Multilateral Class Discussion with Free Use of L1

Paragraph from Joel's story

*So my mom **signed me up for daycare**. Just **because** she had to go to work, so she couldn't **take care of** me. At daycare, it was only English speakers. I was the only Spanish speaker at the daycare. So that came with a bunch of problems in itself. I remember this one time, well, **several times**, actually, where I didn't know how to say, "Can I use the bathroom?", and like, you know, "Can I go use the bathroom?" in English. So I would just pee myself, and my mom would have to **get called from work** and bring me a new **change of clothes**.*

1	**Anna:**	If you are Joel's mom, what, what do you do? What do you do if you, you Joel's mom? They call you, and you bring clothes, and they call you, [Wafa: Oh] and you bring clothes, what do you do? If you were Joel's mom?
2	**Wafa:**	Mom? (signaling others around the table) All mom.
3	**Sahar:**	*Asal to begu chi mige…* Asal you say what she is saying…
4	**Asal:**	*Migan age shoma budin madare Joel budin shoma chikar mikardin… amo ziat dare mishe, har dafe ke mirin daycare hami karo mishe…* She is saying, if you were Joel's mother, what would you do?... but this situation happens a lot, it happens every time your kid goes to daycare. (Dari, overlapping talk)
5	**Wafa:**	*Age awladet bara har dafe zang bezane?* (switches to English) I go, OK. If your kid goes and calls every time? I go, OK.
6	**Anna:**	What, what would you do if you were (.) Joel's mom?
7	**Asal:**	They said they would just keep going.
8	**Wafa:**	Good mom, yeah.
9	**Anna:**	Eh – you just, you just bring clothes?
10	**Sahar:**	Yes, bring clothes.
11	**Anna:**	Every day? Bring clothes, bring clothes?
12	**Sahar:**	Strong mom.
13	**Asal:**	What if you – is it possible you can say, 'Hey, eh (.) bathroom, Spanish, baño. You just teach the teacher, baño. And say 'baño, go bathroom.' Is this OK? Asal, can you translate…?
14	**Asal:**	*Migan ke age moalem begin ke tasnap da Spanish… What was it? [Joel: Baño.] Baño mishe oon asan tar mishe bekhatare har dafe ke Joel bege mikham beram baño moalem mifahme ke bache mikhad bere tashnap.*

		She is saying that if you tell the teacher that the bathroom in Spanish is… What was it? [Joel: Baño] It is baño, it makes it easier because every time Joel says he wants to go to baño, the teacher understands he wants to go to the bathroom.
15	**Anna:**	Can mom say, "I'm just – I'm busy! You have to fix this (.) for me. Just learn (.) the word baño." Can you translate?
16	**Asal:**	*Mige age madar bege ke man… yani man ziat kar daram. [Wafa: Kho masroof hastom] Bale masroof hastom befahmin ke bathroom Baño mishe harchiz bara har kasi asan tar mishe.* She is saying that if the mother says she has… like I have a lot of work [Wafa: Yes, I am busy] Yes, saying I am busy, understand that bathroom is baño everything for everyone becomes easier.
17	**Anna:**	Maybe let's just do a poll. Asal, can you translate? Raise your hand if you just keep getting called and keep bringing clothes. Raise your hand if this is what you would do.
18	**Asal:**	*Age shoma har dafe ke zang mizadan mirin, mirin chizi nemigin, destetan bemanin bala.* If you guys will go every time they call without saying anything, raise your hand?
19	**Wafa:**	Ah.
20	**Students:**	(Talking is Pashto, the word "maktab," i.e., school, is heard; chuckles)
21	**Anna:**	Now, raise your hand if you'll say to the teacher, "Hey! The Spanish word is (.) baño. Please tell, use this word." OK. Raise your hand if you would say, tell the teachers that.
22	**Asal:**	*Mige destetano banin bala age bara moaelem migin ke yani bathroom da espaniyayi mishe baño.* She said put your hand up if you would tell the teacher that the bathroom in Spanish is baño.
23	**Students:**	(Talking in Pashto, the word "tashnab," i.e., bathroom, is heard; more chuckles)
24	**Anna:**	Kaamla, what would you do?
	Wafa:	*Mige to chi mikoni?* She said what would you do?
25	**Kaamla:**	(taking in Dari; raising her pinky finger)
26	**Asal:**	Oh, she said she would just teach a hand signal.

27	**Kaamla:**	(demonstrates raising her pinky finger)
28	**Anna:**	Oh!↑ You would just teach a hand signal. (Learners repeating "Oh!") Even better… that's smart.
29	**Wafa:**	Very good. (chuckles)
30	**Sahar:**	My son two three time. Pee the pants.
31	**Anna:**	In the daycare?
32	**Sahar:**	Yeah, the daycare, but (talk in Pashto with others) two three time.
33	**Asal:**	She said that she puts emergency clothes in her son's bag.

In this conversation, Anna invites multilingual talk to elicit students' opinions about what they would do if they were Joel's mother. While plurilingual approaches did not make any difference in reading times or vocabulary scores, they resulted in bi/multilateral spontaneous talk rather than students only responding to what the teacher asked, even though they did this as well. In addition, free use of languages other than English in the lesson allowed Asal and students to interpret and clarify for one another (ll. 3–4, 14, 16). Collaborative talk patterns that loop everybody into understanding regardless of asymmetries in language proficiencies (not just the target language but others as well), focusing attention and doing comprehension checks, sharing information, and reporting what someone said to the group – these practices characterize what Faltis (2001) calls a "joinfostering" pedagogy in which free use of everyone's languages promotes a positive interdependence and accountability to one another when teaching and learning. We believe that our flexible classroom language policy benefited class participation and could be the reason for our students' regular attendance and low attrition, *indirectly* benefiting language acquisition, though there may be no quantitative data to support this.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study involved a single class with particular languages in a particular location. The finding that neither reading speed nor vocabulary scores improved should not be taken to mean that plurilingual identity texts cannot improve these, as other factors come into play: practice outside of class, or prior Latin alphabet decoding fluency. For example, if more sustained phonics instruction could get all students to the level of Wafa and Kaamla *and* if students were made to practice reading English aloud outside of class for several hours a week, with weekly reading speed tests, reading speeds may indeed go up, as they did in van de Craats and Peeters' (2013) study involving 16-word lists in Dutch, a computer program that could adapt to the learner, and egg timers. We thus encourage teacher-researchers to explore how plurilingual pedagogies can be combined with *other* necessary elements to facilitate language acquisition.

However, what we could have done in this study, though it regrettably did not occur to us, was to ask the learners about the extent to which they practiced reading the stories at home (they took them home as paper handouts), which could have been accomplished with simple exit tickets. Had we done so, we might have deduced that what was needed to raise reading fluency scores was simply more practice. These limitations can be addressed via future research.

In addition, our findings that the "Rosetta Stone" activity worked better between English and the language with decent translations (Dari), and better for Dari L1 speakers who could already decode Latin letters, posing challenges to Pashto L1 speakers who had limited experience with print literacy, highlight the inequities that can arise with plurilingual pedagogies related to textual literacy if some languages have more literacy resources than others. We therefore call for future research to take i) the *type* of plurilingual pedagogy into account, as well as ii) the *language(s)* involved and iii) the l*anguage/literacy profiles* of the learners, in formulating hypotheses and drawing conclusions about plurilingual pedagogies.

Conclusions

Treffers-Daller (2024) and Huang and Chalmers (2023) call for evidence that trans/plurilingual pedagogies promote language acquisition or develop metalinguistic awareness. While this study did not find increased reading fluency or improved vocabulary scores over eight weeks, this does not mean that language acquisition did not happen or that the foundation for further language acquisition was not laid. Treffers-Daller (2024) and Jaspers (2018) also challenge translanguaging scholars to provide evidence that translanguaging has transformative power, that it actually re-structures power relations in society. As far as particular learning environments go, bi/multilingual classroom activities that ratify students' home languages can do so (Cummins & Early, 2010). In our intervention, teachers built material out of learners' lived experiences and interests, managed turns at talk so they were more bi/multilateral than unilateral, in which bi/mulitlingual talk plays a key role (Faltis, 2001), and honored learners' different perspectives (Excerpt 3). Through bi/multilingual identity texts, we affirmed our learners' linguistic resources and personal histories (Teng, 2019) and sustained their regular attendance – their investment in English learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015) – for over a year before the project.

What is important is not to *overstate* the benefits of trans/plurilingual pedagogies (Jaspers, 2018) so that stakeholders, instead of becoming skeptical, can remain open to these pedagogies' affordances and the ethics behind them, considering how they might be harnessed differently depending on the context (Mendoza et al., 2024). Where the target language is spoken in society with no others to rival it, and all students share a lingua franca, trans/plurilingual pedagogies do not limit target language exposure, while bi/multilingual classroom talk and L1 translations and transliterations (if high-quality ones can be made) have always been worth it in our context.

Transcription Conventions

(.) micropause <0.2s
(1.0) approximate pause
:: sound elongation
< > reduced speech rate
> < increased speech rate
[ ] speech overlap
(X) unclear section
– abrupt cut
= no audible pause
( ) transcriber comments
↑ rise in intonation

emphasis
… omitted speech

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