

Chapter 19

Plurilingual Tasks in TESOL: Improving Learners' Emotionality



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Abstract Current Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) practices are often anchored in monolingual and monocultural ideologies that focus solely on the cognitive dimension of language learning. Unaware of the term plurilingualism, learners may nevertheless resort to plurilingual strategies to express different emotions and navigate language differences. On the one hand, the impact of emotions on language learning has been documented; similarly, there is evidence on the positive impact of plurilingualism on language acquisition among learners. However, there is little knowledge on the role of plurilingualism in improving learners' emotional well-being and the consequent implications for language acquisition. For that, this chapter reports on the pedagogical application of five tasks that incorporate plurilingual pedagogy while addressing learners' emotional well-being, with a focus on design, implementation, and outcomes. The tasks were applied in three undergraduate English language classes in a university in Lebanon. The results reported in this chapter are based on my perspective as an instructor and on students' feedback. Major outcomes included (1) increased student motivation to learn English, (2) increased confidence using English, and (3) improvement of vocabulary. The benefits were not only academic; the tasks helped create a bond of trust among students and decreased students' anxiety toward learning English as a second language. Although these TESOL tasks were implemented in a Lebanese context, they could be used in other multilingual contexts. The significance of these tasks goes well beyond the individual level; they highlight the unavoidable hybrid and fluid interconnectedness of individuals as social agents with external social and cultural influences and other social agents.

Introduction and Context

Research in the field of second language acquisition acknowledges the impact of emotionality on students' language learning (Arnold, 2019; Dewaele, 2020;

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Teimouri, 2017). As emotions and languages are related, affective variables can enhance or diminish the extent to which students invest in learning a second language, and ultimately their language proficiency (Richards, 2022). Learners of a second language often struggle with phonological, morphological, or syntactic challenges that hinder the learning process (Abd Elwahab, 2020; Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Strauss, 2012) and translate into an emotional burden that renders the learning process even more challenging (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017). Despite the good intentions underlying current Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) practices, research has repeatedly shown that these practices often disregard students' emotional needs as they focus on the cognitive aspect of language learning (i.e., attention, memory, and analysis), without recognizing the role of emotionality in enhancing cognition (MacIntyre & Swain, 2013; Vincze, 2017). Affect influences how students create and react to mental representations of the world and process and retain information (Forgas, 2008). In addition, existing TESOL practices expect students to use the English language based on monolingual and monocultural norms instead of considering students as plurilingual speakers (Barros et al., 2021; Galante, 2021b). Monolingualism assumes that separating languages is the best default practice for language teaching (Cummins, 2017). Such an approach to language teaching can have detrimental effects on students' English language learning as their linguistic diversity, in addition to their prior lived experiences, are undervalued and ignored (Dewaele & Li, 2020; Paterson, 2020). Hence, current TESOL strategies dismiss students' emotionality and linguistic repertoires, which can negatively impact students' chances to achieve academic success (Carmona-Halty et al., 2021; White, 2018).

To bridge students' linguistic practices beyond classrooms and the teaching strategies implemented inside the classrooms, this chapter reports on my experience—the author's—implementing five plurilingual tasks in TESOL classes in a university in Lebanon, with a focus on objectives, design, implementation, and affordances. While the role of emotions in language learning on the one hand (Richards, 2022; White, 2018), and the positive impact of plurilingualism on language acquisition (Busse, 2017; Piccardo, 2019) have been documented, there is still a dearth of research on the role of plurilingual pedagogy in enhancing learners' emotionality. After implementing the tasks, it was observed that plurilingual instruction offered concurrent affordances in both areas of cognition and emotionality. Students felt more at ease when they used their entire linguistic repertoire as their linguistic and cultural identity was respected and valued. This created a positive learning environment where no language is favored over the other. As a result, students had more emotional stability and increased motivation, leading to better language learning and performance.

Lebanon's Linguistic Landscape

To contextualize the rationale behind implementing the plurilingual tasks, it is important to understand the educational system in Lebanon. Schooling in Lebanon heavily

relies on foreign languages (mainly English and French). Arabic, the official and national language, is only used to teach Arabic and social studies classes (Orr & Annous, 2018). This focus on foreign languages results from Western powers' historical, political, and economic involvement in Lebanon and job requirements at the national and international level that also entail proficiency in dominant languages (Baladi, 2018). Hence, students in Lebanon usually learn both languages simultaneously as a second and third language depending on the school's orientation and affiliation (i.e., Lebanese system, French system, and International Baccalaureate), and often incorporate different languages in their daily interactions. Although students are exposed to different languages in schools, Lebanon's language policies are still biased toward a monolingual ideology that uses the target language as the language of instruction and disregards students' linguistic repertoire. In the case of English teaching, for example, teachers and students are required to use English only in the classroom. The use of other languages is disfavored. Such practices cause additional challenges in learning English, especially for Arabic speakers who already struggle with linguistic insecurity (Al Suwaiyan, 2018).

Undergraduate Courses: Overview and Objectives

The five tasks described here were implemented in three undergraduate TESOL courses (intensive, intermediate, and advanced level) with a total of 95 students in a university in Lebanon. The duration of the courses was four months, although the number of weekly sessions slightly varied. The intensive course concurrently prompted reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills throughout various tasks and activities such as understanding the different stages of the writing process, writing cohesive paragraphs, and demonstrating the ability to converse about general topics. The intermediate course focused on writing short essays of different genres (i.e., reading response, problem–solution, and persuasive essays) and developing public speaking skills. The advanced course emphasized critical thinking abilities through exposure to academic and non-academic articles and writing argumentative essays and article critiques. I taught all the courses, including the tasks, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the classes were offered entirely face-to-face. However, the tasks can easily be adapted to an entirely online or hybrid mode of delivery. I used a variety of multimodal strategies to teach the classes, including, but not limited to, videos, course packs, and slides.

Theoretical Framing: Plurilingualism and Emotionality

My work draws upon the concepts of *multilingualism* and *plurilingualism* as theorized in the Common European Framework (CEFR; Council of Europe [CoE], 2001;

Piccardo & North, 2020) and its companion volume (CEFR CV; CoE, 2020). *Multilingualism* is centered around the co-existence, at the societal and individual level, of different languages with the official languages of a specific context. That is, various languages (i.e., heritage language, home language) are used and spoken alongside official and dominant languages (i.e., English and French) in schools, homes, public spaces, and social settings. *Plurilingualism*, on the other hand, focuses on learners having “a single, inter-related, repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies to accomplish tasks” (CEFR, 2001, p. 28; CEFR CV, 2020, p. 30). In other words, plurilingualism does not deny the existence of named languages; yet it treats them as one entity of inter-connected traits rather than separate entities with fixed boundaries.

While the terms emotionality and affect are often used interchangeably, some literature classifies the latter as a subordinate of the former. For the purpose of clarity, my work considers emotionality and affect as both being “aspects of emotion, feeling, mood, or attitude which condition behavior” (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p. 1); that is, two faces of the same coin. I draw on one of the CEFR’s general competences: *savoir-être*, which encompasses affective variables involved in language learning such as self-confidence, anxiety, attitudes, motivations, and values. According to the CEFR, these variables “affect not only the language users’/learners’ roles in communicative acts but also their ability to learn” (CEFR, 2001, p. 106). Hence, I explore tasks to bring affect into the TESOL classroom.

Pedagogical Strategies

Based on the literature and my student population, I selected five pedagogical strategies to implement in the tasks:

- (1) **Translation** (Galante, 2021a; González-Davies, 2017): When encountered with a new word, expression, or sentence that they do not understand, students can translate it to another language they are familiar with. Then, they can share their translations with other members of the class and compare whether they are similar to English or not. By translating words to different languages, students engage in meaning and ultimately retain the words faster.
- (2) **Cross-linguistic comparisons** (Ballinger et al., 2020): As they are learning the target language, English in this case, students can compare the words in different languages they are familiar with. The comparisons can be at the level of pronunciation, meaning, word formation, word classes, etc. For example, if students are learning about basic sentence structure in English (subject, verb, and object), the teacher can ask them about sentence structure in their languages. Then, they can compare where the subject is positioned in the sentence in different languages. Through cross-linguistic comparisons, students can affirm their linguistic identity, all while learning a new language.

- (3) ***Cross-cultural comparisons*** (Coste et al., 2009): Throughout the language learning process, students are introduced to different cultures and their traditions, customs, beliefs, and ways of living. For example, some languages such as English, French, and Arabic are used in different countries and parts of the world; yet, they are used differently depending on the cultural context. For that, teachers can ask students to research and compare how the same language is used in different countries. Hence, cross-cultural comparisons offer students the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills and learn about cultures from various perspectives, especially regarding how language is used.
- (4) ***Translanguaging*** (García & Otheguy, 2020; Li, 2018): To facilitate making meaning of the content, students can use different languages or different variations or dialects of a language. For example, they can read a text in French and bring the knowledge to be discussed in class in English. Or, when writing an essay in English, if they cannot find the word they are looking for, they can write it in a different language and revise it later. Thus, students can still deliver without interrupting the flow of communication.
- (5) ***Pluriliteracies*** (Coyle, 2015; Meyer et al., 2018): Plurilingualism considers learners as social agents who rely on their linguistic and cultural knowledge to initiate and participate in various communication processes. They rely not only on reading, writing, speaking, and listening to communicate; but also, on other types of literacies such as visual representations (i.e., memes, emojis, and images), symbols, body gestures, and digital literacies (i.e., vlogs, reels). So, plurilingual instruction uses pedagogical resources already available and new ones created by the students. For example, a map illustrating the history of the English language can inspire students to turn it into a short movie or a song.

Plurilingual Tasks

The decision to develop the below plurilingual tasks stemmed from anecdotal evidence resulting from a student's visit to my office. After failing her English midterm exam, my student asked to see me during office hours. As we were going over her answers in the exam, she used English; however, as she started expressing her feelings, she was "stuck" and switched to Arabic. Unaware of the notion of plurilingualism, she nevertheless used two main plurilingual strategies (translation and translanguaging in this case) to describe her emotions. In addition, my students have always expressed apprehension toward solely using the target language as the language of instruction. Hence, I developed the tasks below to celebrate my students' linguistic diversity and emotionality.

The common objective of all the tasks was to create a welcoming and an accepting environment where students can claim their right to speak and express their emotions. The academic and non-academic affordances of each task are also discussed in the following section, in addition to an indication of the designated level and a description

of objectives, design, and implementation. I list the tasks according to the level I used them with; however, they can be adapted to any level.

Therapy Task

Level: Intensive.

Plurilingual Strategies: Cross-linguistic comparison and translanguaging.

Objectives: This task aimed to (1) enhance students' English vocabulary of emotions and (2) improve students' ability to construct basic sentences and converse about general topics.

Design and Implementation: This task was implemented weekly as a relaxing pre-weekend activity. I started by asking students how they were feeling. As students took a turn in expressing negative and positive emotions, they alternated between the three languages they were all familiar with: Arabic, English, and French. Some students used additional languages or different varieties of the same language. While I initially encouraged them to use English, most of them used Arabic, their first language, to describe their feelings as they could not always identify them in English. While students shared their feelings, I wrote down on the board the types of emotions they were unable to identify in English. If a student used a language I was unfamiliar with, I asked them to write it themselves. Once students were done, we went over the list of words together. For each word written in a language other than English, I asked the student who used it to read it, then explain its meaning. The explanation could be in English or any other language. It is essential to allow students to describe the feeling using any language even if the teacher or students do not understand it. Students should be able to exercise agency over the way they express their emotions, including the language they use to do so. Then, I asked the student to take out their phone and find the word's translation in English. I wrote the translation on the board next to its counterpart. Once we translated all the terms, we divided them into categories of emotions (i.e., anger, happiness, and love). We explained the variations (if any) of the feelings within the same category (i.e., anxiety and frustration). Depending on the duration of the session, teachers can either choose to end the task at this point or extend it by comparing word formation, pronunciation, and meanings of a type of feeling across different languages and cultures (cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison).

Affordances: Although students were hesitant to share their feelings at the beginning of the semester, however, as the semester progressed, students were more likely to share personal stories as opposed to the common challenges students face during their studies. This is probably due to their sense of belonging that was nurtured throughout the task, which also enabled students to communicate different emotions. By the end of the term, it was also noticed that students were more likely to use English to express their feelings instead of Arabic, as they now had a richer English vocabulary repertoire

of emotions. The observed advantages of the task align with Van Der Wildt et al.'s (2017) findings that correlate teacher practices with students' sense of belonging. In other words, the author argues that tolerance toward multilingualism and attention to students' needs (personal and emotional) affects their sense of belonging to the classroom and, ultimately, their learning.

Beauty Task

Level: Intensive.

Plurilingual Strategies: Cross-cultural comparison and translanguaging.

Objectives: This task aimed to (1) explain the notion of word formation especially that of adjectives, nouns, and adverbs and (2) introduce students to worldwide perceptions of beauty.

Design and Implementation: During the first part of the activity, I wrote the word *beautiful* on the board and asked students to share their perceptions of the notion of beauty. More specifically, I asked them to give examples of adjectives in English that they would typically use to describe beauty. While some students focused more on appearances and body image, other students gave more intuitive answers that related beauty to personality traits. After concluding the first part of the task, I asked students to work in small groups to find the noun and adverb forms of the adjectives written on the board. A read aloud of all the nouns, adverbs, and adjectives and a discussion about word formation later followed. The next step consisted of assigning one country to each group of students and asking them to research the beauty standards of this country. Since beauty standards are often related to sociocultural influences, suggesting countries from different parts of the world would enrich the activity. I encouraged students to conduct their research in any language of their choice and bring in the results to be shared with their classmates in English. Students then gave short presentations about worldwide perceptions of beauty, followed by discussions including comparisons between different countries. The last part of the activity focused on students' emotional reactions to the beauty standards shared, including those of the Lebanese culture's, and the impacts (positive or negative) on their well-being. I asked students to share personal experiences or encounters using the nouns, adjectives, and adverbs learned during the first part of the activity. Some of the reactions shared included a critical comparison of the notion of beauty concerning both women and men and how modern societies, including social media, pressure women more than men to abide by strict beauty standards.

Affordances: Interestingly, when students discussed their perceptions of beauty in Lebanon, they alternated between Arabic and English instead of solely using Arabic. This is probably because students now felt they have a base of English vocabulary of beauty and emotions that they can use. Also, they were more motivated to

use and practice English despite potential grammatical, phonological, or syntactical errors because the classroom environment fostered a trial-and-error approach to learning. Hence, plurilingual practices validated students' linguistic diversity (Dooly & Vallejo, 2019) and broadened the task to include personal aspects of significance to the students (Van Viegen & Zappa-Holman, 2020).

Memoir Writing Task

Level: Intermediate.

Plurilingual Strategies: Pluriliteracies, translanguaging, and translation.

Objectives: This task aimed to (1) illustrate the importance of cohesion and coherence in writing and (2) align content to students' real-life experiences.

Design and Implementation: Since the topic of the activity requires familiarity among students, I implemented this task toward the end of the semester or the academic year. After spending an entire semester or year together, I found this to be a great way to see how well students and myself know each other. The task was implemented to conclude a reading and writing unit about *memoirs*, in which students were introduced to different types and structures of memoirs, including examples of relevant memoirs (i.e., excerpts from *Seventy* by Mikhail Naima; *Lighter Than My Shadow* by Katie Green). For the task, I asked students to plot the most significant moments of their life into a diagram to prepare them to write their memoirs. The length and guidelines of the memoirs are for the teachers and students to decide, depending on the content covered in class. For the students who already have one burning story to share with their peers, I asked them to outline the main points they would like to talk about. Since the focus of the diagrams and outlines was more on highlighting main events and less on students' ability to write in English, students were allowed to use different languages, in addition to symbols and drawings. Students were also invited to use all their senses, including the various sights, sounds, smells, and textures that their story evokes in them. After giving students ample time to plan and write the first drafts of their memoirs, I assigned the second draft as homework. Students were expected to use English only in their second drafts, submit one soft copy to the teacher (through email or school's system) with their names, and bring one anonymous hard copy of the assignment to the class. I collected all hard copies on the due date and distributed them randomly to students who were supposed to guess who the memoir belonged to.

Affordances: This activity allowed students to practice the cohesion and coherence writing strategies previously covered in class. The reported benefits of the task also included students' ability to write a vivid and detailed description to re-create a memorable that is emotional, event or a moment in time. Thus, students responded to the challenge of writing in English by implementing plurilingual strategies to create

meaningful writings (Little & Kirwan, 2018), ones that evoked positive feelings in them.

Gratitude Task

Level: Intermediate.

Plurilingual Strategies: Translation and pluriliteracies.

Objectives: The task aimed to (1) encourage positive relationships among students and their entourage and (2) teach students the necessary vocabulary and expressions to make and answer phone calls.

Design and Implementation: For this task, students and I conducted our *experiment of gratitude*, where we called our loved ones in class to express how grateful we are for having them in our lives. Some students even went a little further and apologized to family members or friends to resolve existing misunderstandings among them. This task was the most emotional experience my students and I went through together as a group. As they called their loved ones, students' facial expressions and behaviors beautifully reflected raw human emotions. Linguistically, it was also observed that students mostly used Arabic during the phone calls. After completing the first part of the task, I then asked students first to write down the expressions they used to make the phone call (i.e., openings/greetings, establishing purpose, wrap-ups, and closings), then to translate them to English. We later discussed how these expressions differ depending on our audience and the context (i.e., professional and cultural). In fact, students compared how the expressions and words they used, in addition to other conversational elements (i.e., tone of voice and formality) varied depending on the person they called. To recognize informal and formal functional language related to common telephone routines, I suggested different scenarios and asked students if they would still use the same language they used with their loved ones and to suggest alternative examples. Finally, we created a list of expressions and vocabulary in English that students can use to make or answer a phone call. The task can be expanded into a role-play where students can use the list in different scenarios.

Affordances: By the end of the task, students were able to use common phone call phrases to engage in informal and formal phone conversations. They were also able to improve their communication skills by expressing their opinions and emotions through different modes and mediums (i.e., phone call and oral discussion). The results agree with Piccardo's (2019) and Kharkhurin's (2021) claimed about the role of plurilingual strategies in allowing students to creatively stretch linguistic and cultural norms. The results were not only academic. By experiencing gratitude, students were able to feel more positive emotions, deal with relationships adversity, and build stronger connections; all of which enhanced their engagement in the academic part of the activity (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2021).

Mental Health Task

Level: Advanced.

Plurilingual Strategies: Translation, pluriliteracies, and cross-cultural comparisons.

Objectives: This task aimed to (1) introduce students to academic responses and (2) warn against the dangers of mental health stigma.

Design and Implementation: Based on my experience as an English teacher, students often struggle with writing an academic response. For that, I usually use this task as an introductory activity to teaching response writing. The challenges students face with response writing might be due to the nature of the essay that requires students to reflect on different aspects of a given source (i.e., article, movie, and book) through academic writing. That is, students are expected to implicitly express their personal opinion about either the main topic and ideas or the structure (i.e., organization of ideas and type of reasoning) of a source by basing it on research, analysis, and critical thinking so that it appears to be objective. I also choose a current critical topic that students can relate to. As a strong advocate of mental health, I center this activity around depression. Interacting with students for extended periods opened my eyes to the daily internal struggles students deal with, often on their own. Despite the ongoing advocacy for mental health, it is still considered a taboo in Lebanese culture, which stigmatizes people suffering from mental health issues and forces them to suppress their struggles.

The first time I implemented this task was during an advanced English undergraduate course. The music video of Billie Eilish and Khalid's song "Lovely" had just come out. For the first part of the activity, students and I watched the video clip together twice. The first time was for students to familiarize themselves with the singers and the song, and the second time was to focus on the details, such as the music and the narrative nature of the clip. Since the lyrics do not explicitly refer to depression or any other mental health issue, students were expected to critically analyze the song and video clip elements to guess what they were really about. They were encouraged to take notes either in writing or using symbols and drawings. After expressing their reactions to the song and the elements of the video clip (i.e., the graphics and the singers' body movements), students concluded that the song was about depression. A lengthy discussion about mental health and the different types of symptoms and treatments later followed. Then, I asked students to gather in groups to find a song about depression in Arabic. When students were ready, they were supposed to compare in writing how the topic of depression is portrayed in both songs. More specifically, they had to critically examine the vocabulary used, the main arguments, the supporting ideas, the choice of instruments, and the rhythm. Aligned with the structure of the academic response, students first summarized different elements of both songs and then responded to three main ideas. The song *Lovely* is used here as an example. Teachers may choose other songs or other artistic platforms in addition to other languages besides Arabic. The activity can also be edited to fit more beginner levels.

Affordances: By utilizing plurilingual strategies, students were able to reflect on how depression is perceived in different cultures through a critical examination of language, and digital and artistic tools. They also learned new information about mental health and its prevalence, and some positive coping strategies to deal with mental health issues. It is also important to focus on the emotional aspect of the activity which was a key criterion in its success. In fact, students felt at ease to discuss mental health which is often a difficult topic for many to tackle. This may be due to the sense of community and the connections built in the classroom and among the students. The results of the task fit within the scope of current research about plurilingualism. In fact, students reported that when used with a plurilingual approach, translation allowed them to make sense of English vocabulary, and enhanced conceptual knowledge (Galante, 2021a). In addition, plurilingual practices helped them strengthen their connections and community building (Walker, 2021).

Implications for Language Education

While research has highlighted the positive role of emotionality in enhancing students' second language learning (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017; Saito et al., 2018;), current TESOL practices continue to be biased toward a cognitive approach without recognizing the role of affective variables in improving cognition. As languages and emotions are firmly connected, disregarding students' emotionality can adversely affect learners and negatively impact their investment in learning English as a second language (Dewaele & Li, 2020). In addition, current teaching pedagogies are anchored in a monolingual and monocultural ideology that often dismisses students' linguistic and cultural repertoires (Galante et al., 2019). Such practices can increase students' emotional distress in relation to language learning (Taboada Barber et al., 2021). Finally, implementing activities that focus on affect is also positive for teacher development as it allows teachers to be more creative and autonomous instead of only working with textbooks (Arnold, 2020).

The materials included in this chapter are meant to address these issues and guide TESOL teachers into enhancing students' emotionality through the implementation of plurilingual pedagogy. Informed by the concepts of plurilingualism and emotionality, the tasks focus on utilizing five plurilingual pedagogical strategies that value students' linguistic and cultural repertoires while addressing critical emotional issues such as self-esteem, trust, and happiness. The affordances discussed are presented from my perspective as an English teacher and based on my students' feedback.

While the tasks were implemented in English language learning classrooms in Lebanon, they could be used in any other multilingual setting and adapted to different levels. Given that the tasks require teachers to reflect on their context, pedagogical practices, and students' affect, teachers can design suitable tasks for their learning environment and student population. For example, while most teachers will not deny the importance of sharing emotions in class, some would argue about the extent and the type of emotions to be shared. Sociocultural factors also come into place as some

cultures are centered around the importance of emotions in building trustworthy relationships, whereas others are intolerant toward sharing one's emotional state. Hence, the activities' objectives, plurilingual strategies, design, and implementation can be customized to support context-specific outcomes. Moreover, even in contexts where language policies are monolingual or bilingual, plurilingual approaches can validate students' emotions by drawing on their plurilingual and pluricultural identities. Emphasizing students' emotionality has both an intrinsic and an instrumental value in their language learning in general and English language acquisition.

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