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Plurilingual literary writings as tools to develop students' creativity

In an era marked by rapid change, educators face a persistent call to nurture creativity in students, prompting them to explore innovative solutions. This study investigates the role of students' plurilingual resources in fostering creativity within a foreign language classroom at secondary school level. Students collaboratively produced literary writings (songs, poems, and short stories) in which they applied their plurilingual resources (all of languages they knew). This case study employs a bottom-up approach to analyse students' texts to determine whether facilitating the use of their diverse linguistic resources, including the blending of codes and modes, acts as a catalyst for creativity. The research results indicate that the foreign language classroom can indeed serve as a platform for students to engage in various forms of language creativity. The findings also suggest that encouraging students to utilize their diverse linguistic resources enhances language creativity. Additionally, the analysis highlights that the collaborative nature of the task supports the notion that exploring multiple solutions, rather than adhering to a single correct answer, fosters creativity. Furthermore, evidence indicates that creating a safe environment for learners is crucial for encouraging playful and unconventional language use for creative purposes.

Keywords: creativity, plurilingualism, secondary school, foreign language classroom

Słowa kluczowe: kreatywność, wielojęzyczność, szkoła średnia, nauczanie języków obcych



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1. Introduction

There exists a consensus among various stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, policymakers, and researchers, regarding the critical importance of nurturing creativity in students for success in the 21st century (European Council, 2008; the Council of Europe, 2008). European policy initiatives, such as the Europe 2020 strategy introduced by the European Commission in 2010, have underscored the centrality of creativity in fostering innovation and driving economic growth (European Commission, 2010). Moreover, global organizations such as UNESCO advocate for integrating creativity into educational curricula to develop problem-solving skills and foster innovation (UNESCO, 2021).

In addition, Canagarajah (2012) points out that today individuals engage with numerous communities, viewing them as dynamic and diverse constructs shaped by factors such as migration, social media, and global connectivity. These communities coalesce around shared interests rather than conventional markers such as language or ethnicity (Canagarajah, 2012). To effectively communicate across these diverse cultural contexts, individuals require creative use of their linguistic skills. Hence, educators should provide opportunities for language play, defined by Ellis as the manipulation of sound patterns, structures, and meanings (Ellis, 2016). Cho and Kim argue that language play enhances the creativity of foreign language learners (Cho, Kim, 2018). Moreover, the Council of Europe acknowledges the potential for creative language manipulation at higher proficiency levels in foreign language (FL) education, as outlined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001). However, there are significant disagreements regarding the definition of creativity and the methodologies needed to cultivate it in educational settings (Cachia et al., 2010). Torrance's definition of creativity serves as the foundational framework in this study: "process of sensing difficulties, problems, gaps in information, missing elements, something askew; making guesses and formulating hypotheses about these deficiencies, evaluating and testing these guesses and hypotheses; possibly revising and retesting them; and finally communicating the results" (Torrance, Shaughnessy, 1998: 442).

Although, as indicated above, creativity is considered paramount in FL teaching and learning, Verde underscores the scarcity of research concerning the influence of creativity on the development of speaking and writing skills in FL learning (Verde, 2022). Thus, this case study offers insights to address this research gap and advance understanding in the field as it analyses the extent to which utilization of students' plurilingualism enhances their creativity while performing written tasks; in this case plurilingual writings (songs,

poems, and short stories). Aligning with the Council of Europe's (CoE) perspective, this paper adopts a definition of plurilingualism that pertains to individuals who possess and employ diverse linguistic resources, often within the same communicative context (Council of Europe, 2001).

Building on UNESCO's (2021) assertion that language transcends mere communication, the author advocates for actively promoting students' full linguistic resources across academic domains, including in FL classrooms. This approach empowers students to creatively manipulate lexical and grammatical structures, utilizing them in innovative ways.

2. Theoretical background

For over seven decades, scholars have extensively explored the concept of creativity within educational settings; however, despite this prolonged inquiry, creativity remains a multifaceted construct, eluding a singular comprehensive definition (Runco, Jaeger, 2012). In this study, Tin's definition of language creativity, as illustrated in Figure 1, is utilized to operationalize Torrance's concept of creativity which is presented in the introduction of this paper (Torrance, Shaughnessy, 1998). Tin's definition is split into three categories: *creativity through language* emphasizes generating new ideas and communicative purposes using familiar language; *creativity of language* fo-

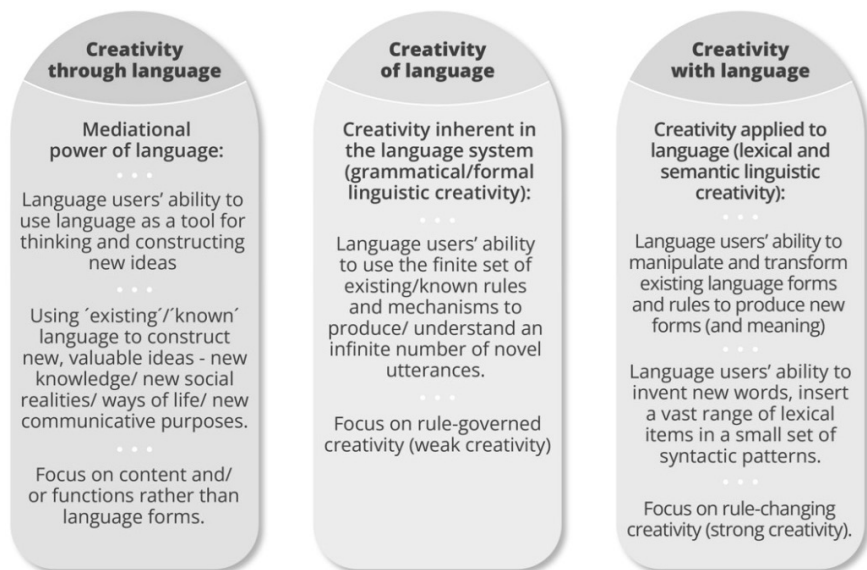


Figure 1. Tin's creativity definition (Adapted from Tin, 2022: 145)

cuses on generating novel utterances within existing language rules; and *creativity with language* involves modifying language rules to create new forms of expression.

Verde (2022) highlights the diverse perspectives through which scholars have examined creativity, including cognitive theories (Boden, 2004; Guilford, 1967; Mednick, 1962; Wallas, 1926), personality studies (Costa, McCrae, 1992; Feist, 1998), socio-cultural research (Amabile, 1992), and componential theories (Amabile, 1983, 1996; De Jesus et al., 2013; Plucker, Beghetto, Dow, 2004). Given the challenges involved in defining creativity, Tin (2022) suggests that creating a supportive environment is essential for learners to playfully and non-standardly employ language creatively, highlighting the influence of environmental factors on creative language use. Therefore, educators should rather emphasize the creation of supportive environments that foster experimentation, risk-taking, and the exploration of innovative approaches. Safe classroom settings empower students to develop openness, characterized by a propensity for engaging in ambiguous tasks, seeking new experiences, and possessing cognitive skills essential for creativity (Costa, McCrae, 1992). However, achieving these objectives poses challenges within educational systems heavily reliant on standardized assessments such as PISA¹ or SAT², which significantly influence students' future trajectories (Cachia et al., 2010).

Initial research findings indicate a predominantly positive correlation between creativity and various facets of FL proficiency, including vocabulary acquisition and lexical production (Verde, 2022). Li highlights the necessity for learners to go beyond rote memorization and recall of language concepts, instead advocating for active engagement in critical and creative analysis as well as evaluation of the content to fully internalize the language (Li, 2016). Creativity within language, grounded in the inherent creativity of the language system, particularly its grammatical framework, entails the adept manipulation and transformation of linguistic rules by language users to generate diverse novel forms, spanning lexical creativity and unconventional grammatical patterns (Tin, 2022). This concept aligns with Vygotsky's framework, which views language as a mediational tool empowering students to construct implicit knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

Zabihi, Rezazadeh and Dastjerdi (2013) noted a positive correlation between creative fluency³ and FL fluency in individual writing tasks, along with

¹ Programme for International Student Assessment

² The SAT acronym originally stood for "Scholastic Aptitude Test," but as the test evolved, the acronym's meaning was dropped.

³ The total number of interpretable, meaningful, and relevant ideas generated in response to the stimulus (Torrance, 1966).

a negative correlation between creative originality and FL fluency in both individual and collaborative contexts. Carter (2004) highlights that students should frequently use various linguistic devices, such as rhyme, repetition, wordplay, metaphor, slang, proverbs, humour, and idiomatic expressions, to effectively convey their ideas. Maley (2015) proposes strategies for fostering creativity in the FL classroom, including experimentation, setting constraints, making unusual combinations, developing divergent thinking, and utilizing a variety of materials and resources. Research findings also suggest that individuals with bi-/multilingual abilities demonstrate superior performance on various creativity measures compared to monolinguals, which is attributed to enhanced executive functions, greater generative capacity, and exposure to diverse cultural contexts (Dijk et al., 2019). Additionally, bi-/multilinguals exhibit heightened cognitive control (Bialystok, Craik, Luk, 2012), increased cognitive flexibility (Kharkhurin, 2017), and superior problem-solving skills (Leikin, Tovli, Woldo, 2020) compared to monolinguals. Consequently, creativity emerges as a potentially significant factor contributing to learner variability in FL acquisition. However, further research is necessary to validate these initial findings and establish a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between creativity and FL learning.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research objectives

This qualitative research adopts a case study approach, emphasizing a focus on understanding intricate processes rather than generalizing findings to larger populations (Suter, 2012). In this study, students were tasked with collaborating and integrating all of their known languages while crafting a piece of literary writing (song, poem, or short story). This was done to investigate whether Choi's assertion, that encouraging students to utilize their full linguistic resources and mix codes and modes, promotes creativity and aligns with the data under analysis (Choi, 2016). To attain these objectives, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent is Tin's definition of *creativity: through, of, and with language* (Section 2, Figure 1) evident in students' plurilingual texts?
2. What is the correlation between students' choice of language and the types of creativity discernible in the plurilingual texts?

3.2. Participants

The study was conducted at a private secondary school located in a mid-sized town near Barcelona, Spain. The participants comprised twenty-two students (8 males, 14 females), aged 14 to 15 years, in their third year of mandatory secondary education. These students were purposively selected from five different homerooms and assigned to an English class based on their language proficiency. Instruction in English consisted of four 50-minute lessons per week, with the author serving as the regular English teacher during the data collection period.

All twenty-two students were fluent in Catalan and Spanish, which served as the primary languages of instruction at the school, and had B1/B2 level in English, a compulsory subject at this school. Additionally, students had varying levels of proficiency in other languages, which they either studied as elective courses at school or acquired as heritage languages at home. Table 1 shows the languages of students working in particular groups.

Table 1. Students' languages present in each of the group

Group	Languages
Group1	Catalan, Spanish, English, French, Mandarin
Group 2	Catalan, Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, German,
Group 3	Catalan, Spanish, English, Russian, Italian, Mandarin, French
Group 4	Catalan, Spanish, English, Italian, Serbian, Mandarin
Group 5	Catalan, Spanish, English
Group 6	Catalan, Spanish, English, French, German, Portuguese

At the outset of the study, students were informed that their work might be used for research purposes, and written parental consent was obtained in advance. It was explicitly stated to both students and parents that participation in the research would not affect students' final academic evaluations. Students were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (without parental notification).

3.3. Research instruments

The data examined in this study formed part of a comprehensive pedagogical plan (spanning the first and second academic terms) that aimed at using innovative tools (e.g. linguistic landscapes⁴ and students' plurilingualism) to

⁴ "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" (Landry, Bourhis, 1997: 23)

promote their critical thinking skills (Kruszynska, Dooly, 2023; Kruszynska, 2024) and creativity. This plan encompassed a range of formative and summative tasks, incorporating both oral and written assignments and utilizing various technological tools such as voice recording and videos, as well as traditional methods such as drawing on paper. These tasks were executed through both individual and collaborative efforts. Learning objectives of tasks were developed in reference to the modified Bloom's Taxonomy (Armstrong, 2010) to foster critical and creative thinking skills.

The data analysed in this paper were collected in October 2022 and came from a formative task aligned with Bloom's *Create* domain. Students needed to follow these instructions:

In your groups, select a topic for your collaborative literary writing, such as love, sunset, or autumn leaves, etc., and decide whether you will create a song, a poem, or a short story. Make sure that your writing incorporates all the languages from your list in any form: sentences, words, or paragraphs. After completing your literary work, find images that represent it, and then record a video of your group reading your text, accompanied by images and (optional) music.

Table 2 presents the number of students in each group and the type of literary writing each group produced. There were six groups: four groups comprising four students and two groups comprising three students. Students wrote: one song, two short stories, and three poems; in all of them students used all of their plurilingual resources. Examples of students' plurilingual writings are available in annex.

Table 2. Groups sizes and text types produced

Group	Number of students	Type of text
Group1	4 students	poem
Group 2	4 students	song
Group 3	3 students	poem
Group 4	3 students	short story
Group 5	4 students	short story
Group 6	4 students	poem

3.4. Procedure of data analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the study employs Silbey's (2021) adaptation of Grounded Theory for the analysis, characterized

by the construction of theory primarily from empirical data, constituting a bottom-up approach. This methodology entails the compilation of empirical evidence, including observations and statements from respondents, to formulate generalizations and hypotheses. Such an approach permits the incorporation of documentary sources, such as students' texts (Silbey, 2021).

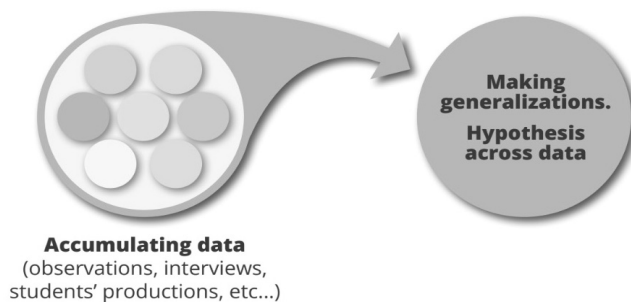


Figure 2. Silbey's adaptation of Grounded Theory (*Adapted from Silbey, 2021*)

Silbey's (2021) adaptation of Grounded Theory allows for the incorporation of relevant concepts from existing literature as well as terms extracted directly from the analysed texts of students as potential codes. As noted by Tavory and Timmermans (2014), specific code categories may emerge organically from the data, while others may be drawn from external sources if they are deemed relevant to the observed data.

To analyse the students' written work, the author read the texts and coded them line by line applying Tin's (2022) categories of creativity: *through*, *of*, and *with language*. The category *creativity through language* went through a two-phase coding in order to be fully explored. Each text was read again, and each line was coded with a word or short phrase to capture its main idea/content. Next, the verses with the same code were assembled. By applying this process, the author could examine if students generated

TEXT 2

if the soccer players eat it – who eats it
they will be the pixixi - famous
 if the swimmers make a bocao – who eats it
 they will be the rei with bacalao – famous

CREATIVITY THROUGH LANGUAGE -
 using previous knowledge in a new
 context. Pixixi (Pichichi) famous goalkeeper

Figure 3. Example of two-phase coding of *creativity through language* category (abstract from Text 2)

new ideas and communicative purposes (*creativity through language*) using different words and/or languages. Figure 3 showcases examples of the two-phase coding applied to students' texts.

5. Results

Six literary writings were analysed in order to measure the extent to which Tin's language creativity categories (as defined in Section 2) were present in the students' texts (Tin, 2022). Table 3, presented below, provides an overview of the findings related to the study's first research question. Category *creativity through language* is split into *creativity through language 1* and 2 as this category underwent two-phase coding described in Section 3.4.

Table 3. Instances of *creativity through*, *of* and *with language* found in each text

Students' text	Creativity through language 1	Creativity through language 2	Creativity of language	Creativity with language
TEXT 1 (poem)	4	8	5	1
TEXT 2 (song)	2	12	1	0
TEXT 3 (poem)	0	9	1	1
TEXT 4 (short story)	6	22	2	0
TEXT 5 (short story)	4	21	0	0
TEXT 6 (poem)	0	15	1	0
TOTAL	16	87	10	2

In general, students have shown engagement across all categories; however, there is a notable emphasis on *creativity through language* in all texts (103 instances; 16 in *creativity through language 1* and 87 in *creativity through language 2*). *Creativity of language* was found 10 times, compared to only two instances of *creativity with language*. Texts 1 and 3 (both poems) stand out as they incorporated all three categories of creativity. In texts 2, 4, and 6 (a song, a short story, and a poem), students incorporated two creativity categories (*creativity through language* and *creativity of language*), while in text 5 (a short story) only one category (*creativity through language*) was utilized. Furthermore, it is evident that utilizing a two-phase coding method reveals a greater number of examples of the *creativity through language* category, which emphasizes students' capacity to exploit language effectively for expressing ideas and knowledge. Figure 4 illustrates instances

TEXT 1

18. L'humanité n'est pas séparée par la façon dont nous sommes

(***Humanity is not separated by the way we are***) – equality

19. 我们的素质不能使我们与众不同

Wǒmen de sù zhì bùnéng shǐ wǒmen yǔ zhòng bùtóng
(*Our qualities don't make us different.*) – equality

20. 每个都是原样

Měi gè dōu shì yuányàng
(*Everything isn't as it should be.*) – differences

21. Podem no ser tots iguals.
(*We may not be all the same.*) – no differences

22. però això no és lo important,
(*But that's not important.*) – equality

CTREATIVITY THROUGH LANGUAGE -
expressing what defines humans,
what matters and what doesn't in this
process.

Figure 4. Example of two-phase coding of *creativity through language* category (abstract from Text 1)

of “equality” expressed in three verses (lines 18, 19, and 22) through varied words and languages (French, Chinese, and Catalan, respectively).

The second research question examines the relationship between different types of creativity and the languages used. The subsequent aspect pertains to the languages utilized by students to manifest *creativity through language 1* and 2. The predominant use of English is evident across all texts, with text 5 exhibiting this language almost exclusively. Another notable observation is that texts 1, 2, and 6 (two poems and a song) employed more than three languages to convey the same idea, while the remaining three texts primarily utilized a single language to express the same idea in varied terms.

Additionally, the analysis revealed instances where students expressed ideas in a bilingual format (code-mixing), with a part of the line in one language and the rest in another. This phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 5 below, depicting the language combinations employed by students.

From the analysis of the data, it is evident that bilingual expression occurs only in certain texts, such as 2, 3, and 4, while in texts 1, 5, and 6 languages are not mixed within the same line. Additionally, in texts where bilingual expressions are present, all language combinations involve English paired with another language. English-Catalan was the most prevalent (7 instances), followed by English-Spanish (4 examples), English-French, and English-Italian (3 occurrences each), English-Russian (2 examples), and one instance each of English-Chinese and English-Portuguese.

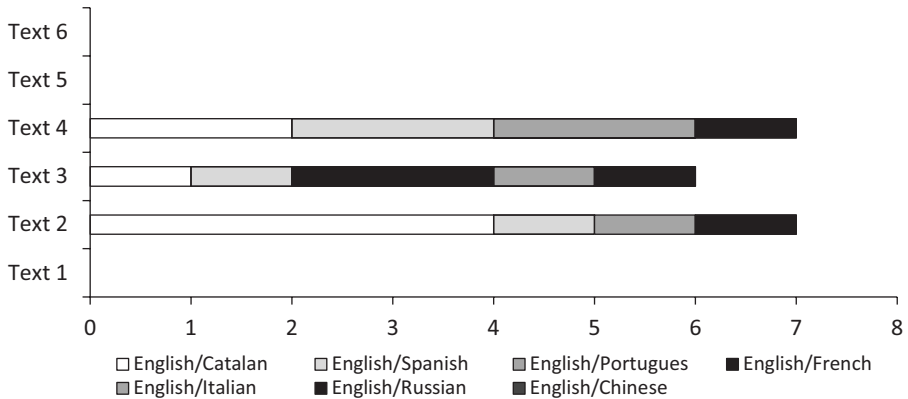


Figure 5 Instances where students expressed the same idea in a bilingual format

Tables 4 and 5 present the distribution of *creativity of* and *with language* categories according to the language in which it was expressed and examples from students' texts.

Table 4. *Creativity of language* across languages and an example from students' texts

Language	Instances	Examples from students' text and [analysis]
Spanish	5	<p>‘¿Por el color de tu piel piensas que eres superior?’ (‘By the colour of your skin do you think you are superior?’)</p> <p>[using rhetorical question and translation from Spanish to English]</p>
Catalan	1	<p>‘no hi haurà llibert<u>at</u> fins que tinguem la igual<u>tat</u>,’ (no freedom till we’re equal)</p> <p>[repeating the sound ‘tat’ in words llibertat (freedom) and igualtat (equality) makes it rhyme]</p>
English	4	<p>‘Don’t make any more excuses; Don’t think this doesn’t affect you; Don’t sit back and be silent’</p> <p>[ANAPHORA – repetition of ‘don’t’]</p>

Examples of *creativity of language* are predominantly composed in Spanish (5), English (4), and Catalan (1). In this category, students employ various literary devices, e.g. rhyme, anaphora, rhetorical question, humour, metaphor, foreshadowing and simile to enhance their texts.

Table 5 *Creativity with language* across languages and an example from students' texts

Language	Instances	Examples from students' texts
English	1	'until that new light enters in your life'
French	1	'si le coeur brille...' (English: if the heart shines...)

Regarding *creativity with language*, there are only two instances. One example is written in English and the other in French. In these instances, students employ the language in innovative ways, such as using the word "light" as a synonym for "a friend" and giving the heart the attribute of a sun ("the heart shines").

Notably, examples in English span all three creativity categories rather than the school's official languages (Spanish and/or Catalan), which may warrant further investigation. One possible explanation is that the task was conducted during an English as a FL lesson, prompting students to primarily use this language.

6. Discussion

This study enhances comprehension of the methods by which foreign language educators can promote creativity among students through the utilization of their plurilingual resources. To achieve this goal, the author evaluated the degree to which Tin's definitions of creativity were apparent in the texts produced by students.

While students generally demonstrated engagement across all creativity categories, there was a notable emphasis on *creativity through* compared to *creativity of* and *with language*. The use of linguistic devices such as rhyme, repetition, wordplay, metaphor, slang, proverbs, humour, and idiomatic expressions directly relates to *creativity of language*, as suggested by Carter, who argues that language users frequently employ various linguistic devices to effectively convey their ideas (Carter, 2004). The limited presence of *creativity with language* examples indicates that students found it challenging to generate diverse novel forms, including lexical creativity and unconventional grammatical patterns, that are typically associated with proficient language users (Tin, 2022). One explanation for the low number of examples of creativity with language in students' texts could be the novelty of the activity, as it was the first time the students performed it. Additionally, the low proficiency levels in some of the languages they used, with some languages having been studied for less than a year, may have contributed

to this outcome. The fact that students utilized both their native language and various foreign languages at different proficiency levels could be an area for further research.

Furthermore, the formative and open-ended nature of the task established a conducive environment for learners, aligning with Tin's assertion that such an environment is vital for encouraging playful and unconventional language use for creative purposes (2022). Additionally, the collaborative aspect of the task enabled students to explore diverse solutions rather than adhering to a singular correct response, supporting the argument posited by Costa and McCrae regarding the necessity of these skills in nurturing creativity (1992). In order to prompt students to utilize all of their plurilingual resources, they were placed in a novel situation necessitating experimentation and unconventional linguistic combinations because, as suggested by Maley, this type of situations offers strategies for fostering creativity in the FL classroom (Maley, 2015).

This study also investigates the association between language choice and the various forms of creativity demonstrated in students' plurilingual compositions. Notably, English was predominantly employed across all texts, possibly because the task was conducted during an English as a FL session, prompting students to favour this language. However, this hypothesis warrants further examination. It is noteworthy that *creativity of* and *with language* were equally expressed in the school's official languages (Catalan and Spanish) and FL (English and French). An examination of the *creativity through language* category reveals that all groups utilized multiple languages, with half of them engaging in code-mixing (English alongside another language within the same text line), to convey the same idea.

While the findings of the study are limited to a single school context and a small sample, they serve as a starting point for further research on utilizing plurilingualism to enhance creativity. Despite their context-specific nature, these insights can inform educators interested in implementing similar approaches in secondary school FL classrooms. The fact that this study adopts practitioner research, where an individual serves as both practitioner and researcher, aiming to enhance targeted practice (Campbell, Groundwater-Smith, 2009), may be seen as a limitation. The researcher acknowledges the inherent tension between their roles and the potential for over-interpretation of the source data. To mitigate this, the author anonymized the data and deferred analysis until after teaching the specific group of students, reducing potential bias from prior interactions. On the other hand, this approach allows bridging of the gap between research teams and participants, as well as between theory and practice (Nussbaum, 2017). As a classroom teacher, the researcher possessed a deep understanding of the students, which

potentially facilitated a nuanced comprehension of their expressions in the target language, without being unduly influenced by common errors made by learners at the B1/B2 level.

7. Conclusion

In an era marked by rapid technological progress and uncertain future trajectories, the necessity of imparting essential skills to secondary school students becomes increasingly evident. Among these skills, fostering and applying creativity emerges as a critical priority. The data presented in this case study exemplifies how the FL classroom can serve as a platform for students to engage in various forms of language creativity. Furthermore, Canagarajah (2012) underscores the role of languages as creative tools for shaping and reconstructing identities, highlighting teachers' pivotal role in advancing ideals of global citizenship and fostering cooperative attitudes.

The findings of this study have the potential to contribute to the existing body of research in the field of FL education, curriculum development, and pedagogical methodologies. Firstly, the study corroborates Choi's assertion that facilitating students' utilization of their diverse linguistic resources, including the integration of codes and modes, supports creativity, although it does not provide data to compare it with monolingual speakers (Choi, 2016). Secondly, the analysis implies that the collaborative nature of the task supports the idea that exploring various solutions, rather than keeping to a single correct answer, offers students a platform to cultivate creativity. Furthermore, there is evidence which suggests that creating a safe environment for learners is crucial for promoting playful and unconventional language use for creative purposes. Finally, this study demonstrates that the application of Tin's creativity definitions for both task design and research approach can be used to structure learning processes to promote creativity in a FL classroom context (Tin, 2022).

Acknowledgements

This article was funded by the ERASMUS+ Traineeship Program.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Anna Czura from the University of Wrocław for her invaluable support and supervision during the ERASMUS+ Traineeship Program in 2022/2023 academic year. Her guidance, insights, and encouragement were instrumental in the development and completion of this article. This research is a direct outcome of our fruitful collaboration, and I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity to work under her mentorship.

Additionally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the reviewers who provided detailed and constructive feedback. Their thorough and insightful comments greatly contributed to the improvement and refinement of this article.

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Received: 20.02.2024

Revised: 29.07.2024

This work was carried out within the framework of the Doctorate in Education Program at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Annex: Examples of students' plurilingual writings (students' original spelling)

<p>I WAS THAT NORMAL GUY I was that normal guy on el centro de Madrid making pa amb tomaquet and singing this but I really dont like it je aime baguette it is delicious wie die Brezel it is pa amb tumaca desayuno y merienda it is pa amb tumaca desayuno y merienda ideal pa am tumaca, pa amb tumaca if the soccer players eat it they will be the pixixi if the swimmers make a bocão they will be the rei with bacalao if the cyclists take it they will win the tour of france if the boxers menger they will fight perfect it is pa amb tumaca desayuno y merienda it is pa amb tumaca desayuno y merienda ideal pa amb tumaca, pa amb tumaca</p>	<p>MADRE The day I was born I couldn't feel anything until you hugged me for the first time je t'aime Eu te amo mãe. On peut dire qu'il nous a tout donné die Liebe der Mütter Mother's love is unique thanks to you I am what I am i amb el teu menjar mai he pasat fam tu me criaste cuando no estaba papa, por eso mismo te quiero mamá t'estimo per tot el que hem passat I love you from the moon and back that's why I didn't commit any lack Ich bin glücklich, seit ich ein kind war Por eso mismo te quiero mamá I love you for that Je t'aime maman Te quero.</p>
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