

Multimodality-enhanced teaching: Fostering global citizenship and intercultural competence in ELT

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Introduction

This article showcases multimodality-enhanced learning tasks that embrace learners' linguistic and cultural diversity as an asset to advance their oral communication skills, promote global citizenship (UNESCO, 2018), and cultivate intercultural competence (Byram, 1996) in a university English communication course. Drawing upon Cummins' (2009) transformative multiliteracies pedagogy and García's (2009) translanguaging that highlight affirming diversity and acknowledging a fluid flow of 'languaging' (Swain, 2006) in transnationals' language learning as a source of empowerment in teaching, we exemplify two innovative multimodal projects called *My Cooking Show* and *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression Corner*. These projects invited learners to activate and share their prior cultural and linguistic knowledge base with the aim of developing their cross-cultural and cross-linguistic awareness, English communication skills, and interdisciplinary academic literacies. These tasks encouraged learners to use appropriate linguistic and paralinguistic elements relevant to the task genre. To be more specific, in *My Cooking Show*, learners were encouraged to use sequencing discourse markers for giving cooking instructions and utilize affective linguistic and paralinguistic features to amplify knowledge and attachment to the dish. In *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression Corner*, learners were encouraged to explore English colloquial and idiomatic expressions through multimodal, plurilingual and intercultural exploration. This research-informed teaching practice implies pedagogical potential to foster learners' development of intercultural competence and growth as inclusive global citizens building a strong sense of global connectedness and belonging.

Connecting theory and practice to inform new pedagogical initiatives via critical action research

Our teaching and research context is situated in a credit-bearing undergraduate English for academic purposes (EAP) communication course where we are both course directors and action researchers. The



main objective of the course is to facilitate learners' development of oral communication skills and academic literacies essential for their academic success in university and beyond. Students enrolled in this course use English as a second or additional language. Student demographics represent relatively diverse cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds with most of the students in the course from Asian ethnic backgrounds.

The theoretical concepts that guide our pedagogical innovations and inspiring our teaching practice to be multimodality-enhanced comprise inclusive global citizenship (UNESCO, 2018), intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1996), and multiliteracies and translingual pedagogy (Cummins, 2009; García 2009). UNESCO's (2018) inclusive global citizenship stresses learners' development of attitudes toward inclusive global identity, knowledge of global issues, and creative and critical cognitive skills, as well as collaborative social skills. Inseparable and pivotal to acquire these tenets to be inclusive global citizens is developing and utilizing intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Learners with ICC are able to bring the culture of their origin and other cultures into relation with one another and actively demystify biased cultural assumptions and advance knowledge of their own and others' cultures and become culturally inclusive and responsive communicators with others. Furthermore, Cummins' (2009) transformative multiliteracies pedagogy and García's (2009) translanguaging emphasize the importance of creating a pedagogical space and instructional design where pluricultural and plurilingual learners' multiliteracies engagement and fluid expressions of translanguaging are optimized. These pedagogical concepts urge EAP teaching practitioners to rethink and restructure conventional approaches to teaching (e.g., top-down instructions, teacher-centric, Anglo-centric onto-epistemology oriented teaching) in order to create an inclusive and empowering learning space advocating for ownership of students' learning which will in essence contribute to altering the status quo of unequal power relations operated in the process of knowledge (re)construction in EAP classrooms.

Our research and teaching is framed within the lens of critical action research (Burns, 2010; Kemmis, et al., 2014), which is often understood as a form of classroom research or teacher research that examines a teacher's own practices in partnership with colleagues, students and/or community partners to improve their teaching with critically-oriented pedagogy raising students' critical awareness of issues, diversity, equity, and justice (See Song, 2019; Song & McGaughey, 2022 for more discussion on critical action research). Critical action research proceeds in a spiral and cyclical process. It starts with an initial step of creating a new instructional design and continuing the research with the sequencing steps of practicing and observing teaching practices, reflecting on and analyzing the practices collaboratively, and revising and recreating instructional design based on reflective analysis on the initial teaching practices and evidence of student engagement with teaching practices. Action researchers continue this research process (i.e., planning, acting/observing, reflecting, analyzing, and revising) in a continuum of this cycle until they meet their research goals. In this article, we focus on sharing our instructional design that has been informed



through two action research cycles conducted in 2021 and 2022.

The following section showcases how student participants responded to and further engaged in extended dialogues on two multimodal tasks, *My Cooking Show* and *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression Corner*, which are designed to facilitate learners' English language skills as well as develop intercultural awareness and inclusive global identity through multiliteracies and plurilingual engagement.

Multimodal task one: *My Cooking Show*

In this experiential education (EE)-oriented and learner-centric multimodal task, *My Cooking Show*, learners are assigned to cook and narrate their special food item reflective of their social and cultural identities intersecting with their transnational experiences.

The expected learning outcomes from this task include the following:

1. to practise speech patterns, functions and styles associated with this task;
2. to interact with others' contributions and establish a strong sense of connectedness as a community of language and cultural practice and to learn more about others' cultures as well as their own cultural practices and knowledge associated with the food; and
3. to investigate further with sociocultural and intercultural inquiries through a follow-up (asynchronous) interview activity.

Students are tasked to create a three- to five-minute-long cooking show video to introduce any form of food that is special and meaningful for them as transnational academics. While showing how to prepare and cook the dish, students provide a clear verbal direction to each step, using appropriate sequencing discourse markers, cooking-related vocabulary, and colloquial expressions learned from class sessions. Also, wherever applicable, students are asked to elaborate on the cultural and/or historical remarks, and personal meaning/memories affiliated with the dish. Moreover, students are encouraged to use affective linguistic and paralinguistic features to express their feelings and emotions attached to the dish. Lastly, they are invited to engage in the follow-up online interview forum where all classmates leave verbal or written comments on others' posts with questions. Students are also asked to respond to all of the questions and comments that they received on their own cooking show.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 show still images of students' video creations in the *My Cooking Show* project. In his video, a student participant, BW (see figure 1) introduced a spicy instant noodle that he used to eat whenever he was busy working and did not have time to cook. He explained the meaning behind the name of the instant noodle product, and further elaborated how the name of the originally Korean product became

culturally appropriated in China and explained the cross-cultural differences of naming the same product between the Korean and Chinese contexts, known as fire chicken noodles and turkey noodles, respectively. BW who was majoring in Communication and Media Studies, actively incorporated visual and graphic images into his video creation to express the taste and other sensory feelings and emotions alternatively, which seem to show his academic expertise in digital editing skills, organizing images coherently with his oral narrative within the expected academic rhetoric structure (i.e., introduction, contextual information, directions, reflection and conclusion) for this EE based assignment genre.

In MN's cooking show (see Figure 2), she introduced a chicken soup following her mother's recipe. She explained that the chicken soup is viewed as one of the best home remedies for sick people in her home country, China. Also, she added that she eats this food whenever she feels lonely and homesick, which is reflective of the lonely transnational life that many classmates seem to share through their cooking shows and follow-up comments. Similarly, another international student, JES, who is living alone in Canada, chose to cook a cultural dish, sweet and sour pork, in her cooking show (see Figure 3). She was aware of the complicated recipe, ingredients, and procedures of this ubiquitous, authentic Cantonese dish that her mom used to cook for her family as a comfort food. She prepared her cooking show with support from her mom who remotely guided her to complete all steps via a Facetime call. In her reflective task, JES expressed that this cultural dish, though it did not taste the same way she had back home, emotionally *comforted* her by connecting her with her mom and the family food she greatly missed.

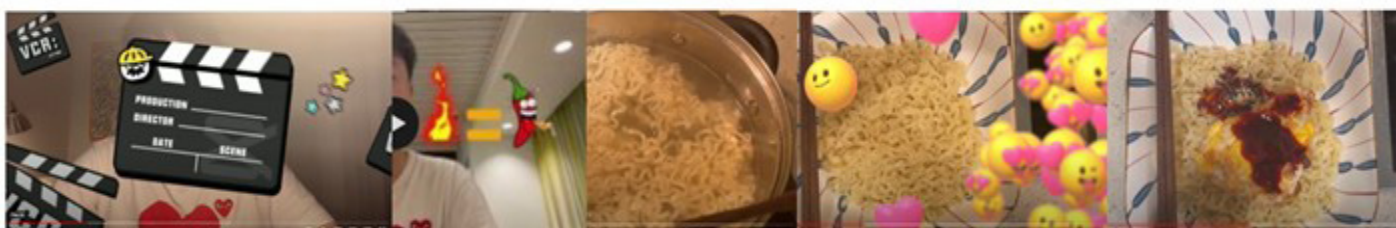


Figure 1. BW's Cooking Show: Spicy Chicken Noodles (Still images from the video file)

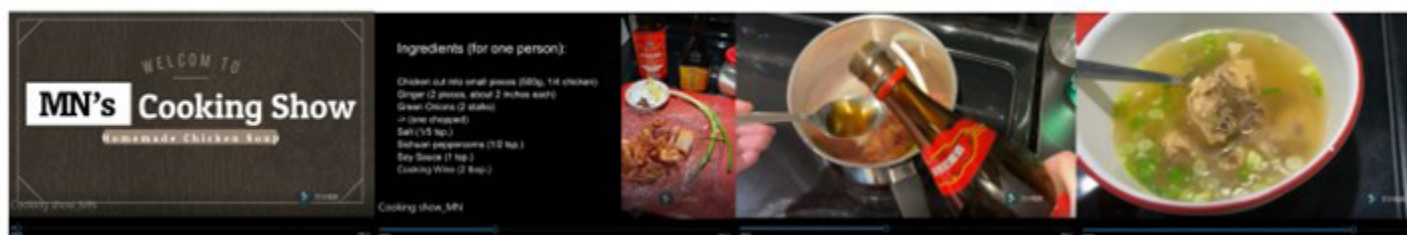


Figure 2. MN's Cooking Show: Homemade Chicken Soup (Still images from the video file)



Figure 3. JES's Cooking Show: Sweet and Sour Pork Ribs (Still images from the video file)

When students were invited to ask questions and further exchange thoughts in the follow-up interview forum, they had an extended dialogue while showing curiosity toward cultural and linguistic knowledge and practice associated with their classmates' cooking shows. Students made evident effort to deepen intercultural knowledge and attitudes toward different dishes introduced by their peers by further inquiring about different culinary practices and sharing more options. In this task, students were navigating and advancing their learning through a collaborative knowledge seeking process. Although as action researchers, we do not intend to quantify learners' academic endeavors, the number of replies/correspondences on most cooking show videos and the interactive engagement among students with subsequent questions and responses were overwhelmingly outstanding. Although the minimum number of the entries required for students, was two comments and two corresponding replies, many students' cooking shows received more than the minimum number of replies (i.e., peer comments and their own responses to the comments). In one class group of the second action research cycle, 20 students shared their cooking shows and there were in total 136 replies/comments exchanged, showing average 6.8 replies made for each cooking show. The preponderance of students' engagement in comments highlights intercultural exchanges and cross-linguistic explorations in multimodal dialogues, as one peer responded to MN's cooking show as the following:

I really enjoyed watching your video because I just learned how to make chicken soup in a different way. The way I usually make it is completely different. I usually add either oat or vermicelli to it but it just take[sic] me a lot of time. I will definitely try making your recipe soon. If I want to add some vegetables, what kind of vegetables you think would be better in your recipe? Also, does it matter if I use chicken breast or chicken thigh[sic]? Here is the video of how I make chicken soup. I just wanted to share it with you in case you are curious.

MN's cooking show ignited a continued dialogue in multimodal forms among class participants. In another reply to MN's cooking show (see Figure 4), the commentor was inspired to learn more about different chicken soups thanks to MN and showed a variety of chicken soups across the world from her search sharing the link to different recipes.

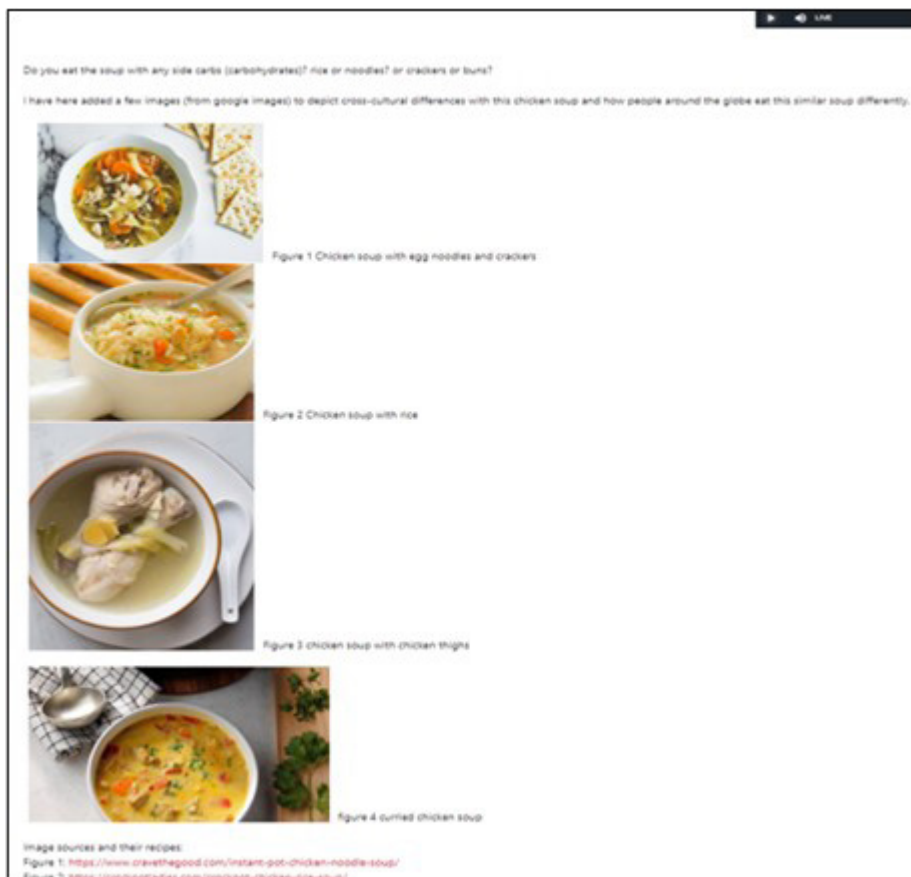


Figure 4. Multimodal Engagement with Cooking Shows on Online Forum (screenshot of a reply to MN's cooking show)

As such, this innovative multimodal task in a communication course creates a space for students to actively perform various functions of language discussed in class, exchange their existing knowledge around their special dish, and also collaboratively discover new knowledge of various foods using multiple modes of expressions such as texts, images, videos, and plurilingual expressions while finding some commonalities and differences of cultural practices behind the foods and feeling social connectedness as transnational academics.

Multimodal task two: *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression Corner*

Another multimodal project, *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression Corner* is devised to allow learners to compare some English colloquial expressions with equivalent expressions in their first languages, which in turn provides learners an opportunity to activate the prior knowledge of first language expressions and facilitate their use of the English expressions in a situational dialogue. Students are expected to achieve the following learning outcomes:

1. to learn the connotations and functions of useful English expressions widely used in oral communications at a deeper level,
2. to transfer those expressions to real-life formal, semi-formal and/or casual contexts,
3. to practise translanguaging by employing different linguistic features to maximize their communicative potentials; and
4. increase global connectedness by learning the meaning and application of similar phrases of other cultures through multimodal expressions and intercultural explorations.

To achieve these learning goals, students are assigned to complete the following six step-based components:

1. quotation: select commonly used English colloquial or idiomatic expressions from course materials, meaning & usage: explain the meaning and usage of the quoted expression with an example of the social context when and where the expression could be used,
2. plurilingual and intercultural understanding: provide an equivalent expression in their first or other languages that they know with an example of the social context wherein the expression is used,
3. application: make a dialogue script using the expression with their own words with their own original thoughts,
4. visualization: visualize the expression by linking relevant images or videos,
5. activation: act out in a short dialogue using the expression and create a video of the dialogue.

Some of the students' work on *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression Corner* is shown in Figures 5, 6, and 7. The samples illustrate the process of how learners understand, apply, and internalize new English expressions by relating to their familiar linguistic and cultural knowledge and by utilizing multimodal, plurilingual, and translingual expressions to optimize their advancement of new knowledge.


What is noticeable is that peers were eager to discuss the expressions shared on their virtual learning platform (i.e., Moodle/eClass). For instance, the *to sugar-coat* expression shown in Figure 6 attracted peers' active engagement resulting in multiple plurilingual expressions shared with sociocultural contexts and examples associated with the expression. One peer made the following comment:



Thank you for sharing the meaning of this expression. We also have a similar expression “to sugar coat” in our cultures. We say: “takpin ng asukal” when people express something ironical or send bad news in a positive way. For example, when I received a bronze metal in a swimming game when I was in high school, my friends tried to cheer me up. But I used the phrase “takpin ng asukal” and told them: “you don’t have to sugar coat it. I know I have to work harder in order to get a gold next time” (Student Comment)

The student who made this comment shared his understanding in his first language, Tagalog, recalling his own personal moment when the equivalent expression in Tagalog was used in the past.

To sugar-coat



“To sugar-coat” means explaining something (an unpleasant thing or a problem) in a positive way. This expression is often used for telling someone bad news but makes it acceptable for the other person to hear and tries to avoid hurting someone’s feelings. The origin of this expression is when putting a thin layer of sugar on the pill, it is easier to swallow. Therefore, when something negative you are trying to avoid saying straight, you can say “to sugar coat” in mandarin, “糖衣炮弹” has a similar meaning to “sugarcoat”, which means putting sugar onto the bullet. It seems very sweet but can actually hurt others.

Example:
 -Boss: “Ben, I know you are a passionate person and contribute a lot to our company, but our budget is really limited this year.” Ben: “我知道你是一个对工作很有热情的人并且为公司付出了很多，但是我们公司今年的预算非常有限。”
 -Ben: “Could you please don’t sugarcoat it, just say it, I can take it.” “请不要糖衣炮弹了，你直接说出来吧，我可以接受的。”
 -Boss: “Ok, Ben, you are fired.” “好吧，Ben，你被开除了。”

Other sources: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJeE_oThIVU

Figure 5. Student Sample of *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression, to sugar-coat* (screenshot of the student post)

I selected a colloquial expression “not my cup of tea”, which means if something is not your cup of tea, it is not the type of thing that you like. For example, you can use it when someone invites you, but you don’t want to go, then you can say, “thanks for inviting me, but the concert isn’t really my cup of tea.” In my first language Chinese, I can use this phrase “不是我的菜” to tell someone that I am not interested in something. For instance, when your friend sends you a picture of a guy, ask you if he looks good, you may say, “他不是我的菜”, which means he is not my type.



Here is an example of a dialogue.

claire: hi, jessie, are you coming to watch movie with me tonight? 嗨Jessie，今晚要和我去看电影吗？
 jessie: i haven't decided yet, which type of movie do you watch? 我还没决定呢，看啥呀？
 claire: i am going to watch “minions” at Dundas cinema. 我想去dundas看小黄人。
 jessie: emm, i don't think i will come. Dundas cinema is too far for me and cartoons is not my cup of tea.
 要不你还是去看吧，dundas离我太远了，而且卡通片也不是我的菜。

▶ ◀ 10s 1x [🔊]

▶ ◀ 10s 1x [🔊]

Some example sentences of “not my cup of tea”.

- This music is much more my cup of tea than this new stuff.
- I enjoy museums, it is my cup of tea.
- Hiking is not my cup of tea, but my husband enjoys it.
- The opera is not my cup of tea, but I can see how people may like it.


Figure 6. Student Sample of *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression, not my cup of tea* (screenshot of the student post)

On the one hand, I'd like to go out tonight, but on the other hand, I need to be at work very early tomorrow. (From gymglish)

2. [meaning & usage]
 "On the one hand... on the other hand..." means from one point of view... from another point of view... In other words, you can say "on the one hand" before describing one of two contrasting ideas, options, or opinions, and then say "on the other hand" before telling the other one.

3. [plurilingual and intercultural understanding]
 "On the one hand... on the other hand..." is equivalent to "不仅...而且..." in Mandarin. Usually, it will be used to describe different characteristics of some things. These two phrases have quite similar meanings. For example, when we want to say one good is not only low quality but also expensive, we can say, "这件商品不仅贵而且质量还不行."

4. [Application]
 Speaker 1: I like your clothes
 Speaker 2: To be honest, I don't like it. **On the one hand**, it was expensive, **but on the other hand**, it has really poor quality!

5. [Visualization]

 Image Credit: dreamstime


6. [Activation]


Figure 7. Student Sample of *Plurilingual and Intercultural Expression, on the one hand, on the other hand* (screenshot of the student post)

When creating a dialogue using the expressions, students also actively applied the classroom knowledge related to the conversation style and formality of expressions in different social situations that course materials and class discussions explored prior to this task. Students created innovative short role-play/skit videos integrating imagined characters using various objects that they can create by themselves or find around their rooms (e.g., dolls, stuffed animals, paper characters from drawing, finger characters, etc.).

The active engagement in this multimodal task among class participants was also evident to create a space for students' collaborative learning and knowledge advancement as they were eager to share their linguistic and cultural knowledge and showed curiosity to learn more from others related to the given expressions. As a result, students were able to deepen their English and academic literacy skills by understanding, exploring, and applying the meaning and functions of certain expressions in the target language while actively utilizing their existing academic, cultural, and linguistic expertise.

Conclusion

Based on how our creative and culturally responsive instructional design have been operated and how our students' creative multimodal practices have been demonstrated through the two cycles of action research, we can conclude that the multimodality-enhanced pedagogical approaches to teaching English language learners contribute to learners' development of a growing sense of belonging as transnational academics and global participants. The tasks created ample opportunities for learners to relate to their linguistic, cultural and social experiences in a safe and at the same dynamic learning space, which led to increased learner engagement, making culturally responsive learning and inclusive global citizenship possible in an EAP communication course. To this end, we suggest that the instructional design that enables learners to engage in multimodality-enhanced activities and intercultural interactions leads to creating an innovative and inclusive learning space and further deepening their intercultural competence. Importantly, the instructional design that recognizes learners' existing cultural and linguistic identities as well as emerging social identity contributes to building a strong sense of global citizenship.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our student participants in our research for their amazing contribution. We would also like to acknowledge York University's research support through Minor Research Grant (2021-2022) for our research.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by authors.



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