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ARTICLE

The Roles of Translanguaging in Multilingual Chinese International Students' Academic Literacy Development in Canadian Higher Education

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Delving into students' sociocultural and educational backgrounds, this study explores the divergent roles of translanguaging in graduate-level multilingual Chinese students' academic literacy development. Ten Chinese graduate students studying at a Canadian institution participated in semi-structured interviews voicing their lived translanguaging experiences in Anglophone classrooms. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed four intricate and occasionally shifting roles of translanguaging: (a) a source of cognitive relief, (b) a tool for agentic identity negotiation, (c) a practical means to achieve goals, and (d) a context-dependent option. These roles illuminate students' perspectives on how translanguaging operated in their English-dominant classrooms in Canada. The findings contribute to understanding translanguaging as a multifaceted and even contrasting resource, disrupting an overly romanticized view of it as a panacea. Notably, this study sheds light on the productive tensions different participants experience towards translanguaging as they navigate varying conditions, such as differing English proficiency levels and personal learning preferences. These insights underscore the context-dependent rather than universally prescriptive nature of translanguaging, thereby suggesting that translanguaging is most effective when exercised agentively, strategically, and responsively across various literacy development contexts.

Introduction

Globalization and cultural diversity have heightened demands for multilingual education, which, in turn, has prompted adaptation of teaching language practices to prepare learners for a globalized workforce (Alisoy, 2025). This shift has necessitated moving beyond monolingualism towards more inclusive frameworks (Vega et al., 2026; Wong et al., 2025). In considering how to support multilingual students' academic literacy development, scholars have increasingly turned to an asset-based reconceptualization that treats multilinguals students' linguistic repertoires as assets rather than deficits, challenging traditional approaches that have historically privileged monolingual English norms and marginalized multilingual students (Canagarajah, 2024). In this study, translanguaging, the fluid, strategic use of learners' full linguistic repertoires across named languages to make meaning, is

used to frame multilingual writing as a resource-rich practice that enables students to draw on these repertoires to negotiate academic literacy.

China has been the largest source country for international students globally for over two decades, and over one million Chinese students have pursued degrees abroad (Education Fair, 2025). Chinese international students (CIS) pursuing graduate programs in Anglophone countries navigate multifaceted challenges. Linguistically, they transition from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in their home countries to English as a Second Language (ESL) in Western educational contexts, a shift that demands simultaneous development in English proficiency and disciplinary knowledge (Zhang & Hadjioannou, 2022). Academically, they must master specialized academic genres, lexicogrammar conventions, and unfamiliar pedagogical expectations (Najorda, 2025). Sociocultural challenges include negotiating academic identities in English-dominant institutions and managing anxieties about proper English that may discourage full engagement with their multilingual resources (Li & Locher-Lo, 2025). To support their academic learning, Chinese multilingual learners need to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire to engage with complex content (Turner & Tour, 2024). Translanguaging spaces, which respect their multilingual skills and ways of knowing/being, can potentially support meaning-making so that the different dimensions of their selves can be authored (Irgin, 2026). It is therefore imperative to examine the many roles of translanguaging and how Chinese multilingual students leverage their full linguistic repertoire in academic literacy development. The principal aim of this study is to investigate the roles of translanguaging in academic literacy development for Chinese international students (CIS) within the Canadian higher education context.

The focus on CIS is particularly important given their sustained demographic presence in Canadian higher education. Despite recent policy changes (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024), CIS continue to represent the second-largest study permit population in Canada (Government of Canada, 2024; Xiao, 2024; Yao & Mwangi, 2022). Additionally, CIS often share overlapping educational and sociolinguistic backgrounds shaped by the traditional Confucian-influenced values (Liang & Matthews, 2023). This shared context may help support the examination of translanguaging practices across participants while allowing for individual variation. The experiences of CIS are valuable for understanding translanguaging practices, given their strong tendency to translanguage in graduate-level academic contexts (Song & Shin, 2025). While findings are grounded in this specific population, they may offer a starting point for examining translanguaging among other international graduate students who are negotiating academic literacy in a non-native language.

This study is positioned in a Canadian higher education context because the country's demographic diversity, with approximately 51.2% of the population born outside Canada (Hou et al., 2023), starkly contrasts with institutional inadequacy in supporting multilingual students' full linguistic repertoires. According to Hou et al. (2023), Canada represents one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse societies, a reality reflected in its official recognition of English and French as official languages (Raza & Chua, 2024). Despite growing recognition of multilingualism's value and Canada's commitment to linguistic inclusivity (Akhmedova et al., 2026; Rhim, 2025), higher education institutions remain inadequately equipped to foster English language development among multilingual speakers in ways that honor their translanguaging practices. The entrenched dominance of English and official French has created disparities between official language policies and the realities of societal multilingualism, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive translanguaging-centered pedagogical frameworks in Canadian higher education (Chiras & Galante, 2021). Inspired by the concept of translanguaging, this study centers Chinese international students' voices and examines their lived experiences in developing academic literacy at a Canadian university.

Literature Review

Academic Literacy Development in Multilingual Contexts

The rapid development of globalization and academic mobility of international students has fundamentally shifted academic literacy development from a monolingual English-centered enterprise to one that demands multilingual navigational practices (Heidt & Svrcek, 2025). However, despite this shift in demand, institutional approaches to supporting multilingual writers remain largely anchored to English-centric pedagogies. Translanguaging, the strategic deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire, offers a conceptual and pedagogical response to this gap. For higher education institutions in Anglo countries where English is deemed the default medium of instruction (Selvi & Silman-Karanfil, 2025), it is imperative to help multilingual students draw from their funds of knowledge as they learn and develop literacy skills across languages (Pretto, 2024). In such contexts, where many immigrant, multilingual, and international students and teachers seek to situate literacy experiences within broader social frames, it is also important to address the differing ideological positionings of multilingual and multicultural students (Melo-Pfeifer & Tavares, 2026). Transforming academic literacy development for multilingual writers requires recognizing how monolingual language ideologies constrain their access to translanguing resources, ultimately limiting their capacity for knowledge production and expression (Kato & Kumagai, 2022).

While studies on academic literacy within multilingual contexts have examined specific approaches and practices in improving teachers' and students' academic literacy across various genres and disciplines, relatively little attention has been paid to translanguaging as a lived practice in students' academic literacy development. For instance, Werdiningsih et al. (2025) went beyond basic reading and writing skills, embedding academic literacy into contemporary EFL learning. They revealed that the successful integration of a broad range of competencies into EFL instruction would help students develop the skills essential for academic success and real-world applications, but this pedagogical focus did not accurately capture how students themselves mobilized their multilingual resources in actual academic contexts since student perspectives on their own literacy practices were not gathered. Curry and Lillis (2024) challenged the dominance of English by questioning its seemingly unshakable status in scholarly knowledge creation by arguing that teaching approaches for academic literacy and publication writing should not assume English was the sole medium for scholarly communication. However, their work prioritized systemic/institutional critique rather than examining students' translanguaging practices. Elola et al. (2018) investigated the development of academic literacy at the graduate level among multilingual learners, focusing on how multilingual writers gained academic literacy, but their study only illuminated how multilingual writers navigated the negotiated nature of academic writing and constructed researcher identities, and it did not explicitly examine how students actively and purposefully mobilized their full linguistic repertoires to develop academic literacy. These literatures shed light on how academic literacy development in multilingual contexts has overturned the conventional approach to literacy, yet they remain predominantly focused on pedagogical/instructional design and institutional barriers than centering students' lived experiences and voices of translanguaging practices.

To address this gap, this study aims to investigate multilingual Chinese international students' views on translanguaging practices to understand the roles translanguaging plays in their academic literacy development and how these influence their literacy growth within Canadian higher education contexts. Before examining how students themselves perceive translanguaging's roles, it is essential to understand how translanguaging, as a theoretical and pedagogical framework, has been theorized, implemented, and studied across diverse educational contexts. The following sections, therefore,

review literature on translanguaging for academic literacy development, with particular attention to research involving multilingual Chinese international students.

Academic Literacy Development through Translanguaging

Translanguaging has emerged as a new concept in response to the call for multilingualism in international higher education because it resonates with multilingual perspectives on language education (Ou et al., 2023). In the past decades, translanguaging has been employed in diverse research settings and as a pedagogical resource in language teaching and learning, including complementary schools in heritage language education in the United Kingdom (Silvestri, 2025), two-way immersion (TWI) programs through translanguaging in the United States (Sun, 2026), and translanguaging's crucial role in the context of Content-Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Translanguaging has also been explored insofar as it functions as a possible tool to promote academic literacy development. For example, Gouiez and Fezzaa (2023) examined students' and teachers' views on translanguaging as an approach for enhancing academic literacy. Their study sought to verify the validity of the primary research assumptions, which suggested that first-year master's students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) held favorable attitudes towards employing this strategy. It also affirmed that translanguaging played a constructive role in multilingual learners' academic literacy development through scaffolding what might otherwise be excessive cognitive demands of composing exclusively in the target language. By contrast, another study, which focused on an English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) classroom in which a strict English-only policy was implemented, pointed to the challenges such policies raised for students. Particularly in the case of those in their first EMI experience, where the both the content and the language were new, such policies could make the transition into university overwhelming (Liu & Li, 2025). The lack of translanguaging in developing academic literacy could bring about higher failure rates among students whose primary language is not the target language (Lawton et al., 2025), as its prohibition reinforced colonial ideologies and rendered L2 English speakers vulnerable (Sun, 2025).

While translanguaging demonstrably supports academic literacy development, students' perceptions of translanguaging's role, whether as enabling or risky, vary significantly across educational contexts and learner populations. In a study focused on learner beliefs lenses among international multilingual students at a US university, Kafle (2020), for example, pointed out that students themselves were hesitant to show their full linguistic repertoires because they viewed them as deviating from academic writing and feared this could result in a lower grade. This variation in student attitudes and experiences suggests that translanguaging functions differently depending on contextual, institutional, and individual factors. Understanding how Chinese international students specifically perceive translanguaging's roles, and the factors shaping those perceptions, thus becomes essential for illuminating the nuanced and varied functions translanguaging serves in multilingual academic contexts.

Translanguaging's Roles in Multilingual CIS's Academic Literacy Development

Some studies have investigated specifically multilingual CIS's translanguaging practices, these investigations remain geographically or pedagogically limited. For example, Zhu and Li (2025) examined academic writing through translanguaging among Chinese students in mainland China, Liu and Chen (2026) focused on machine translation informed by translanguaging in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) academic writing classrooms in mainland China, and Ching and Ruowei

(2025) investigated translanguaging in Chinese writing classrooms in Hong Kong. These studies, while insightful, centered translanguaging within the greater China region and examined it primarily through pedagogical or technological lenses.

Although scholarly attention to translanguaging in multilingual education in Canadian higher education contexts has grown, research specifically examining the lived experiences of CIS and the varying roles that translanguaging plays in their academic literacy development remains underexplored. This gap is evident in the existing literature. Shi (2024), for instance, examined the multiple, fluid, and sometimes contrasting identities international graduate students constructed through translanguaging, drawing on positioning theory framework that analyzes how individuals are situated, and situate themselves, within shifting relational and discursive roles in interaction. Rajendram et al., (2023), instead, focused on the experiences and recommendations of international graduate students from the Global South related to pedagogical translanguaging. Chen (2024), in the meanwhile, shed light on the attitudes and experiences of Chinese international students with translanguaging pedagogy and plurilingual instructions, along with the outcomes of these pedagogical approaches. Nonetheless, none of these studies specifically investigated how Chinese international students perceive the multiple, in some instances tension-laden, roles that translanguaging plays in their graduate-level academic literacy development in Canadian higher education. This is the gap this study intends to address.

Translanguaging has shown evident roles in multilingual contexts (Li, 2026; Özkaynak & Peker, 2026; Wang et al., 2025), as discussed above. Yet existing research on translanguaging and Chinese international students exhibits three specific gaps: First, studies such as Chen (2024), Rajendram et al. (2023), and Shi (2024) examined international graduate students' translanguaging experiences, but they did not specifically focus on Chinese students' perceptions. Second, studies on Chinese students' translanguaging are predominantly situated in greater China rather than in Anglophone higher education (Liu & Chen, 2026; Zhu & Li, 2025). Third, research has not adequately examined how multilingual Chinese students perceive the multiple and sometimes contradictory roles that translanguaging plays in their academic literacy development as influenced by linguistic proficiency, prior language learning experiences, and sociocultural factors.

This study addresses these specific gaps by centering Chinese international students' voices in Canadian higher education and by investigating how they perceive translanguaging's contingent and essential roles in their graduate-level academic literacy development. Specifically, this investigation attends to how multifaceted factors—including English language proficiency, experience learning languages beyond Chinese and English, the perceived role of diverse linguistic repertoires in facilitating comprehension, and the psychological and cognitive dimensions of translanguaging—influence students' choices to translanguage and their perceptions of translanguaging's value. The central research inquiries that guide this paper are: How do multilingual Chinese international students perceive the roles of translanguaging in their graduate-level academic literacy development at a Canadian university, and how do these varying roles create tension in their actual deployment of the practice? Understanding the multiple and at times divergent roles of translanguaging for multilingual CIS in Canadian higher education is essential not only for developing more responsive pedagogies for this population, but also for centering their voices as linguistically diverse and embodied learners. This inquiry illuminates insights applicable to other multilingual student populations while affirming CIS as agents whose multilingual resources and perspectives merit scholarly attention.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in translanguaging, which recognizes language learning as a complex, dynamic and mediating process. Following García (2018), we define translanguaging as the dynamic

deployment of multilingual speakers' full linguistic repertoires to communicate, learn, and resist rigid language boundaries, challenging traditional notions of named languages as separate systems. Wei (2022)'s concepts of translanguaging space and translanguaging instinct have provided a foundation for understanding how learners navigate and transcend their learning. Translanguaging returns the power and agency to learners and underscores multilinguals' creativity, encompassing the hybridity of learners' everyday spaces and multiple resources to make sense of the world, which is much more than mere code-switching or code-meshing. From an etymological perspective, *trans-* means to transcend and go beyond, ushering in a new perspective of viewing the learning of multiple languages as a fluid and continuous process; *linguaging* is used to highlight language as a transitive verb (Bloome & Beauchemin, 2016). The shift from language as a noun to linguaging as a verb views language learning as process-oriented rather than product-oriented. Adding the *trans-* prefix allows for fluidity from language to another, rejecting the compartmentalized view of different languages (Jessner et al., 2025). Translanguaging foregrounds the learner's dynamic process of meaning-making, inviting researchers to reconceptualize the use of one's linguistic resources to develop students' communicative repertoire for knowledge construction.

Methodology

Research Context

This study was conducted from July through September 2023 in Toronto, Canada. The research site was the School of Education at a Canadian public research university, which attracts a substantial population of graduate students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The study involved in-depth interviews with ten participants, all of whom were international students of Chinese origin with varying levels of experience in Canadian graduate education. The selection of this specific demographic and context allowed for a focused exploration of how multilingual Chinese students navigate academic literacy development in an English-dominant educational setting, drawing upon their diverse linguistic repertoires.

Researcher Positionality

At the time of this study, the second author was the Assistant Professor of Writing and Rhetoric Studies at the university in which the research took place, while the first author was a graduate of the same institution. The second author obtained the Human Participant Ethics Protocol, approved by Research Ethics Board (REB) of university, had a proven track record of teaching courses such as Writing in a Second Language, and possessed expertise in incorporating the *trans-* concept into second language writing pedagogy (Silva & Wang, 2021). As the instructor of the abovementioned course, the second author offered valuable insights from his teaching experience, particularly with predominantly Chinese-origin students. To acknowledge the second author's dual role as instructor/researcher, a protective measure was executed to safeguard the integrity of participants' responses: the second author received only pseudonymized interview data, with all identifying information removed by the first author prior to sharing. This ensured that participants could respond candidly without concern that their answers might carry academic consequences, considering their existing relationship with the second author as their course instructor.

The first author encountered the second author through this course. The first author's academic journey included several courses at the university focusing on L2 writing in academic contexts, translanguaging, and plurilingualism, which significantly informed her understanding of

these areas. Influenced by interactions with the second author and classmates, as well as drawing on her multilingual and translanguaging lived experiences among Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Japanese, and Portuguese, the first author was intrigued to propose a study exploring how her peer student writers perceive translanguaging, their actual translanguaging practices, as well as how their creativity sparked translanguaging practices across Asian and North American academic contexts. Built on the classmate-relationship rapport between the first author and the participants, this insider perspective enabled authentic and comfortable dialogue about language practices, fostering an environment where participants could openly share their translanguaging experiences without fear of judgment or academic evaluation.

Demographics and Recruitment of Participants

Ten international students of Chinese origin participated in this study. All were currently enrolled in the School of Education at the research university, ensuring diverse perspectives from individuals at different stages of their academic journeys. This inclusive recruitment approach captured a broad range of experiences, extending beyond current students to include those who had completed their programs, regardless of age or current occupation.

As presented in Table 1, participant demographics reveal ages ranging from 18 to 30 years, with a gender distribution of 40% female and 60% male. To protect confidentiality, all participant names were pseudonymized. The cohort consists primarily of master's students across various stages of their programs, with the notable exception of Eric, who had already obtained a doctoral degree from China. All participants demonstrate bilingual proficiency in Chinese (Mandarin) and English, with several possessing fluency in additional languages or Chinese dialects such as Cantonese, reflecting the linguistic diversity within the CIS population. Rather than employing the terminology of translanguaging, researchers informed participants that the study's purpose was to investigate how they used their first language alongside English in the context of their academic writing and learning experiences. The scope of the literacy classroom was intentionally defined broadly to include any course that involved developing literacy skills across languages, rather than being restricted to language or literacy-designated courses, as defined earlier in the study. This was intended to capture the full range of participants' translanguaging experiences across graduate studies. Recruitment employed a non-probability sampling strategy combining two complementary approaches. Convenience sampling facilitated ease of access and geographical proximity to participants within the Toronto area (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025), while snowball sampling enabled the identification of additional participants through networking and referrals from initial contacts (Ting et al., 2025). This dual approach proved effective in reaching multilingual Chinese students who could offer rich insights into their translanguaging experiences.

Table 1
Demographics of the Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Major of Study	Place of Origin	Languages/Dialects
Amber	Female	26	Master of Arts in Language and Literacies Education	Hebei Province	Chinese, English, Linjiang dialect (Handan, Hebei Province)

Luna	Female	29	Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education	Guangdong Province	Chinese, English, Japanese, Henan and Hakka dialect
Charlie	Male	28	Master of Education in Adult Education & Community Development	Liaoning Province	Chinese, English
Eric	Male	30	Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education	Shanghai	Chinese, English, Cantonese, Japanese
Ivan	Male	30	Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education	Beijing	Chinese, English, French
Jimmy	Male	25	Master of Education in Adult Education & Community Development	Guangdong Province	Chinese, English
Aurora	Female	23	Master of Education in Curriculum and Pedagogy	Shanghai	Chinese, English, Japanese
Hanson	Male	23	Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education	Beijing	Chinese, English, Latin, the ancient Greek language
Kevin	Male	25	Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education	Guangdong Province	Chinese, English, Cantonese, Hakka dialect, Japanese
Ashley	Female	23	Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education	Beijing	Chinese, English, Italian, French

Research Design

Drawing upon an interpretivist paradigm that assumes reality is subjective and can differ in light of the experiences of different individuals (Tanlaka & Aryal, 2025), the first author conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant individually (interview questions are in the Appendix), with each interview lasting from around 45 minutes to an hour. Semi-structured interviews employ a comparatively detailed interview schedule or guideline and are designed to solicit insightful responses from the participants. Largely used in social sciences and educational research, this method allows the participants to provide open-ended answers in which they are free to express their perceptions, feelings, and opinions based on personal experiences (Isik, 2025). The researcher contacted each participant for their preferred mode of interview; six interviews were conducted via Zoom (60%), while four interviews (40%) were in-person in the vicinity of the university. Interviews conducted via Zoom were video-recorded; in-person interviews were audio-recorded. All recordings were stored securely on the researcher's personal MacBook and used exclusively for research purposes to ensure confidentiality. It is noteworthy that the choice of interview language, whether Chinese, English, or a combination of both, was based on the comfort level of each participant. This approach was

implemented to ensure that the participants' voices and experiences were not compromised during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Interviews were manually transcribed through selective transcription that allowed the researcher to manage such large data volume. This means that key statements, recurring ideas and notable quotations were jotted down, and conversational filters and repetitions were omitted. This approach allowed the researcher to manage the volume of data generated across ten participant interviews without compromising analytical depth (Johnson et al., 2025). The researcher opted to do this manually rather than using transcription services for two reasons: financial constraints and the need to engage closely with participants' insights. This immersive scrutiny sharpened the researcher's interpretive sensibility and facilitated a more grounded analysis of the data (Tumiran, 2025). The first author assisted in verifying translation of Chinese data (both researchers' L1). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) identified patterns in the ten participants' evolving perceptions of linguistic-cultural conventions related to translanguaging practices in their academic literacy development.

Phase 1 & 2: Familiarizing with Data & Generating Initial Codes

Both researchers immersed themselves in the raw data by reading the interview transcripts multiple times. In transcribing the interviews, the first author took initial reflective notes, which helped her to build conceptual patterns from interview data. She highlighted key quotes in different colors that would later emerge as codes, and sketched preliminary diagrams (Diagram 1) to visualize recurring patterns across participants' responses, allowing for iterative reflexivity of the analysis (Udayanga, 2025). Phase 1 is essential, as it allowed the researchers to engage with the data and acknowledge researcher subjectivity. Descriptive codes were assigned to data segments using Microsoft Excel. For instance, the excerpt, "My language is like a coding system. There are some parts of the poem that I don't want them (classmates) to understand. That's why I use my own language" was coded as identity expression and identity affirmation. Eight initial codes were first generated, which were then reviewed and confirmed by the second author. The data excerpt and initial codes were also highlighted in gradient colors corresponding to their respective theme for easy reference.

Diagram 1.

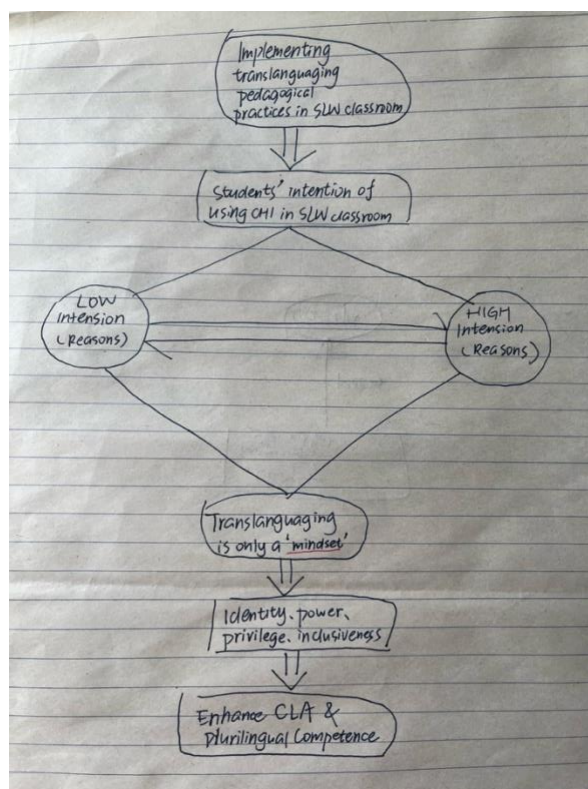
Preliminary Sketch of Recurring Patterns from Interview Transcripts

Figure 1.

Coding Process for Initial Codes

Data Excerpt	Initial Codes
“我是中国人，在加拿大读书。(在教室里可以使用中文) 这样很好地保留了我的身份。I feel so included” (Aurora, Female, 23).	Identity inclusion, Identity hybridity
“My language is like a coding system. There are some parts of the poem that I don't want them (classmates) to understand. That's why I use my own language” (Amber, Female, 26).	Agentic cross-cultural communication
“我选择不说 (中文) 和 禁止我说 (中文) 是不一样的。Even if I don't speak Chinese, it's better to be in a linguistically-inclusive classroom. 一个是 'I have to speak English', 一个是 'I choose to speak English'” (Hanson, Male, 23).	Learner agency, Learner autonomy
“Professors难以平衡：一方面想要提供一个 'inclusive environment', allowing students to speak other languages in the	Inclusive environment, Context-dependent use

classroom, 可是另一方面也想要学生说英语, 毕竟想他们英语有提升” (Luna, Female, 29).	
“从心里层面上, 可以使用不同语言你会更加mentally open。你和我说不一样的语言, 我不会瞧不起你, 我愿意去听, 去接收, 去学习” (Hanson, Male, 23).	Cognitive reliever, Linguistic inclusivity
“在一个inclusive, 可以使用母语的classroom, 学生是会更加mentally-open的。当我觉得我属于这里的时候, 我当然会open, 当然会comfortable” (Charlie, Male, 28).	Affective filter, Emotional belonging
“我不管用哪个语言, 语言本身就是tool。我只要understand了就可以” (Ashley, Female, 23).	Instrumental view of language
“语言只是tools and means。Means是帮助你实现freedom的, 它不是limit你的。所以人不应当有这个枷锁。只要你想表达你自己, 你可以用language表达, 你可以用body表达, 你可以用无线电去表达。不要用人的一些框框条条, 教条 doctrine去限制” (Charlie, Male, 28).	Means to end, Tool-based translanguaging

Phase 3 & 4: Searching for Themes & Reviewing Themes

Initial codes were subsequently organized into final themes through iterative analysis. For instance, codes such as *identity inclusion*, *identity hybridity*, and *agentic cross-cultural communication* were synthesized into Theme 1, Translanguaging as agentic identity negotiation. The utilization of color-coded technique allowed for consistency between data excerpt, initial coding, and final themes.

Figure 2.
Coding Process for Final Themes

Initial Codes	Final Themes
Identity inclusion, Identity hybridity	Theme 1. Translanguaging as agentic identity negotiation.
Agentic cross-cultural communication	
Learner agency, Learner autonomy	Theme 2. Translanguaging as a contingent option rather than mandate.
Inclusive environment, Context-dependent use	
Cognitive reliever, Linguistic inclusivity	Theme 3. Translanguaging as a cognitive reliever.

Affective filter, Emotional belonging	
Instrumental view of language	Theme 4. Translanguaging as a practical, convenient means to an end.
Means to end, Tool-based translanguaging	

The finalized themes were rigorously evaluated for coherence and alignment with the data. Researchers discarded the initial code *translanguaging resistance* after finding only one participant viewed translanguaging as unnecessary due to advanced English skills. Following thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the researchers did not exclude outlier views but contextualized them. Though temporarily integrated into dominant themes to maintain representativeness, these perspectives were explicitly discussed in the Findings section below to better reflect participant diversity. This approach upholds qualitative research ethics—which stress research design practices that support trustworthiness, reflexivity, and social justice—by balancing majority patterns with transparency about marginal views (Ahmed et al., 2025). Figure 3 illustrates the analytical pathway from raw data to final themes, demonstrating the inductive coding process.

Figure 3
Reviewing the Coding Process

Data Excerpt	Initial Codes	Final Themes
“我是中国人，在加拿大读书。(在教室里可以使用中文) 这样很好地保留了我的身份。I feel so included” (Aurora, Female, 23).	Identity inclusion, Identity hybridity	Theme 1. Translanguaging as agentic identity negotiation.
“My language is like a coding system. There are some parts of the poem that I don’t want them (classmates) to understand. That’s why I use my own language” (Amber, Female, 26).	Agentic cross-cultural communication	
“我选择不说(中文)和禁止我说(中文)是不一样的。Even if I don’t speak Chinese, it’s better to be in a linguistically-inclusive classroom. 一个是 ‘I have to speak English’, 一个是 ‘I choose to speak English’” (Hanson, Male, 23).	Learner agency, Learner autonomy	Theme 2. Translanguaging as a contingent option rather than mandate.
“Professors难以平衡：一方面想要提供一个 ‘inclusive environment’, allowing students to speak other languages in the classroom, 可是另一方面也想要学生说	Inclusive environment, Context-dependent use	

英语，毕竟想他们英语有提升” (Luna, Female, 29).		
“从心里层面上，可以使用不同语言你会更加mentally open。你和我说不一样的语言，我不会瞧不起你，我愿意去听，去接收，去学习” (Hanson, Male, 23).	Cognitive reliever, Linguistic inclusivity	Theme 3. Translanguaging as a cognitive reliever.
“在一个inclusive，可以使用母语的classroom，学生是会更加mentally-open的。当我觉得我属于这里的时候，我当然会open，当然会comfortable” (Charlie, Male, 28).	Affective filter, Emotional belonging	
“我不管用哪个语言，语言本身就是tool。我只要understand了就可以” (Ashley, Female, 23).	Instrumental view of language	Theme 4. Translanguaging as a practical, convenient means to an end.
“语言只是tools and means。Means是帮助你实现freedom的，它不是limit你的。所以人不应当有这个枷锁。只要你想表达你自己，你可以用language表达，你可以用body表达，你可以用无线电去表达。不要用人为的一些框框条条，教条 doctrine去限制” (Charlie, Male, 28).	Means to end, Tool-based translanguaging	

Phase 5 & 6: Defining and Naming Themes & Producing the Report

By constantly comparing data and synthesizing codes, this study identified four multifaceted themes that summarize the roles of translanguaging in promoting academic literacy development within a graduate-level classroom. The extraction of each theme in this study was not based solely on the perspectives of individual participants, but rather on the commonalities that emerged across two or more participants. The first author conducted member-checking via WeChat, with participants confirming interpretations of their quotes. Though informal and limited by pre-existing researcher-participant relationships (classmates), this process confirmed thematic resonance for over half the participants.

Findings

The researchers identified four multifaceted themes based on the ten interviews, and the four themes illuminate the multifaceted roles translanguaging plays in the academic literacy development of multilingual Chinese students in a Canadian university context. These themes respond to the study's research questions by revealing the complex roles of translanguaging, evidenced by participants neither

uniformly embracing nor rejecting translanguaging. Their orientations towards it were deeply shaped by proficiency level, learning purpose, and the institutional cultures they navigated.

Theme 1. Translanguaging as a Cognitive Reliever

Several studies reveal that translanguaging can be effective in providing learners with a linguistically and emotionally safe space where they can cope with their negative emotions through employing multiple entangled layers of linguistic resources (Ali, 2026). Translanguaging spaces may work as emotional well-being zones to alleviate negative emotional reactions triggered by foreign language anxiety (Rabbidge, 2026). This study corroborated similar results: several participants mentioned that in a classroom where their mother language was allowed, they felt mentally open to the teacher and classmates. For instance, Jimmy shared that translanguaging “removes mental barriers” as he could feel free to “express my thoughts.” Luna, who had several years of experience teaching IELTS in China, articulated that her observations of student comfort when translanguaging was permitted informed her understanding of translanguaging’s role in reducing psychological barriers to academic engagement, particularly for speakers with lower English proficiency.

However, this study also observed seemingly conflicting views about translanguaging’s necessity and utility. Ivan offered a contrasting perspective that challenged Luna’s viewpoint. When asked whether his mindset differed depending on whether English was allowed or prohibited, Ivan presented an alternative interpretation of the linguistic environment’s impact on learner psychology:

就我个人而言，不会有太大的区别。后期上课我感觉我的英语掌握已经很熟练了，甚至我会利用课堂机会锻炼自己的英文水平。只是前期会有这个问题 (Ivan, Male, 30).

(For me personally, there isn’t a huge difference (in using Chinese or not). I feel that my mastery of English is pretty mature in the later phases of learning, so I even seize classroom time to practice my English. I only felt the need (to use Chinese) at the early stage of learning.)

He further elaborated that in his graduate-level classrooms, the prohibition of students’ first language did not necessarily result in increased psychological barriers. Ivan argued that as English proficiency improved, students’ psychological barriers diminished even in monolingual English environments, as they became capable of expressing themselves freely in English. He noted that some students voluntarily adhered to an English-only principle in the classroom, viewing it as an opportunity to maximize their academic language and literacy development. Consequently, while translanguaging functions as a cognitive resource that reduces psychological barriers, its utilization depends on both context and individual factors, such as English proficiency levels, personal learning preferences, as well as the perceived benefits of using English as the sole language for academic communication.

Theme 2. Translanguaging as Agentic Identity Negotiation

Identity negotiation involves language learners’ constant production of selves, positioning of others, and creation of new modes of being and belonging (Hajar, 2025). The learning and teaching of a language is often inextricably intertwined with identity negotiation, especially when learners develop bi- and multilingual disciplinary academic literacies (Nikula et al., 2026). Translanguaging, as a liberating classroom practice that embraces linguistic diversity to decolonize English writing, can

positively facilitate students' identity negotiation as Chinese individuals in the Western (Shen & Xue, 2026). While the relationship between translanguaging and identity negotiation is well documented (Rojas, 2025; Zirak Ghazani, 2026), the findings of this study extend this conversation in a specific direction: for multilingual Chinese international graduate students in Canada, identity negotiation through translanguaging is not merely about inclusion, but as an agentic act of resisting linguistic assimilation within an institution that simultaneously promotes multiculturalism and but sanitizes English academic discourse. This tension gives the identity dimension of translanguaging a particular texture in this context, one that existing literature has not fully captured.

Chinese international students in Canada face the challenge of negotiating their varied investments and identities as Chinese individuals amid Western cultures, values, and customs. This negotiation is never abstract, but surfaces directly in how students talk about language practices in the classroom. When asked whether languages other than English were allowed, all participants unanimously confirmed they were permitted. Crucially, however, their responses revealed that this permission carried significant emotional and identity weight, suggesting that language use in the classroom is never merely instrumental, but framed in terms of belonging, orientation, and self-positioning. Most participants expressed appreciation towards their instructors for this openness. For instance, Amber noted that her professor's embracing attitude towards Chinese use in the classroom made her feel welcomed. In a similar tone, Aurora reflected how "being able to speak Chinese helps preserve my identity" and she felt "so included." This response affirmed translanguaging as an act of identity preservation. To her, being allowed to speak Chinese in a Canadian classroom was not a convenience, but an acknowledgment that her "Chinese self" was not something to be left at the door. This is particularly significant in a Canadian graduate context where institutional multiculturalism coexists with but can also be in tension with the stark dominance of English academic literacy norms.

Building on previous studies that reveal the interplay between language and identity construction, this study further discloses the agentic and cross-cultural dimensions of translanguaging. When asked why she used Chinese in a poem writing exercise in one of the academic literacy development classes, Amber's account captured something that existing literature has insufficiently examined:

My language is like a coding system. There are some parts of the poem that I don't want them (classmates) to understand. That's why I use my own language (Amber, Female, 26).

The secrecy that Amber established exclusively with herself embodies the strategic and bounded nature of Amber's translanguaging: she was not code-switching for comprehension but deliberately using her linguistic repertoire to control who had access to her inner world. This role of translanguaging unveils it not just as an inclusive bridge to more linguistic resources, but as an invisible wall against information leaking in a foreign space. This phenomenon reveals how agency and identity are central to learners' academic literacy development, not only through the accumulation of symbolic capital but also through the deliberate control of its circulation. Language learners exercise agency by strategically deploying linguistic resources to enhance their symbolic power and, consequently, their social capital (Li et al., 2025). Amber's practice complicates this framing, since her agency was exercised not by expanding who could access her linguistic resources, but by restricting it, a form of symbolic power built on exclusion rather than accumulation. Her translanguaging in the Canadian academic classroom has exemplified a dimension of academic literacy development that is as much about boundary-making as it is about resource-broadening. By drawing on her full linguistic repertoire, she agentially opted not to be more legible to others, but remained selectively illegible, building and protecting her own linguistic and social capital.

Charlie offered perhaps the most philosophically rich remark on identity and language by noting how “people only open up to those who open up to them, much like a mirror.” This reciprocal or even transactional exchange among interpersonal relationship was reflected in this Canadian classroom where he felt his identity was recognized when allowed to use his mother language. Charlie further elaborated through a culinary analogy: one approach to hosting a dinner guest would be to force them to spit out what they had already eaten to make room for the host’s food, which is an act that is both irrational and unwelcoming. The more reasonable approach, he argued, was to let the guest bring what they carried and add to it. By drawing this analogy, Charlie underscored that fitting into a new academic and cultural environment does not require discarding one’s prior identity. It means carrying it forward into new spaces. His framing is significant because it reframes identity negotiation not as loss or compromise, but as accumulation. It also pushes back against deficit narratives of CIS as passive assimilators, affirming their agentic beings in academic spaces.

Collectively, these findings do not simply echo existing scholarship on translanguaging and identity. They create a productive tension that illuminates a specific dynamic: in a Canadian graduate context where institutional multiculturalism coexists with the dominance of English academic literacy, translanguaging becomes at once a strategy for self-protection and a philosophical stance on what it means to belong without demeaning oneself. This layered and complex quality is what distinguishes the identity negotiation documented here from more generalized accounts in the existing literature.

Theme 3. Translanguaging as a Practical, Convenient Means to an End

While translanguaging research has documented its instrumental functions in supporting comprehension and academic achievement, less examined is how multilingual students themselves theorize their own practices and what philosophical implications this may hold for their academic identities. In fundamentally recognizing the diversity of multilingualism, multimodal practices, and the creative capacities of language users (Rajendram et al., 2022), translanguaging pedagogically functions to enhance student learning. It can be employed for delivering instructions that facilitate students’ comprehension of content and materials (Robillos, 2023), thereby serving as a bridge connecting learners to a target knowledge. Within graduate-level classrooms where English is the dominant language, translanguaging enables students to draw upon their diverse linguistic and semiotic resources to effectively convey meaning, comprehend concepts, and construct knowledge. The CIS in this study did not simply deploy translanguaging unconsciously; rather, they agentively constructed explicit theoretical models of how their languages functioned together.

Ashley articulated an instrumental orientation towards language use, stating that she was unconcerned with which language she employed. This perspective aligns with Charlie’s conceptualization of languages as means, tools, and vehicles, within English-dominated Canadian university classrooms for academic literacy comprehension, communication, and development:

语言只是means。Means是帮助你实现freedom的，它不是limit你的，所以人不应当有这个枷锁。语言是工具，可以是刀，叉，筷子，Concept是一道菜。我们的目的是要去借助工具吃菜 (Charlie, Male, 28).

(Languages are simply means that help you realize freedom, not limit you, so we should be unfettered by them. Languages are tools, and they can be knife, fork, or chopsticks. Concept is the dish. Our purpose is to use the tools to eat the food.)

Charlie's articulation is significant not merely because it documents instrumental translanguaging use, but because it reveals explicit and conscious metacognitive theorizing about multilingualism. By positioning languages as interchangeable means towards ends, Charlie reframes code-switching from an orthodox deficit perspective, also known as "cross-linguistic contamination" (Portoles & Marti, 2020, p. 250), to a philosophical liberation. This is a move that extends beyond instrumental function to liberatory epistemology. It suggests that multilingual students are theorists of their own practices, constructing models that position language flexibility as fundamentally emancipating.

Kevin backed this perspective up by saying:

Academic writing相当于是一个工具。其实我们人学习一样东西，我们是要借助外界的东西 (Kevin, Male, 25).

(Academic writing is just like a tool. In fact, this is like how we learn things, we need to learn with the help of other things.)

Kevin's framing adds a temporal dimension often absent from translanguaging research: the notion that learning inherently requires rapid cognitive deployment and mobilization of external resources. This suggests that multilingual students navigate a process of rapid coordination under the cognitive, contingent, and ad hoc demands of graduate-level instruction.

In this tool-based metaphor, the means is the cutlery (language), and the end is the food (message): the goal is to eat the food. From this, a circular configuration with the central point representing the desired meaning or message can be envisioned. Surrounding it are concentric circles representing one's languages, labeled L1, L2, L3, etc., all converging towards the core meaning. This circle spins rapidly, accelerating until all languages L1, L2, L3...Lx, merge into an indistinguishable unity. This model of rapid convergence and merger reveals what participants understand intuitively but what is rarely articulated explicitly in translanguaging literature: the neurodynamic efficiency required of multilingual students. Indeed, languages do not simply exist alongside each other, but must accelerate and integrate under academic pressure, suggesting translanguaging is not only instrumental but conditionally imperative.

Importantly, participants also acknowledged that the seamless integration of languages should not erase contextual boundaries. Participants navigated a productive tension by proposing that languages could and should merge towards meanings, and yet contextual awareness demanded that they remain strategically distinguishable. As Charlie noted in his cutlery metaphor, tools and ends remain conceptually distinct even when functionally merged: cutleries serve the food, but they are not the food. Similarly, languages and meaning converge in translanguaging practice, but remain strategically distinguishable. This challenges binary frameworks in the literature that position translanguaging as either seamlessly fluid (Liu & Lin, 2021) or rigidly bounded (Zhao & Warren, 2025), revealing instead a more nuanced practice that is simultaneously unified and contextually strategic. In a multilingual English-dominated classroom, the main goal is to convey meaning effectively and enhance academic literacy. For these CIS, translanguaging functions philosophically as a liberation from language anxiety, a reframing of multilingualism from deficit to resource, from intrusion to strategic choice. This extends existing translanguaging research by demonstrating that students' theoretical stance towards language flexibility, not merely their actual practice of it, shapes their academic comprehension and literacy development.

Theme 4. Translanguaging as a Contingent Option Rather Than Mandate

While translanguaging is often celebrated as a resource for multilingual students, participants' lived experiences reveal it functions as a contingent option, either deliberately adopted, adapted, or rejected depending on context, purpose, and individual learning goals. Rather than a universal practice, translanguaging emerges as strategically deployed when it serves specific academic or creative purposes, and purposefully withheld when other priorities take precedence. In this study, the researcher explored how participants actively assessed contextual demands and aligned their linguistic practices accordingly.

Charlie exemplified this contingency most starkly. In earlier interviews, Charlie shared that he had translanguaged in his pre-graduate studies when his English proficiency felt insufficient. However, upon arriving in Canadian graduate-level classrooms, he made a deliberate choice to avoid translanguaging entirely. Charlie believed he had now achieved a decent level of proficiency, so he chose not to use other languages in order to learn English more immersively. Charlie's strategic avoidance reveals that translanguaging is not an imperative but a contingent choice. For Charlie, the graduate classroom represents a space specifically for English immersion, and translanguaging dilutes rather than enhances his learning goal. This demonstrates that students assess contextual demands and align their linguistic goals accordingly, rejecting translanguaging when they think that monolingual English immersion serves their immediate academic priorities.

Following a brief explanation of translanguaging, Hanson approached a follow-up interview question, "What challenges, if any, do you see in implementing this practice in Canadian graduate-level classrooms?" with a critical perspective:

I believe that translanguaging is a good thing, but it can be difficult to be put into practice. It's more of an ideal. Somehow idealistic. Just very difficult and many obstacles. Translanguaging 可能不是 a series of actions, 更多的是一个 mindset, 去看待/包容不同的东西 (Hanson, Male, 23).

(Translanguaging might not be a series of actions, but rather a mindset to view and accept different things.)

Hanson's articulation that translanguaging is "more of a mindset than an actual practice" suggests that translanguaging represents a philosophical orientation towards language flexibility rather than an automatic or mandated behavior. In an assignment asking him to write a play script analyzing Ancient Greek drama, Hanson crafted a 2700-word dramatic piece, about which he stated: "the skin of the script is English, but the bone and the blood of it are Greek." One striking example of this deliberate translanguaging appeared in his orthographic choices. Where standard English would use "Oh" as an interjection, Hanson chose the Greek-origin form "O," which appears three times in the Chorus section. He explained that this choice was deliberately made because the "O" visually and phonetically signals the Greek origin of the dramatic form, making it more disciplinarily appropriate to his scholarly argument about ancient theatrical traditions. Rather than unconscious code-switching, Hanson's translanguaging was meticulously calibrated to serve the academic and creative demands of the assignment. This demonstrates that when students perceive translanguaging as serving their disciplinary goals, they deploy it strategically and thoughtfully.

In a nutshell, Charlie's deliberate avoidance and Hanson's strategic deployment showcase how translanguaging functions as a contingent option shaped by their assessment of context, purpose, and learning goals. It is not a universal good but a contextualized resource. Students actively and agentively

evaluate when language flexibility serves their immediate academic priorities and when monolingual focus, disciplinary appropriateness, or immersion in English better serves their academic literacy development. This perspective complicates the celebratory narratives of translanguaging as widely beneficial, and suggests instead that its value is dependent on the specific academic, disciplinary, and individual contexts in which students operate.

Discussions and Conclusions

Theoretical Implications

Participants in this study expressed divergent and multifaceted views about translanguaging. Some viewed it as proficiency-dependent scaffolding while others saw it as generally valuable; some emphasized instrumental functions while others foregrounded identity and cultural validation; some raised concerns about balancing comprehension support with language development goals while others prioritized content comprehension. These discrepant perspectives of translanguaging that are almost paradoxical enter the conversation of existing literature that has expounded on the intricate ways in which translanguaging is leveraged in academic writing processes (Zhu & Li, 2025), highlighting how translanguaging allows for identity negotiation and rejects stark cultural assimilation that leads to the erasure of students' own funds of knowledge.

Furthermore, allowing the use of different languages in an Anglophone classroom fosters learner agency and autonomy, as they are given the freedom to choose what and when to translanguauge (albeit this can create tension between needing to improve English, on the one hand, and wanting to use Chinese). This tension is, however, productive rather than suppressive, as when students are aware of the choices they are free to make, they are held accountable to the consequences behind every choice. This joins in the conversation of "to translanguauge or not to translanguauge" (Gafaranga, 2026, p. 290), denying translanguaging as a panacea (Bautista & Kim, 2025). That translanguaging functions as a cognitive reliver since it can lower affective filter (Ulum, 2025) does not always hold true. When participants are fluent enough in the target language, they might no longer need to resort to translanguaging for emotional belonging.

Participants' transactional orientation towards language shows a productive tension: they deployed translanguaging both as a pragmatic means to comprehend content and to assert their multilingual identities within English-dominated spaces. By framing languages as tools (functional), students were empowered to use them strategically for both content comprehension and identity assertion. This challenges theoretical frameworks that position translanguaging as primarily identity work (Dikilitaş, 2025) or primarily pragmatic scaffolding (Adam, 2025), manifesting instead that these functions are mutually reinforcing even though seemingly unrelated.

Translanguaging should be employed strategically when it enhances comprehension and facilitates meaning-making, reflecting its status as a context-responsive option rather than a prescriptive mandate. This context-dependent nature ensures that translanguaging is tailored to the specific affordances and constraints of each educational setting, troubling translanguaging's romanticized merits (Maddamsetti, 2026) while avoiding the other extreme of the English-only approach to academic literacy development in higher education. In the course of academic literacy development, the strategic deployment of translanguaging interrogates the power dynamics embedded in language practices, academic conventions, and broader sociopolitical discourses (Fox & Chang-Bacon, 2023). These interlocking dimensions, including cognitive facilitation, cultural validation, and critical consciousness, (re)orient translanguaging as both a tool and a site of agentic identity negotiation

that expands students' social and cultural capital while simultaneously broadening their academic literacy across multiple linguistic, cultural, and epistemological frameworks.

Practical Implications

This nuanced understanding of multilingual Chinese students' translanguaging habits illuminates when and how educators should tactically employ translanguaging. Given translanguaging's context-dependent nature, its implementation should be grounded in comprehensive needs analyses of specific learning contexts.

Educators should recognize that translanguaging is not universally appropriate. This study foregrounds that students themselves, like Charlie, Hanson, and Luna, strategically assess when translanguaging serves their learning goals. Respecting students who prioritize target-language immersion for proficiency development over immediate comprehension legitimizes monolingual instructional approaches as equally valid choices. Conversely, when students perceive translanguaging as serving their disciplinary or creative goals (as Hanson did in his play script), educators should create spaces for strategic multilingual deployment. Furthermore, through systematic needs analyses, educators can make informed decisions about the strategic implementation of translanguaging and adapt it to optimize learning outcomes for diverse learners and varied pedagogical objectives. This differentiated approach ensures that translanguaging is not applied uniformly but rather adapted to the distinctive affordances and constraints of each educational setting.

At the institutional and policy level, educational authorities should recognize the multifaceted and contingent roles of translanguaging in graduate-level English-dominated classrooms. Rather than adopting blanket English-only or translanguaging-encouraged policies, institutions should develop flexible frameworks that acknowledge (1) disciplinary variation where subject-learning contexts may benefit from translanguaging flexibility, while language-learning contexts may require different approaches; (2) learner agency where students themselves make strategic assessments/evaluations of when to translanguaging, as this practice is not a remedy for all learning contexts and institutional policies should support rather than constrain students' own choices; (3) institutional support for instructors in facilitating translanguaging while also respecting those who emphasize English-focused instruction. By acknowledging these tensions and complexities, educational authorities can develop culturally and linguistically responsive policies that advance social justice in higher education without placing unrealistic demands on instructors or constraining student agency. This also validates that translanguaging is not a one-size-fits-all principle but one that requires careful planning and sophisticated judgment.

Limitations

This study contributes to understanding multilingual Chinese international students' perceived roles of translanguaging in academic literacy development within Canadian graduate-level classrooms. Three critical limitations warrant acknowledgment and suggest productive directions for future scholarship.

First, this research captures only one dimension of the pedagogical ecosystem. As an important stakeholder of learning environments, instructors occupy positions of considerable epistemic and institutional authority in determining when, how, and why translanguaging practices are legitimized or constrained within academic spaces. Future research must, therefore, interrogate instructors' ideological orientations towards multilingualism, their pedagogical decision-making processes regarding translanguaging implementation, and the institutional and disciplinary forces that shape their

practices. It is particularly crucial to examine how educators navigate the tension between linguistic inclusivity and disciplinary gatekeeping in classrooms comprising international students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical backgrounds. Such inquiry would illuminate the complex power dynamics that mediate translanguaging as both a liberatory practice and a site of potential marginalization.

Second, the study's limited demographic scope constrains its theoretical generalizability. Although this group of participants is substantially represented in Canadian higher education, centering their experiences risks essentializing a dialectically and regionally diverse population while obscuring the experiences of other international student communities. This study does not, however, seek to generalize the perspectives and experiences of multilingual Chinese students in a Canadian tertiary context. Instead, it amplifies the voices of each participant by affirming their bold, embodied, and layered views of translanguaging, which poses a rupture in a sanitized academic discourse where translanguaging is overly glorified (Tastanbek, 2025). This productive tension prompts future research to adopt comparative, intersectional approaches that examine how students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, particularly those from minoritized or less globally dominant language communities, negotiate academic literacy development through translanguaging.

Third, self-reported data carries phenomenological limitations. Since participants' reflections were mediated by memory and their own language ideologies, what they reported might not precisely map neatly onto their actual translanguaging practices in real classroom interactions. Nonetheless, this should not be simply deemed as a methodological limitation, but the inherent nature of a hermeneutic phenomenology of how participants' lived experience influences the way that they interpret certain phenomenon (in this case, translanguaging) in life (Chikobola & Mutono-Mwanza, 2026). Future studies might productively triangulate interview data with textual artifacts, classroom ethnographies, or stimulated recall protocols to capture translanguaging as it unfolds in practice, thereby acknowledging its versatile and contrasting roles in academic literacy development.

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Appendix

Interview questions:

1. What program are you in? What year are you in?
2. Have you taken a course related to writing or literacies at OISE? If so, what is the name of the course?
3. In that course, were other languages other than English allowed? Say, was it okay for students to speak their lingua francas (a lingua franca is a language that people use to communicate when they don't speak the same native language. It's like a "middle" language that they both know a little bit of, so they can understand each other. English is a common lingua franca used around the world today) other than English? What stances the professor took in this situation? Did they allow for the usage of other languages in class? If so, when was it? During class discussion time? Or only during the break time?
4. Do you recall investigating any writing components in that course? Say, writing cover letters for a job? Preparing for a job interview? Concentrating on English academic writing?
5. Can you elaborate more on how the academic content was conducted? Say, when the class were assigned to discuss and write on a specific theme, was writing in languages other than English allowed? Were there any explicit writing instructions? How did the instructor approach it?
6. Did the professor allow writing in a language that you were comfortable with first, and then translating into English once general ideas were formed?
7. In that course, did the professor do most of the presenting and talking, while students passively listening and taking notes?
8. Were students given opportunities to talk in the class? Say, did you have presentations, seminar discussion, or other forms of activities in the class?
9. What did the professor do to divide you into groups? Say, allowing you to form the group by yourselves, or trying to allocate multilingual group work (students of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds were put in a group)?
10. How would you describe your experience using English versus other languages in the classroom?
11. Could you walk me through your writing process for assignments? Specifically, what language or languages did you use at different stages of writing?
12. How did the language policies in your classroom affect your engagement with the course material, your instructor, and your willingness to participate in class?
13. How did you experience classroom environments where languages other than English were permitted, compared to those where they were not?
14. When you encountered a concept in English that you found difficult to understand, what strategies did you use to make sense of it?
15. In your experience, how did the use of different languages during content explanation relate to your understanding of course material and your academic writing?

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Non-binary/Genderqueer
 - d. Prefer not to say
3. What is your current country of residence?
 - a. United States
 - b. Canada
 - c. China
 - d. Others, please specify:
4. What is your highest level of education in progress?
 - a. Bachelor's degree
 - b. Master's degree
 - c. Doctoral degree
 - d. Others, please specify:
5. Where did you pursue your last/second-highest degree?
 - a. Canada
 - b. China
 - c. United States
 - d. Others, please specify:
6. Where did you finish your secondary schoolings?
 - a. United States
 - b. Canada
 - c. China
 - d. Others, please specify:
7. What is your current enrollment status at OISE?
 - a. Full-time
 - b. Part-time
8. Other than Chinese, what other languages do you speak?