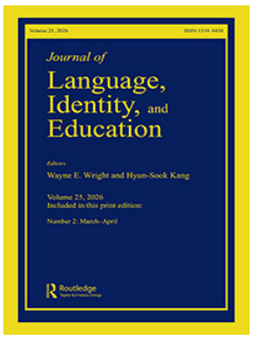

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Using Language Portraits to Promote Critical Self-Reflection for Teaching Multilingual Students

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ABSTRACT

The study examined how pre-service teachers (PSTs) of Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages used language portraits to express their identities visually and in writing. We conducted a qualitative analysis of both the visual and ideological layers of the portraits, focusing on what identity elements PSTs included or did not include in them, and the level of criticality achieved in their multimodal reflection. We found most color choices PSTs made were arbitrary, but certain languages were linked to body parts through function or emotion. Patterns indicating language hegemonies and legitimacy emerged through language inclusion and omission, and only few PSTs depicted translanguaging on their portraits. Lastly, engagement with race varied, with white PSTs often avoiding racial representation. Our findings highlight the need for teacher educators to foster deeper discussions on race and language ideologies and use the portrait assignment to promote more critical reflection. Discussing language portraits would help PSTs challenge internalized assumptions and develop more humanizing understandings of themselves and their pedagogies.

KEYWORDS

Language portraits; multilingual students; preservice teachers; teacher reflection

Introduction

K-12 schools in the United States hit a demographic milestone as the number of students of color surpassed the number of non-Hispanic White students (NCES, 2025). This trend is fueled by the increase in the number of students with immigrant backgrounds: by 2050, 34% of children will have at least one immigrant parent (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Another growing demographic is multilingual students (MSs), many of whom are students of color and children of immigrants. These students understand and/or use more than one language at home, at school, or in their communities (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013), including officially designated English Learners and other plurilingual students.

At the same time, teachers in the United States remain largely white and monolingual English speaking (NCES, 2023; Williams, 2023). This demographic gap is a problem, both because students from minoritized ethnic, racial, and language backgrounds lack adult role models who "look like America" (Riley, 1998, p. 18) and because white, monolingual English-speaking teachers may hold lower expectations for students or misinterpret their behavior, leading to negative consequences (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers from diverse backgrounds are not all well-prepared to teach students merely because of a shared background, because they may have been educated within oppressive systems (Chávez-Moreno et al., 2022; Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019), or are otherwise unfamiliar with culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (Mahalingappa, 2024; Smith et al., 2020).

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As language education scholars, we are particularly concerned with the well-documented unpreparedness of U.S. teachers to identify with, and meet the needs of, MSs (Kiramba et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2024). There is a growing need to address this unpreparedness through purposefully designed learning opportunities in teacher education (Hughes & Mahalingappa, 2018; Peercy et al., 2022, 2023; Peercy, Tigert, et al., 2024; Wesley-Nero & Donley, 2024). Some of this research centers on developing preservice teachers' (PSTs') ability to critically reflect on their identities, stances, and actions for teaching MSs (Coulter & Richardson, 2025; Markos, 2012; Romero et al., 2022). Reflection can promote culturally and linguistically responsive praxis (Civitillo et al., 2019; Harju-Autti & Mäkinen, 2024; Mills et al., 2020), positive beliefs towards linguistic diversity (Li, 2017; Rocafort, 2019; Ulbricht et al., 2024), and critical, anti-hegemonic, and anti-racist stances (Masson & Van Geel, 2024; Seo, 2023).

In this article, we argue that PSTs' critical self-examination can help them develop a foundation for their future humanizing practice with MSs, as they begin to see themselves, and subsequently, their students, as complex beings with varying cultural and linguistic identities, which are valuable in themselves but can also be leveraged to provide access points to powerful learning opportunities. We define *humanizing pedagogies* as those that consider students as whole human beings with unique strengths and histories and that center their learning and well-being. Mindful of the criticism directed towards watered-down, decontextualized approaches to humanizing pedagogies (Bartolomé, 1994; Mehta & Aguilera, 2020), we note that teachers' humanizing practices must be informed by critical and contextual understandings of societal undercurrents that shape education in their local contexts, such as power, racism, and language hegemonies (for more on this from our work, see Peercy, Fredricks, et al., 2024). Building on work by Huerta (2011), we call the foundations of humanizing practice *Humanizing Understandings* (HUs), and posit that critical reflection is fundamental to PSTs' development of HUs. In a typical teacher education program, PSTs write multiple reflections about their identities, beliefs, and practice. Here we focus primarily on the identity dimensions brought forth by PSTs' multimodal reflection, given existing research on teacher reflection is largely focused on written products (e.g., Markos, 2012; Romero et al., 2022) and has yet to sufficiently investigate the affordances of multimodal forms of reflection (Lewis, 2025).

This study emerges from our larger longitudinal study centered on developing PSTs' HUs in one U.S. university's Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) degree programs. We examine how multimodal language portraits might function as a form of critical reflection (Lau, 2016). Soares et al. (2021) define language portraits as an "outline of a body silhouette, which participants must colour by choosing colours to represent different languages, placing them on different body parts, resulting in a graphic visualisation of their linguistic repertoire" (p. 23). They "display how language resources reside tangibly within the body" (Siegman & Phillips Galloway, 2025, p. 2), and offer an "alter(n)ative" mode of inquiry that is both alternative (versus traditional) and "alter-ative" (potentially change-promoting) (Prasad, 2014, p. 54). We also seek to understand how language portraits promote humanizing pedagogy, as PSTs examine their linguistic, cultural, racial/ethnic, and other identities in relation to those of their students (Huerta, 2011), thus potentially developing their HUs for teaching MSs. We see the potential of this self-reflection to eventually result in more humanizing pedagogies for MSs, as PSTs come to recognize and remediate possible oppressive and hegemonic stances in themselves, or conversely, appreciate their own and their students' identities in more nuanced and complex ways. We focus on the following research questions:

1. What dimensions of their identities do PSTs reflect on through language portraits?
2. How might language portraits support PSTs' development of critical reflection of their identities, indicative of humanizing understandings?

Background of the study

Importance of reflection for teaching multilingual students

Reflection serves as a foundation for teacher education programs (e.g., Schön, 1987; Valli, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), with general agreement that reflection can help "practitioners better understand what they know and do as they develop their knowledge of practice, … professional health … and professional judgment" (Loughran, 2002, p. 34). Additionally, reflection can help teachers make more thoughtful, informed decisions about their practice (Farrell, 2024), question their assumptions and values, attend to the contexts in which they teach (Zeichner & Liston, 1996), and seek more equity-oriented learning opportunities for students (Martin-Kerr et al., 2022). Specifically, reflection is valuable for enacting humanizing practice, because it enables educators to "let go of previously held beliefs and tolerate the ambiguity of having to rethink one's perspective" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 51). For the largely white monolingual population of U.S. K-12 public school teachers, this is particularly critical as they work with increasingly diverse student populations.

Reflection is especially important when preparing teachers to work with MSs, as it enables teachers to confront the cultural, linguistic, and systemic inequalities that often shape students' educational experiences (Hernández, 2017). In linguistically diverse classrooms, educators must make sense of the impact of their language ideologies, cultural assumptions, and institutional contexts on students. Building these and other humanizing understandings (Huerta, 2011) is key for enacting equitable pedagogies. Importantly, without critical, intentional reflection, teachers may inadvertently reproduce dominant norms or reinforce status differences that marginalize MSs. Critical and reflective practice helps teachers move beyond surface-level inclusion and work toward equity-oriented and culturally sustaining teaching.

For PSTs to support MSs in meaningful and equity-oriented ways, reflection must include deep engagement with their own identities. Language teacher identity has received significant focus (Kayi-Aydar, 2019), recognizing it as dynamic, shifting, and conflicted (Varghese et al., 2005). As Nieto (2000) describes, learning to teach MSs is "a journey" that involves educators "facing and accepting their own identity by engaging in critical reflection" (p. 184). This helps PSTs unpack the complex ways their identities shape their perspectives and decision-making in the classroom (Smith Kondo, 2024) and creates space to grapple with discomfort and examine the influence of hegemonic language ideologies (Amos, 2016), which in the United States often center on so-called "standard" English as the only legitimate language for school and careers. Through reflection, teachers can draw on particular identities to engage with students in more equitable and humanizing ways (Smith Kondo, 2024). However, we need a better understanding of how teacher education can support such identity work, and how to use reflection to prepare equity-minded educators (Martin-Kerr et al., 2022). Thus, our research on using reflective approaches to support teachers' development of HUs is particularly salient as we continue our efforts to move equity mindsets to action (e.g., Peercy et al., 2022).

The affordances of language portraits for reflection

While research on teacher reflection has traditionally centered on written products (Sulzer & Dunn, 2019), there has been increased attention on multimodal and visual reflection (Lewis, 2025; Melo-Pfeifer & Chik, 2022; Rocafort, 2019). Related fields of research have drawn attention to visuality, multiliteracies, and semiotic systems beyond language (e.g., Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018). Adding these elements to forms of reflection can aid in "investigating intangible concepts" that may otherwise go unarticulated by teachers (Moritani, 2018, p. 2). Some of this research (e.g., Coffey, 2015; Ponzio & Deroo, 2023) has drawn on social semiotics, especially metaphor analysis, to investigate how teachers communicate their language experiences via universal "image schemata" (Johnson, 1989, p. 370). Other research has drawn on visual analysis methods, focusing on colors, placement, and lines (e.g., Masson & Van Geel, 2024).

Language portraits are a specific tool for uncovering autobiographical experiences and identity dimensions and have been widely used with MSs; some of the foundational work was conducted in Austria by Krumm and Jenkins (2001). More recently, Prasad (2014) used them with 11th graders in an international French school in Toronto; Kusters and De Meulder (2019) with transnational adult sign language users in Denmark; Galante (2020) with English for Academic Purposes university students in Canada; Soares et al. (2021) with primary school students in the Netherlands; Morali and Manoli (2025) with refugee children in Greece; and McHolme et al. (2025) with adult MSs in the U.S. Midwest. This work has pointed to the affordances of language portraits for uncovering layers of students' identities. As Soares et al. (2021) argued, "there are things that can only be expressed visually and not linguistically, and vice versa" (p. 23).

Language portraits have also been adopted as a tool for encouraging PSTs to reflect on their linguistic and other identities, especially to prepare them for teaching MSs. Work in this area has argued that language portraits allow PSTs to represent emotional meanings connected to languages (Busch, 2006) and express their linguistic histories "as a complex configuration of emotional impressions felt in the body" (Coffey, 2015, p. 504). Visually, this is demonstrated through the intensity or warmth of colors (Busch, 2006), as well as symbols such as a national flag, or connections between body parts and language uses (Karpava, 2021; Lau, 2016; Prasad, 2018). Additionally, labeling or writing about the language portraits, and discussing them in the classroom, as in our study, brings other elements of multimodality to the process, potentially offering new and alternative avenues for reflection (Melo-Pfeifer & Chik, 2022; Rocafort, 2019).

Language portraits can help PSTs see how different languages are woven into their identity, play an instrumental role in their work or studies (Lau, 2016), or prompt them to think about their own early experiences with language to anticipate those of their students (Park et al., 2024). Thus, language portraits offer "a window for educators into their students' ongoing efforts to construct identities as language users and members of linguistic communities" (Siegman & Phillips Galloway, 2025, p. 2). They can also reveal problematic raciolinguistic ideologies, which can then be dissected to help PSTs rethink them (Masson & Van Geel, 2024). Examples include PSTs characterizing their language proficiency in deficit-oriented terms such as "limited competency" (Masson & Van Geel, 2024, p. 17; see also Lau, 2016; Lindahl et al., 2021) and expressing hegemonic and/or monolingual language ideologies (Lindahl et al., 2021; Masson & Van Geel, 2024). In sum, we argue that language portraits afford both an alternative and an "alterative" (Prasad, 2014) tool for not just reflection and developing more humanizing understandings, but actual change towards equity-oriented instructional practices.

Towards humanizing understandings for teaching multilingual students

We drew from Huerta's (2011) research on teachers' humanizing understanding to develop teacher education pedagogies to support teachers' humanizing practice. We engaged in a process of identifying key Humanizing Understandings (HUs) that mapped onto the core practices (CPs) and humanizing pedagogies (HPs) that we were studying in teacher practice (Peercy et al., 2022; Tigert et al., 2022). These HUs (Peercy, Tigert, et al., 2024) have become foundational in developing PSTs with humanizing perspectives practices. Table 1 illustrates the HUs we have identified and defines their related humanizing practices. These HUs and their manifestations in practice serve as a guiding framework in our own work as teacher educators, for example as we plan course syllabi and assignments for our programs. They also help us frame what we see while researching our own practice and that of the PSTs we teach (e.g., Peercy et al., 2023; Peercy, Fredricks, et al., 2024; Peercy, Tigert, et al., 2024; Peercy, Troyan, et al., 2024). HU1 (Humanizing yourself) is particularly salient to the focus of our work here, as we will illustrate how the language portraits supported PSTs in reflecting on their own identities and considering how their identities might inform their understanding of themselves and the ways they show up in classrooms. In this paper, we focus primarily on HU1 and acknowledge that it has strong implications for how PSTs can build and sustain reciprocal relationships of care and respect to better understand and serve students as complex, cultural, and whole human beings (HU2). In addition, the present study helps us further concretize the HUs by pinpointing the affordances of multimodality when applied to ways the HUs can be developed.

Table 1. Humanizing understandings.

Humanizing understandings
HU1 - Humanizing yourself Understands that we perceive the world through our own identities (cultural, linguistic, racial/ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, religious, ability, age, and other identities).
HU2 - Humanizing your students Knows students as individuals who are complex, cultural, whole human beings who bring a variety of identities and knowledge to the classroom.
HU3 - Holding an asset-based mindset Values the assets and resources students bring to the classroom (e.g., home language, knowledge, etc.).
HU4 - Appreciates the impact of a positive and rigorous learning environment Understands that the teacher and the learning environment have implications for social-emotional development and academic achievement.
HU5 - Recognizes the importance of instruction that leverages students' culture and language Cognizant of the important roles that students' culture and language play in identity and learning.
HU6 - Centers students as active knowers and participants Recognizes that students have prior experiences, are "knowers," and bring individual approaches and learning styles to classrooms.
HU7 - Holds a critical perspective Understands the power dynamics within systems and structures that support or disempower students, families, and communities.
HU8 - Inclined to collaborate and engage with stakeholders Recognizes the importance of different roles needed to support equitable and rigorous educational opportunities.

Study design

Context and participants

The data were collected from a TESOL methods course over several semesters at a large, public research-intensive university in the eastern United States. The 19 PST participants were pursuing varied pathways to licensure—enrolled either in master's programs for initial teacher licensure in TESOL or an undergraduate minor in TESOL with various majors (e.g., Linguistics, Elementary Education). PSTs' experience levels also differed, from formal teaching or paraprofessional experience to no teaching experience at all. Participant profiles outlined in Table 2 include PSTs' self-identified country/ies of origin, languages identified on the portrait or in the accompanying discussion board post, and teaching experience.

Data collection

Data were collected in fall 2022, fall 2023, spring 2024, and summer 2024. The course required PSTs to complete a language portrait early in the semester. Though the instructions evolved, the general guidelines asked PSTs to complete a language portrait to describe which languages influenced their identity. The template in Figure 1 was provided; in some cases, PSTs were required to use it, in others, they were given the option to create their own. Thus, the data set includes some digital and handmade drawings. PSTs were also shown sample language portraits similar to the one included in findings, Figure 2. All portraits included at least some written labels, and PSTs who used the provided template typically wrote in the boxes prompting them to describe their race, languages, and identity. In the first semester, PSTs wrote a short response about their portrait to the prompt: *Can you say a bit about why you chose to draw your language portrait the way you did?* PSTs in the latter three semesters posted a brief summary of their language learning journey on the course discussion board, using prompts such as *Why did you place each language in certain parts of your portrait?* PSTs in these semesters also responded to peers' portraits and reflections in writing. Both the visual portraits and any written texts were analyzed for this study. As part of the larger research project, participants completed a demographic survey; some of the data gleaned from this are used in contextualizing the findings.

Table 2. Participant profiles.

Pseudonym	Self-Identified country/ies of origin	Languages identified on portrait and/or in discussion board post	Teaching experience (in the United States unless otherwise specified)
Caroline	United States	English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Chinese [Korean][1]	Secondary English teacher
William	Morocco	English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Darija/ Moroccan	N/A
Liliya	Russia	Russian, English, German, Chinese, Spanish	EFL tutor in Russia
Wren	United States	English, Italian	Swimming instructor
Zoey	United States	Mandarin, Spanish, English	Middle school teaching assistant
Samantha	United States	English, Spanish, Korean	Community adult ESOL classes
Bernardo	Venezuela	Spanish (Venezuelan dialect), French, English, Portuguese	Spanish and English language teacher in Venezuela
Santiago	El Salvador	English, Spanish, German, El Salvadoran dialect	N/A
Brenda	United States	English, Spanish (Mexico)	Literacy coach in US; English teaching assistant in Mexico
Boyd	United States	English, Spanish, Chinese[2] [Mandarin]	EFL teacher in China
Dannie	United States	English, Japanese, German	Japanese tutor
Sienna	United States	English (New York dialect), Spanish, Hebrew, Italian, German	2nd grade teacher
Clara	United States	Korean, English, American Sign Language (ASL), Spanish, French	2nd grade teacher
Catia	United States, El Salvador	Spanish, English, French, Korean, ASL	Tutoring
Harmony	United States	English, ASL, Dutch, Italian, German	N/A
Anora	Uzbekistan	Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, English, French, Japanese, Farsi/Tajik	National EFL testing in Uzbekistan
Robert	United States	English, Spanish	Teaching assistant
Polina	Belarus	Russian, Belarusian, English, French, German	Special education paraeducator
Mia	United States	English, Mandarin, Jamaican Patois	N/A

Positionality

The second, third, fifth, and sixth authors of this article acted as instructors for the TESOL teacher education classes from which the data were collected. The authors acknowledge that this creates issues of power between the researchers and the subjects and that this positioning may have impacted how PSTs responded to the language portrait assignment. At the same time, the portraits were an assignment all PSTs in the classes completed, whether they consented to the study or not, which helps position the portrait as a learning opportunity alongside producing research data. All PSTs whose portraits were included in the data set signed informed consent, and no participants exercised their right to stop participating in the study.

Data analysis

Our analysis involved both deductive and inductive coding. We drew on work by Cappello et al. (2019) and Serafini (2014), who have utilized a layered approach to analyzing visuals: perceptual (literal or denotative contents of the picture), structural (placement and relationships of the visual and written elements), and ideological (sociopolitical and critical elements discernible from the work). In addition to the visual portrait, we also coded the texts PSTs wrote on their portraits and the reflective discussion board posts, following Cappello et al. (2019), who noted the need to discover any existing synergy between visual and textual elements.

We began with a set of deductive codes (Fallas-Escobar et al., 2022; Kusters & De Meulder, 2019; Prasad, 2014) that were mostly at the level of perceptual (visual and structural). These were organized as follows:

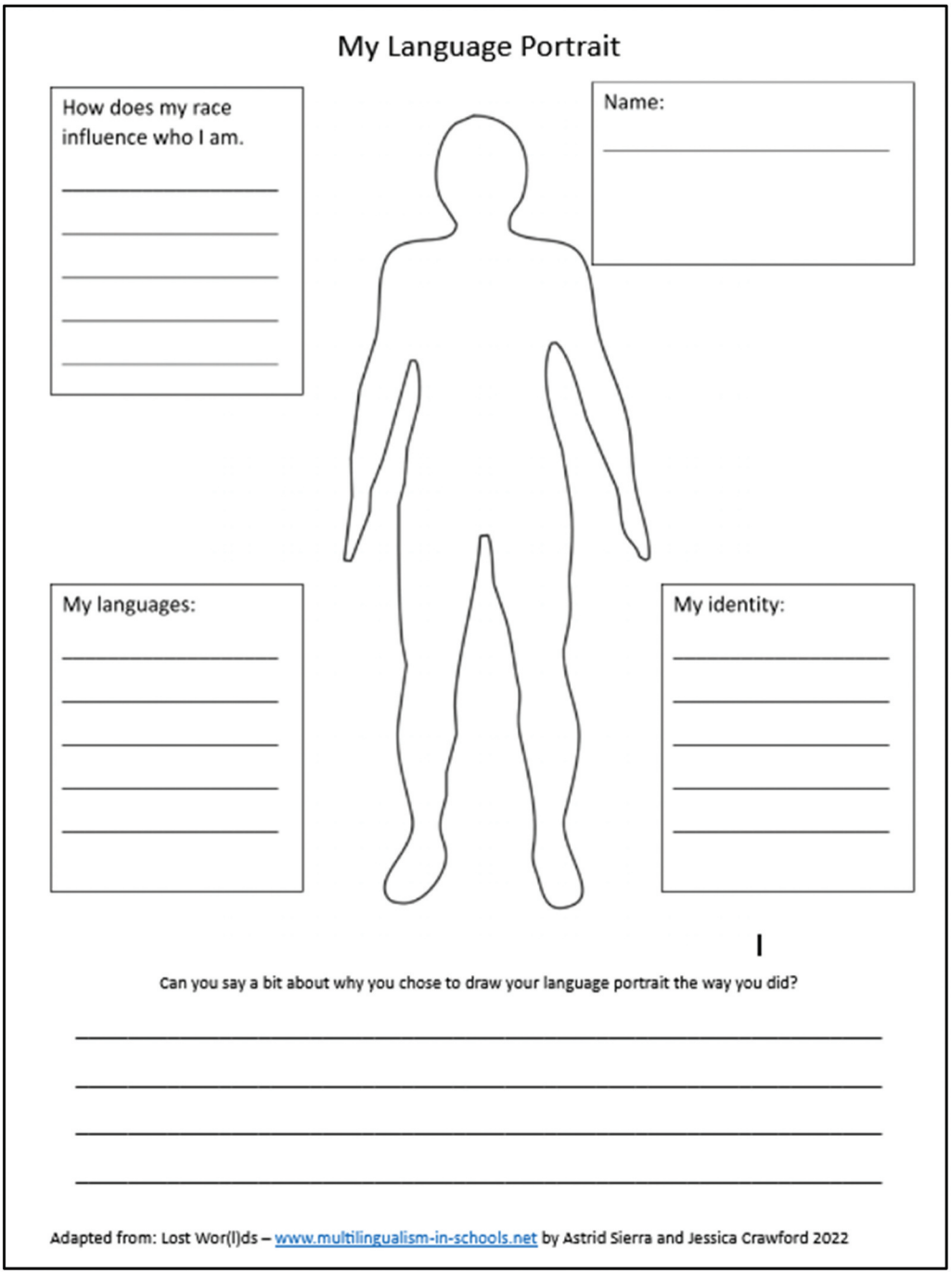

Figure 1. Language portrait template.

- Colors
- Placement (e.g., foreground, left)
- Body parts
- Languages
- Symbols (e.g., heart)

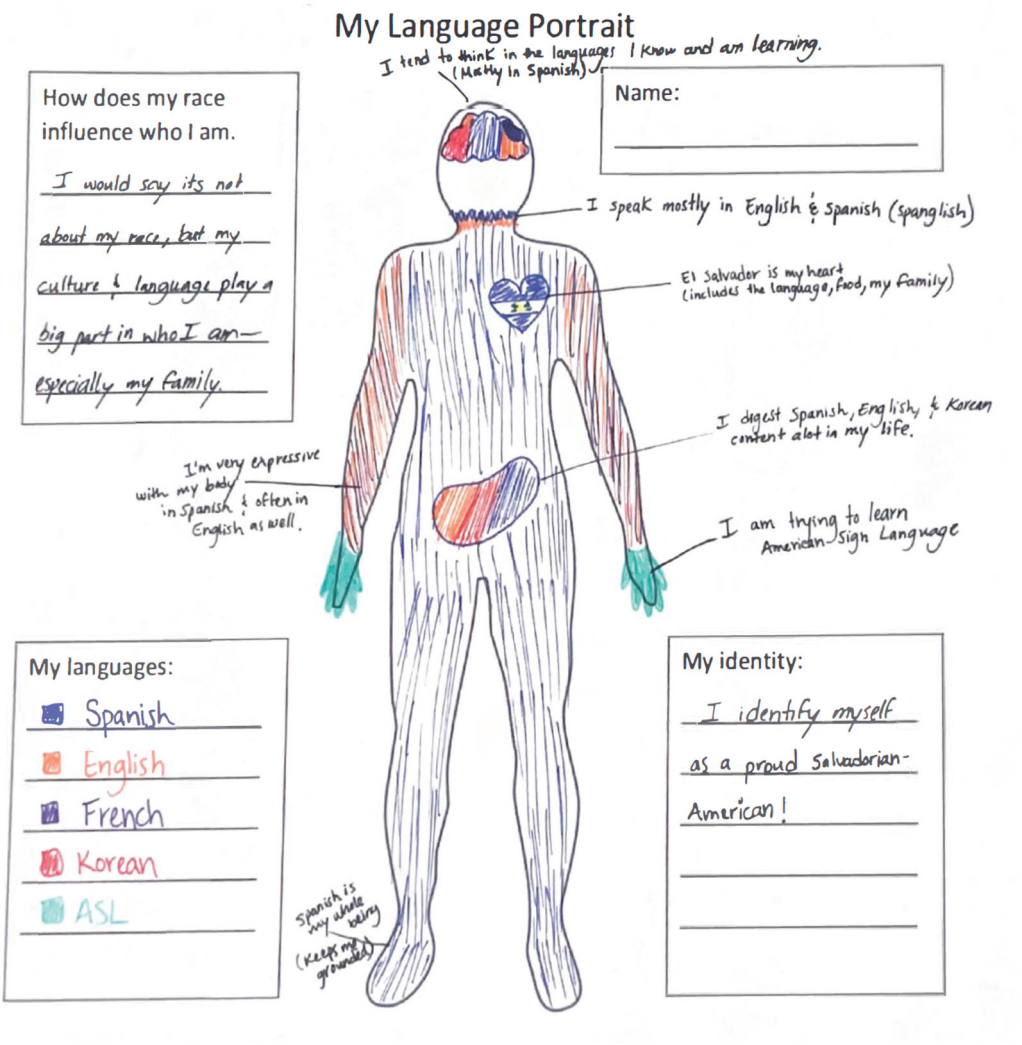

Figure 2. Catia's language portrait.

- Race/ethnicity (e.g., Asian American)

We then added inductive codes that emerged from the data (e.g., translanguaging, sexual orientation); these also allowed us to note the ideological layers especially in the textual parts of the data set (e.g., words like "native," "privilege"). During this round, we frequently applied *in vivo* codes to capture the participants' voices in the data. These inductive codes were organized as follows:

- Ties to language or culture (e.g., travel, family)
- Proficiency (e.g., "native," beginner)
- Other identities (e.g., country/region, gender)
- Translanguaging (or code-switching)

Each language portrait was initially analyzed by one of the researchers, followed by an analytical discussion by several authors on the team to refine the codes and re-code the

data. After further discussion, another round of re-coding was conducted. All portraits were coded by a minimum of two researchers, and any discrepancies were resolved during biweekly team meetings.

Findings

We identified five dimensions of PST identities, which, to varying degrees, created a space for critical self-reflection to develop HU1, *Humanizing yourself*. Through example language portraits and quotes from several other portraits and discussion board posts, we illustrate how the PSTs reflected on their identities.

Embodied language identities

Findings showed that the PSTs described themselves using named languages, which is expected given the instructions to reflect on their language learning. All participants mentioned English, either as a primary language or a language they had learned and/or taught. Only one PST (Catia) described their English as "ESOL," and one (Sienna) specified a variety of English, writing "New York dialect." Twelve participants mentioned Spanish (one mentioning Venezuelan Spanish, another Mexico); other languages or language varieties mentioned by more than one participant were German (6), French (6), Korean (5), Mandarin (4), Italian (3), Russian (3), Chinese (3), and Japanese (2). The following languages and language varieties were mentioned once: Cantonese, Arabic, Darija/Moroccan, Dutch, Portuguese, Hebrew, Uzbek, Farsi/Tajik, Jamaican Patois, Salvadoran native dialect, and Belarusian. In addition to spoken languages, American Sign Language was noted by three participants. Fifteen of the participants identified three or more languages in their portraits.

We observed recurrent connections between certain languages and body parts, especially the head, heart, hands, and feet. First, there seemed to be a connection between the perceived function of the body part and the language. We found that the head/brain area had the highest number of codes out of all body parts and showed a strong presence of English. Eleven portraits included the connection between English and the head/brain, reflecting learning in the language or thinking in it. This interpretation of the language portraits is reinforced by some participants' discussion board posts. Bernardo even made a direct connection between intelligence and English:

> I learned [English] on my own, so I relate it to my mind and intelligence. Also, I see a connection with intelligence due to the influence it has had on my academic and professional experience. Finally, the way I learned English and speaking the language itself was a common reason to be considered smart by classmates and teachers. That is why I put it in my brain.

Hands and arms emerged as tools of communication in many portraits, showing strong connections to active language use. For example, Catia (Figure 2), who described herself as Salvadoran-American, colored her arms both blue for Spanish and red for English, and labeled the portrait with the explanation, "I'm very expressive with my body in Spanish & often in English as well." American Sign Language appeared predominantly in the hands, reflecting its visual-gestural modality.

Second, the language portraits revealed emotional connections to languages, particularly in the heart region and/or with a heart symbol. We found that the heart was associated with the most diverse language representation, with 17 different languages coded in this body part. Many heritage languages appeared here, indicating emotional and familial ties to language identity. For example, Catia drew a heart in her portrait (Figure 2), colored it to resemble the Salvadoran flag, and labeled it, "El Salvador is my heart (includes the language, food, my family)."

The connections between languages and body parts the PSTs made in their portraits did not seem to elevate their reflection to any significant levels of criticality. Rather, the connections made by the PSTs were mostly connected to function or emotion, as described above.

Identities through color, line, and placement

A total of 14 colors and some overlapping mixes of colors were used by the PSTs in their portraits. Most of the color choices participants used for the different languages seemed arbitrary. For example, while English was most often represented by blue or red (8 participants), possibly as a connection to the colors in the U.S. flag, it was also represented by green, purple, or yellow (7 participants). Similarly, the two most used colors to represent Spanish were green and blue, possibly from the Mexican or Salvadoran flags, but this connection was not clear. It is also possible that choices were determined by colors available to the participants, either as physical art supplies, or in digital drawing tools. However, an exception to the seeming arbitrariness of the color choices was the use of mixed colors to denote translanguaging or code-switching.

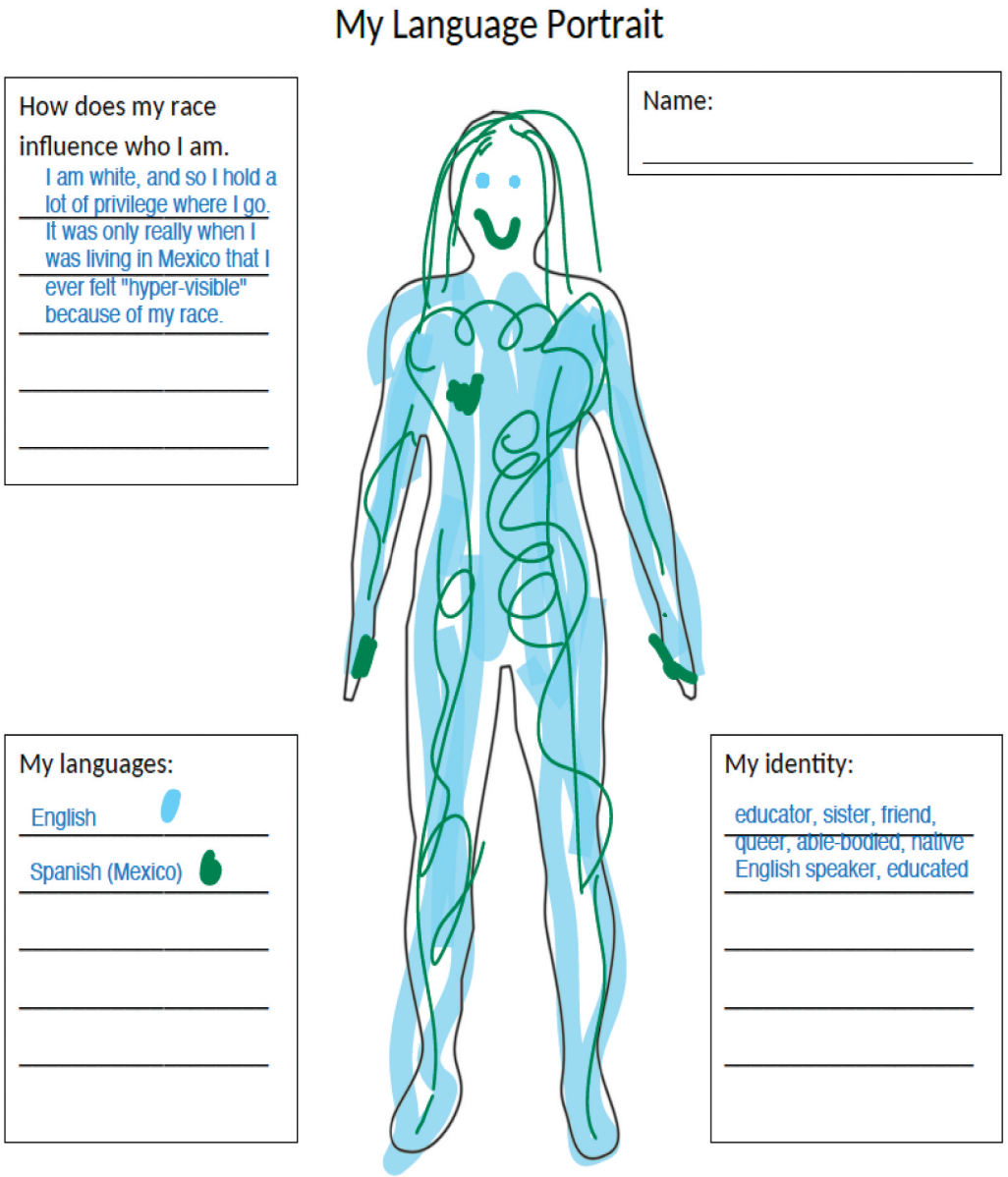

Figure 3. Brenda's language portrait.

We found one case where the thickness of a line seemed to bear significance. Brenda, a white student who had lived in Mexico and speaks English and Spanish, represented the latter as a swirly green line throughout the body (Figure 3).

Brenda shared about this in her discussion board post:

> I swirled the green throughout my body in a thinner line of green to illustrate that, although I consider myself fluent, I still lack some of the basic interpersonal communication skills like idioms or slang that may enable me to better communicate more casually or humorously.

Brenda represented her still-developing proficiency in Spanish with the thinness of the line, whereas the portrait shows her primary language, English, painted with a thick turquoise highlighter tool. This was a visual method for her to illustrate the significance of each language for her identity.

In the portraits where PSTs created the image from scratch, we found some compositional elements that seemed deliberate, particularly the placement of things either higher or lower on the portrait. For example, Sienna used a photo of herself as the starting point for her portrait, and placed the labels "Italian (mom's side)" and "German (dad's side)" high up next to her outstretched arms, which seemed to emphasize their importance.

These visual elements, while obviously meaningful to the PSTs, did not seem to afford significant space for critical reflection. However, further dimensions of the portraits showed the emergence of, or opportunity for, more critical perspectives, discussed in the following sections.

Figure 4. Mia's language portrait.

Legitimizing language identities

Looking more closely at the languages in their portraits, a pattern related to the legitimacy of languages emerged. Some PSTs identified with languages they had studied formally, even if they had limited proficiency in them, while others omitted heritage languages. Mia's portrait (Figure 4), for example, reveals this tension around what counts as a "legitimate" language. In her portrait, only two languages —English and Mandarin—appear, yet in her discussion board post, she revealed that Patois was also an intimate part of her life. She stated, "Unfortunately, the only language I speak is English. My father is from Jamaica, and he speaks Patois, which is broken English. I can understand him, but I can't speak it." Mia described Jamaican Patois as "broken English" rather than as a legitimate creole language. Despite having receptive proficiency, she did not include it in her portrait, indicating that she did not count this as part of her linguistic identity. Mia's classmate Catia replied supportively to her post: "I think it's alright to only know English, there are always different dialects to English … Such as Patois, it could still be a part of who you are even if you may not speak it." This comment attempted to validate Mia's linguistic identity but still framed Patois as a "dialect of English" rather than a distinct language variety.

In contrast, we found that PSTs studying languages like Chinese or Japanese as world languages often chose to include them in their portraits, even with limited proficiency. Indeed, Mia chose to include Mandarin in her portrait (Figure 4), despite stating, "I learned Mandarin in … high school, but I forgot almost everything I knew." One PST (Anora) included Japanese in her portrait despite having studied it for only one semester.

There was one portrait where an explicitly critical stance towards language hierarchies emerged. Zoey wrote critically about the dominance of English in her life: "Being Chinese-American means that language learning is a liminal experience. I am more fluent in my dominant language [English] than my mother tongue [Mandarin] … my fluency is a sign of [Standard American English] hegemony." Zoey's comment points to an opportunity for the language portrait to function as a valuable entry point for critical reflection on what it means to identify with languages or language varieties that have very different societal statuses.

Translanguaging or code-switching identities

In most of the language portraits, each language was represented by a distinct color, marking a clear separation. Only two portraits explicitly represented identities through translanguaging or code-switching. Liliya's portrait (Figure 5) highlighted the range of languages she had acquired—Russian, English, German, Chinese, and Spanish—each represented with a particular color next to the language. But she also symbolized her ability to code-switch between Russian (red) and English (blue) by coloring some of her portrait purple. Liliya shared about this color choice in her discussion board post: "The violet part … is the convergence of English and Russian, the codeswitching part or part of everyday life that I can fully describe using both languages." She continued, "The chest is a mixture of the languages I can speak and how sometimes they mix. I may momentarily struggle to recall a word in one language while readily recalling its counterpart in another, as well as vice versa." Liliya demonstrated an understanding of the fluidity of her multilingual identity, as she stated that code-switching meant both "parts of everyday life" that she could fully describe in both Russian and English, as well as situations where her languages functioned as complementary to one another.

Another example of explicit interaction between languages was seen in Catia's language portrait shared in Figure 2. She colored her neck area with both blue and red and labeled this part with the explanation, "I speak mostly in English & Spanish (Spanglish)." However, unlike Liliya, Catia did not mix the colors in this part of her portrait, despite doing so in other parts, such as the arms, which she did not explicitly describe as related to translanguaging or code-switching. In some other portraits, such as Brenda's in Figure 3, colors overlapped but were not described as related to translanguaging or code-switching by the PSTs.

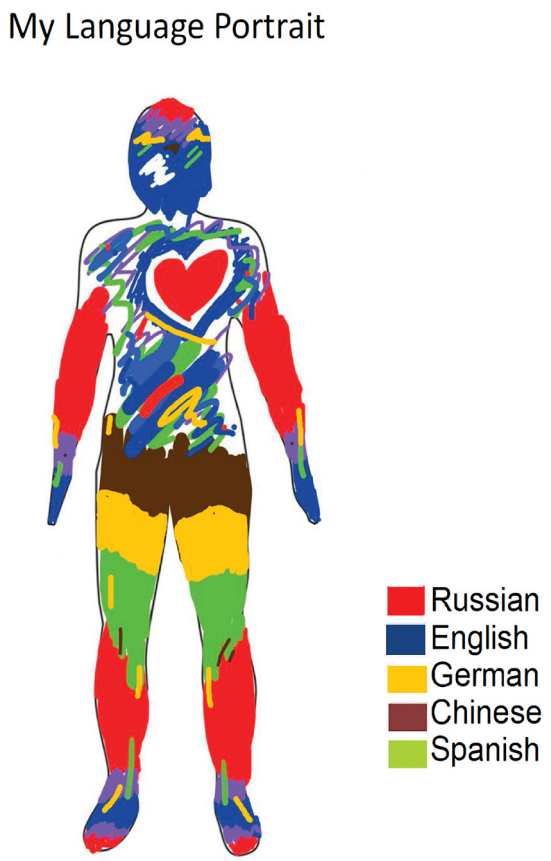

Figure 5. Liliya's language portrait.

In addition, in two portraits (Boyd and Polina), we saw a mix of languages as they used languages other than English in speech bubbles. Boyd wrote, "Donde esta mi Español?" [sic; "Where is my Spanish?"] on his portrait, perhaps to allude to the fact that he was no longer using the language actively. Other bubbles were in Mandarin, for example, "我说中文的时候我也用我的手" [sic; "I also use my hands when I speak Chinese"]. Polina wrote "hello" in several languages. Thus, the language portrait offered opportunities for participants to display their multilingual identities both through color mixing and the use of multiple languages, as well as to critically reflect on the meaning of multilayered linguistic identities, but this opportunity was not taken up by most of the participants.

Ethnicity, race, and privilege in PST identities

Since language, race, and ethnicity are inextricably tied, especially in the U.S. context (Flores & Rosa, 2015), we included a box for PSTs to write a response to the prompt, "How does my race influence who I am?" We found that PSTs' responses varied widely. Some PSTs deleted the race box altogether (Bernardo), left the box blank (Dannie, Polina), omitted it from their self-created portrait template (Wren and William), or even wrote "I do not think race exists" (Anora). Interestingly, some of these PSTs did identify with a certain race or ethnicity in their demographic survey, such as "Latino" (Bernardo), "Central Asian" (Polina), and "White" (Wren).

Some PSTs demonstrated emerging critical perspectives by recognizing how their racial identity influenced their language experiences. Catia (Figure 2), who self-identified as "Salvadorian-American,"

wrote that it was not about her race, but "my culture & language play a big part in who I am," seemingly substituting the concept of culture for race. In contrast, Robert tied race and language together as he wrote, "My race obviously allows me to speak two languages. I suppose it is a unique identity considering I am Latino and have spent my entire life in the USA." Three PSTs showed criticality by choosing to call out their own whiteness. For example, Boyd described both his racial and gender privilege as he wrote:

> I am a white, cis-gender male so my race "enhances" my experiences of the world. I don't need to think about or consider certain things, so my anxiety levels are lower than people of other races. I am also granted the benefit of the doubt in many situations.

Brenda stated, "I am white, and so I hold a lot of privilege where I go," while Harmony wrote, "Being White in American society gives me privilege. Most things in my life, education, media, etc., are catered towards people who are white."

For Santiago, who was from El Salvador, the portrait assignment offered an opportunity for critical thinking about the historical impact of colonialism. In his discussion board post, he stated, "I had to go and check my DNA to be able to identify some details for this portrait." Santiago colored most of his body outline turquoise and labeled it "indigenous from Central America," but also included what can assumed to be results from his DNA ancestry test, labeling his arms and legs "20% European (colonizer)" and his hands "5.3[%] African." Further, several other PSTs included hyphenated identities with reflections of migration histories. For example, the Asian-American participants all claimed some type of hyphenated identity: Clara identified as Korean-American, Caroline, Asian-American, and Zoey, Chinese-American. These varied responses reveal different levels of humanizing understandings regarding the intersection of race and language, suggesting potential areas for growth.

Discussion and implications

The PSTs represented their language identities by linking languages to specific body parts, including the head/brain being linked to thinking and learning, especially English; hands/arms being linked to expressive communication and sign language; the heart (often with a drawn heart symbol) being linked to emotional, familial, and heritage language ties; and feet/legs being linked to travel. All PSTs identified with English, and most listed three or more languages, Spanish being the most common non-English language, followed by German, French, and Korean. Fourteen colors were used, seemingly arbitrarily, though some might have symbolized national flags (cf. Soares et al., 2021). These representations were personal and emotional, but generally lacked critical reflection on broader sociolinguistic issues, and even included problematic notions requiring further unpacking, such as English being equated with intelligence.

We also found that the PSTs mainly displayed connections to "legitimate" world languages, even those they had only briefly studied, while omitting heritage languages and dialects from their portraits, even when these played important roles in their lives. In addition, few PSTs explicitly represented translanguaging or code-switching through color or language choices on their portraits, despite research indicating that multilingual individuals often express their identities through translanguaging or code-switching (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Zhu & Li, 2020). Discussing the decisions regarding including or leaving out languages and language varieties, as well as how translanguaging identities are displayed on the portraits, could lead to more critical thinking among PSTs around the complexity of language identities and internalized language ideologies and hierarchies. In particular, reflecting on the hegemony of English in the world would be important for future English language teachers (Motha, 2014).

Finally, we found mixed levels of readiness for PSTs to engage with the concept of race on their portraits, with some PSTs evading this dimension altogether by omitting it from their portraits or leaving it blank. It remains unclear whether the absence or deletion of the race box in the PSTs' portraits was a sign of race-evasiveness (cf. Amos, 2016), simply an arbitrary move, or perhaps a decision not to tackle such a complex question in such a small space. The freedom afforded to

PSTs regarding race/ethnicity on their portraits is something for teacher educators to consider in terms of how it impacts the level of criticality in PSTs' portraits. In particular, if a pattern of race-evasiveness by white PSTs emerges across portraits, this would warrant deeper discussions to disrupt the culture of whiteness and silence around race (Amos, 2016). At the same time, the mixed responses by other PSTs, for example, those with origins in Central or South America, demonstrate the complexities in the racialization of Latinos and the role of language in that process (cf. Chávez-Moreno, 2021). Asking PSTs to reflect on their decisions on leaving out or depicting their racial identities on the portraits could open up a space to further discuss raciolinguistic perspectives (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Overall, the findings point to several opportunities for language portraits to help PSTs develop HU1, Humanizing yourself, through (critical) self-reflection on various dimensions of their sociocultural identities. The multimodality of the portraits allowed PSTs to make some of their identity dimensions more tangible (cf. Coffey, 2015; Ponzio & Deroo, 2023), such as when a particular language was associated with the function of a particular body part, or colors were mixed to symbolize translanguaging. Thus, the portraits allowed for details to emerge about PST identities that they might not have thought to describe in a written-only reflection. In addition, the opportunity to pair the portrait with a discussion board post or, at minimum, a written explanation of the decisions made when creating the portrait, appeared fruitful for PSTs to extend their reflection.

At the same time, we see opportunities to further develop the language portrait assignment to bring out more critical perspectives towards language ideologies, racialization, and societal hierarchies (Smith Kondo, 2024). For example, we note that what is left out of the portraits may be just as important as what is included, such as the omission of "non-legitimate" languages or racial identification. Thus, we see an opportunity for teacher educators to challenge and disrupt PSTs' internalized assumptions about these and other identity dimensions (Amos, 2016) and recommend that language portraits be analyzed and discussed collaboratively in teacher education classrooms. Anecdotally, we saw the affordances of deep discussions paired with the language portrait assignment in one of the course sections, in which several of the white PSTs were able to critically address their racial privilege on their portraits and the discussion board. As our and other recent studies on language portraits have demonstrated, the multimodality of this assignment can help deepen PSTs' reflection. We posit that especially when paired with other forms of reflection, such as critical dialog around the portraits during a teacher education class, a written revisitation of the portrait at a later point in a course, or a chance to revise the portrait as PSTs develop a more nuanced understanding of their identities can further strengthen the impact of the assignment on PSTs' critical reflection. For example, students could be led to discuss their decision to describe or not describe their racial identities on the portrait, such as when Anora wrote "I do not think race exists," or further delve into language hegemonies, as in the case of Mia's omission of Jamaican Patois from her portrait. As a result of such continued learning experiences, PSTs can be supported in developing a more humanizing understanding of themselves as sociocultural beings with complex life histories and identities, and thus begin to see these qualities in the MSs they teach.

We note that the choice in visual creativity afforded to PSTs, as well as the evolving assignment instructions across the various semesters, made our data analysis more complex and places limitations on our claims. In particular, the heterogeneity of the dataset consisting of template-based, hand-drawn, and digital portraits, each paired with varying degrees of written reflections on the portraits themselves or on the discussion board, challenged the systematicity of our analysis. At the same time, allowing PSTs to create the portraits without strict guidelines is an important part of the reflective process, and as noted above, teacher educators are recommended to take up opportunities to push PSTs' reflection towards more criticality. Overall, we call for continued research on how language portraits and other

multimodal forms of reflection can be used to develop PSTs' HUs, especially for teaching MSs in their future classrooms.

Notes

1. The participant wrote "I wouldn't starve if I went to Korea" instead of identifying a language.
2. The participant identified "Chinese," which was later clarified to be Mandarin.

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