

STORYTELLING AND SELF-TRANSLATION: ECOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR INCLUSION

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Abstract: The narrative device, through its flexibility and capacity to accommodate diverse cultural and individual experiences, fosters intercultural communicative language teaching via creative strategies. This allows for the transformation of the intercultural perspective, very often stopped at a theoretical stage, by implementing it in inclusive processes aiming at participatory citizenship. In the eco-perspective of critically (re)thinking the "stories that we live by" (Stibbe 2015) and increasing the quality of the stories we can live on, a series of guided classroom activities allows students to learn through an experiential process of shared creative practice, involving all receptive, productive and interactive/communicative language skills. This study examines the integration of storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework for second/foreign language (L2/FL) teaching, with a particular focus on inclusion and participatory citizenship. Through a case study involving 76 primary education student-teachers in a COIL project, the extent to which narrative creation and self-translation activities can enhance linguistic competence while developing ecological consciousness was investigated. Data were collected through reflective forum contributions, collaborative productions, and peer feedback. Results indicate that participants demonstrated significant improvements in language skills, cultural awareness, and environmental consciousness. The project produced 28 original stories across diverse narrative structures, with participants developing enhanced ICT competences and intrinsic motivation. Findings suggest that combining storytelling with self-translation creates inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse learning needs while fostering critical ecological awareness. The approach shows particular promise for heritage language learners and students with special educational needs. Implications for language pedagogy emphasize the need for ecolinguistically informed practices that connect language learning to broader environmental and social concerns.

Keywords: ecolinguistics; storytelling; self-translation; inclusion; L2 teaching; participatory citizenship.

1. Introduction: Narratives as Bridges between Languages and Cultures

In a world increasingly characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity (García and Wei 2014), language educators face the dual challenge of facilitating language acquisition while fostering intercultural awareness and inclusivity (Norton and Toohey 2011; Kuusalu *et al.* 2023). The narrative device, inherently flexible, broad in content and forms, and capable to encompass diverse cultural and individual experiences, provides an optimal vehicle for intercultural communicative language teaching and learning (Liddicoat *et al.* 2003, Newton *et al.* 2010, Canals Botines and Leproni 2025). By enabling creative exchanges across cultural boundaries, storytelling facilitates the transformation of intercultural perspectives from theoretical constructs to lived experiences through inclusive pedagogical practices: as Bruner (1987: 15) posited, we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing; within the ecolinguistic paradigm articulated by Stibbe (2015), critical examination of “the stories we live by”¹ allows language learners to deconstruct and reimagine narratives that shape their understanding of self, others, and the environment.

The connection between storytelling and ecolinguistics becomes particularly evident when considering Cronin’s (2017) concept of “eco-translation”. Drawing from Morton (2013), Cronin argues that translation, when approached from an ecological perspective, can function as a hyperobject² and “change our experience of time” (2017: 3) by making visible the interconnections between languages, cultures, and environments. Similarly, the practice of self-translation – moving between one’s native language and a target language (Hokenson and Munson 2007) – creates a pedagogical space where learners can explore linguistic and cultural nuances while developing translingual competence (Canagarajah 2013) and a deeper understanding of their relationship to various ecosystems: linguistic, cultural, and environmental.

Despite growing recognition of the need for more inclusive and ecologically-aware language teaching approaches (Norton and Toohey 2011), there remains a significant gap in empirical research examining how storytelling and self-translation can be systematically integrated within ecolinguistic frameworks. While storytelling has been extensively studied in language education (Wajnryb 2003; Wright 1995), and self-translation has gained attention in literary studies (Hokenson and Munson 2007), limited research has explored their combined pedagogical potential for fostering both linguistic competence and ecological consciousness. Furthermore, despite calls for more inclusive language teaching practices (Cummins 2001; García and Wei 2014), few studies have examined

¹ “The stories-we-live-by are, therefore, cognitive structures which influence how multiple people think, talk and act” (Stibbe 2015: 10).

² A hyperobject, a thing “massively distributed in space and time relative to humans” (Morton 2013: 1), frames ecological crises as vast, distributed phenomena exceeding human spatial-temporal scales. Cronin (2017) applies the concept to translation in an ecological perspective, highlighting how texts, practices, and linguistic choices are embedded within – and affected by – planetary systems that cannot be grasped in their entirety, where translation allows to mediate between local linguistic worlds and the global ecological forces that shape them.

how narrative-based approaches can specifically address the needs of diverse learners, including those with special educational needs or heritage language backgrounds.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the following issues: How can storytelling and self-translation be systematically integrated within an ecolinguistic framework for L2 teaching? What are the effects of this approach on student linguistic development, cultural awareness, and ecological consciousness? How does this pedagogical approach support inclusion and diverse learning needs?

An integrated approach to second/foreign language (L2/FL) teaching through the combined implementation of storytelling and self-translation practices within an ecolinguistic framework is proposed; by exploring both the theoretical foundations underpinning this integration and practical classroom applications across different educational contexts, this paper seeks to demonstrate how language educators can create learning environments that foster linguistic proficiency while developing ecological consciousness to offer efficacious tools for developing communicative competence, enhance cultural sensitivity, and promote participatory citizenship in increasingly diverse educational settings. Through guided classroom activities designed around storytelling and self-translation, students may engage in an experiential process of shared creative practice that activates all receptive and productive language skills including interaction and mediation, as emphasized in the CEFR Companion Volume (2020) while fostering critical ecological awareness.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Narrative Device in the Ecolinguistic Perspective

2.1. Storytelling: A Cognitive and Cultural Process

Narrative, a fundamental mode of human cognition and communication, has been extensively studied across disciplines from linguistics and psychology to anthropology and education. Bruner (1987, 1997) identifies narrative thought as a primary means by which individuals organize experience and construct meaning. The human capacity for narrative enables the transformation of raw experience into coherent stories that provide frameworks for understanding both self and society. These narratives are influenced by external factors and, in turn, modify these factors when shared within a social group or community.

In the context of language learning, narratives serve multiple functions, providing authentic linguistic material, model cultural patterns and values, and creating affective connections that facilitate retention and application. Being inherently interesting, stories have proved to be more easily understood and recalled than other discourse modes (Wajnryb 2003). Furthermore, narratives offer natural contextual support for vocabulary acquisition, grammatical construction, and cultural pragmatics.

2.2. Self-translation as Ecological Practice

Self-translation has a long and distinguished history in literary studies. As Cronin (2017) suggests, it can be understood as an ecological practice that connects different linguistic territories while preserving the diversity inherent in each. When integrated into language teaching, self-translation encourages learners to become active agents in cross-cultural communication rather than passive recipients of target language input; by creating narratives in their second language and then translating them into their first (or vice versa), students engage in a reflective process illuminating both commonalities and differences between linguistic systems, through a bidirectional movement which creates “translation ecologies” – in line with what Cronin sees as dynamic spaces where languages interact without hierarchical dominance.

From an ecolinguistic standpoint, self-translation also addresses what Stibbe (2015) identifies as an urgent need to recognize the cognitive pluralism inherent in linguistic diversity: each language offers unique conceptual resources and frameworks for understanding the world; through the process of creating and self-translating stories, learners gain access to multiple sets of cognitive tools, enriching their capacity to engage with complex environmental and social issues.

2.3. The Ecolinguistic Turn in Language Education

Recent decades have witnessed an “ecolinguistic turn” in language education (see Sterk 2025; Chau and Jacobs 2022) – a growing recognition that language teaching must address not only instrumental communication skills but also the ecological relationships embedded in and mediated through language. From an ecolinguistic perspective, storytelling represents more than just a cognitive process: it constitutes a vital ecosystem where language, culture, and identity interact and evolve. Stibbe (2015: 9) defines ecolinguistics as the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships of humans with each other, with other organisms and with the natural environment, with a normative orientation towards protecting the systems that humans and other forms of life depend on for their wellbeing and survival. The ‘linguistics’ of ecolinguistics involves using techniques of linguistic analysis to reveal the stories-we-live-by, opening them up to question and challenge from an ecological perspective. Within this framework, narratives can represent ecological niches that either support or undermine sustainable relationships.

As Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001) observed, language is not only a mirror of our society but also a major force in constructing it;³ hence, the teaching of second/foreign languages carries significant ecological implications, either reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives about human-environment relationships. Norton and Toohey (2011: 436) highlight this shift by noting that “static views of language as system and language learning as internalization of

³ See also Hofstetter and Schnewly (2022) on Jean Piaget’s contribution to international education, particularly his notion of “education internationalism” developed when working at the International Bureau of Education (IBE).

that system" are no more adequate "in a world in which boundary-crossing, multilingualism, and human agency are recognized". Instead, language educators increasingly acknowledge the need for pedagogical approaches that embrace complexity, connectivity, and contextual sensitivity – hallmarks of ecological thinking.

The combination of storytelling and self-translation offers a practical methodology for implementing this ecolinguistic turn in the classroom. By creating and translating narratives, learners develop their "languaging" (Phipps and Gonzalez 2004) – the ability to move between languages responding to social and environmental contexts, a capacity extending beyond instrumental communication to encompass the need to understand which ground we are standing on (Steffensen and Fill 2014).

The concept of "languaging" represents a paradigm shift from viewing language as a static system to understanding it as a dynamic meaning-making practice. Swain's research demonstrates that "the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (2013: 195) supports both cognitive development and language learning. In the context of storytelling and self-translation, languaging occurs as learners actively construct meaning through creative expression, negotiate understanding through collaborative processes, and develop metalinguistic awareness through translation reflection; language is seen as an active, contextual practice rather than static code, in keeping with ecolinguistic principles.

Multimodal pedagogical approaches recognize that meaning-making occurs through multiple semiotic resources beyond verbal language (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). In contemporary educational contexts, multimodality encompasses visual, auditory, spatial, and kinesthetic dimensions of communication (Jewitt 2006), creating opportunities for diverse learners to engage with content through their preferred modalities. The integration of storytelling and self-translation naturally incorporates multimodal elements through visual story planning, oral narrative performance, written text creation, and digital platform navigation, in line with Ginting *et al.*'s (2024) findings that digital storytelling approaches enhance learning retention through "engaging visuals" and multiple sensory channels, accommodating diverse learning styles (Cameron 2001).

2.4. Inclusive and Integrated Approaches to Ecolinguistic Language Teaching in Primary Education

Young learners benefit from holistic, meaning-focused approaches that integrate language learning with content exploration (Garton and Copeland 2019); storytelling naturally supports these developmental needs by providing contextual scaffolding and emotional engagement (Cameron 2001; Ellis and Brewster 2014). The training of primary teachers requires particular attention to age-appropriate methodologies and inclusive practices (Murphy 2014); student-teachers must develop both linguistic competence and pedagogical content knowledge while learning to address diverse classroom populations, where

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL, see Coyle *et al.*, 2010), provides a complementary framework for ecolinguistic storytelling approaches.

CLIL's emphasis on meaningful, content-driven language learning accommodates the integration of environmental content through narrative creation, while supporting critical thinking and intercultural understanding (Marsh 2012). The storytelling-and-self-translation approach incorporates CLIL principles through its integration of environmental science, cultural studies, and linguistic analysis within narrative creation tasks, developing both language competence and content knowledge simultaneously (Dalton-Puffer 2011). The environmental focus of student-created stories demonstrates how narrative-based CLIL can foster ecological literacy alongside linguistic development, supporting contemporary calls for sustainability-focused education (UNESCO 2017).

Inclusive language teaching requires approaches that accommodate learners with diverse needs, including those with special educational needs (SEN).⁴ Storytelling and narrative-based approaches show particular promise for SEN learners as they provide multiple pathways for engagement and expression (Reid and Green 2018; Kormos and Smith 2012), facilitate the interconnection of individual, social, and environmental factors in learning, and foster a broader understanding where validating multiple ways of knowing and expressing experience becomes essential to create truly inclusive learning environments.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Data Collection Instruments

This study employs a case study methodology (Yin 2018) to examine the implementation of storytelling and self-translation activities within an ecolinguistic framework. Such approach was selected as it allows for in-depth exploration of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly suitable for examining innovative pedagogical approaches. The research design integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to provide comprehensive understanding of both process and outcomes of the educational intervention carried out.

The study involved 76 student-teachers of Primary Education in their fifth year of study, participating in a COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) project titled *Storytelling for L2 teaching* in 2021. Participants were from two partner universities (Roma Tre University, Italy, and UVIC-UCC Central University of Catalonia, Spain) collaborating in international initiatives, representing diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. All participants were engaged in their final year of teacher preparation, providing them with both learner and future-educator perspectives on the pedagogical approach.

⁴The Italian context of “Bisogni Educativi Speciali” (BES) encompasses a broader conception of special needs, including socio-cultural disadvantage and linguistic diversity (Ianes and Canevaro 2015).

The cohort included individuals with varying levels of target language proficiency (ranging from B1 to C1 on the CEFR scale) and diverse L1 backgrounds, ensuring heterogeneity that would support meaningful intercultural exchange and collaborative learning. Participation was voluntary, with all student-teachers providing informed consent as part of the ethical approval process.

Data were collected through multiple sources to enable triangulation and comprehensive understanding of learning processes and outcomes. Records of project design, implementation procedures, and observational notes were maintained throughout the project duration. Forum discussions were conducted through the project's digital platform. A conclusive peer feedback exchange session, including both written comments and audio responses, provided data on collaborative learning processes and critical engagement with others' work.

The project utilized Moodle as the primary collaboration platform, with additional tools including Canva, PowerPoint, and Microsoft Teams for synchronous sessions.

3.2. Data Analysis

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to data analysis, integrating qualitative and quantitative analytical strategies. The analytical framework drew primarily on Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis. Data were analysed through familiarization with the dataset, generating initial codes (both inductive and deductive), developing themes through iterative comparison, reviewing themes for coherence, defining and naming themes in relation to research questions, and integrating thematic findings with quantitative outcomes in the final report.

Content and structural elements in student stories and translations underwent narrative analysis to understand "how research participants construct story and narrative from their own personal experience" (Lewis and Hildebrandt 2019), including character development, environmental representation, cultural references, and translation strategies. Stories were categorized by narrative structure, target audience, and thematic content to identify patterns in creative expression. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse story characteristics, participant demographics, and self-reported competency improvements. Frequency analysis examined the distribution of narrative structures, character types, and environmental themes across the story corpus.

Throughout the analytical process, researchers maintained reflexive awareness of their theoretical positioning and potential biases recognizing that "themes are actively constructed by the researcher from the data, rather than emerging or being discovered" (Naeem *et al.* 2023).

This study adhered to comprehensive ethical principles governing qualitative educational research. All participants received extensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential benefits and risks, data use, and their rights as research participants (Bhandari 2024). The consent process ensured participants fully understood the purpose of the research project and what their involvement would entail (in compliance with both Roma Tre and UVIC-UCC's

ethics policy). Participation was voluntary, with participants able to withdraw at any point.

All data were anonymized to protect participant identities. Given the international nature of the COIL project, particular attention was paid to cross-cultural sensitivity and data protection regulations across different jurisdictions. Digital platforms implemented appropriate security measures to protect participant information. The study recognized the potential vulnerability of participants as student-teachers in their final year of study, implementing measures to ensure participation decisions remained genuinely voluntary and free from coercion (Spriggs 2010).

All research data were stored securely in compliance with institutional data protection policies and relevant national legislation. Access was restricted to authorized research personnel, and data retention schedules followed established protocols for educational research.

4. Pedagogical Eco-Applications: Implementing Storytelling and Self-translation in the L2 Classroom

4.1. Designing Ecolinguistically Informed Activities

The practical application of storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework requires thoughtful instructional design that balances linguistic objectives with ecological awareness (Steffensen and Fill 2014). The principle of contextual relevance demands that stories connect to learners' lived experiences while introducing new linguistic and cultural elements (Van Lier 2004). In practice, this means selecting narrative themes that bridge the gap between familiar and unfamiliar, allowing learners to extend their conceptual frameworks while maintaining meaningful connections to their existing knowledge and experiences.

Multimodal engagement becomes essential as activities must interlock multiple senses and forms of expression, recognizing that ecosystems are characterized by diversity rather than uniformity. By combining visual, oral, and written storytelling modes, educators can create richer facilitative learning environments that mirror the complexity of real-world language use, accommodating different cognitive styles and learning preferences (Margottini and La Rocca 2019; Margottini and Rossi 2019).

The implementation of critical reflection opportunities in both creation and translation processes allows learners to examine their linguistic choices, cultural assumptions, and environmental implications while, through guided reflection, they begin to perceive language as a dynamic tool for meaning-making that carries cultural and ecological significance.

Collaborative construction of narratives works as scaffolding (Bruner 1990), allowing space for adult-led support within a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1978) to foster peer collaboration and co-construction, acknowledging that ecological learning occurs through interaction and is fostered by a participative integrating background (Zanelli 1986). The

supportive structures provided should enable learners to accomplish together what they could not achieve individually, foster knowledge building and the co-construction of meaning (Scardamalia and Bereiter 2006), and create learning readiness through deliberate practice (Trinchero 2015).

4.2. Case Study Implementation: Working with Primary Education Student-Teachers

The COIL project *Storytelling for L2 teaching* involved 76 fifth-year student-teachers of Primary Education from Roma Tre University (Italy) and UVIC-UCC Central University of Catalonia (Spain) in 2021. It aimed to develop participants' second language competence while simultaneously preparing them to implement similar approaches with primary school pupils, conveying "a sense of extended community, belonging, and participation to shared goals in building responsible citizenship" (Canals Botines and Leproni 2022: 152) which embodied the principles of internationalization and interculturality from the outset.

The project followed a structured sequence:

- **Phase 1 – Introduction and Analysis:** Webinars introduced participants to different storytelling traditions and structures from target language cultures; participants explored how stories reflected relationships between people, communities, and environments. Forum discussions examined linguistic, cultural, and ecological dimensions of sample stories, encouraging consideration of cultural assumptions embedded in narrative structures, environmental relationships, and how language choices reflect particular worldviews.
- **Phase 2 – Collaborative Creation:** Small groups (4-5 participants) produced original short stories (maximum one-and-a-half pages) in the target language. Groups ensured linguistic diversity, institutional representation, mixed proficiency levels (B1-C1 CEFR), and cultural background diversity. Each group received a narrative scaffolding framework (base-chain structure, see Canals Botines and Leproni 2022) providing structural guidance: story spine template, character development prompts, setting description guidelines, conflict resolution patterns, and linguistic scaffolding supports.
- **Phase 3 – Self-translation:** Students established criteria for translating and self-translating, considering what to translate versus what to keep in original form, target-oriented versus source-oriented approaches, cultural adaptation strategies, and treatment of untranslatable elements.
- **Phase 4 – Peer Review:** A structured multi-stage process involved anonymous initial reactions, detailed evaluation using rubrics assessing narrative coherence, cultural sensitivity, environmental consciousness, linguistic accuracy, and translation quality, followed by translation-focused review and feedback delivery through Moodle and Teams discussions.

28 stories across different narrative structures were produced, with the majority employing negative-to-positive causal structures (42%) or descriptive structures (35%). Stories targeted different age groups (primarily 5-7 years and 10-11 years) and featured diverse protagonists including girls, boys, fairies, rabbits, and bees. Significant eco-cultural focuses emerged: cultural characterization of protagonists, environmental settings, journey and adventure motifs facilitating cultural encounters, and themes promoting inclusive perspectives.

As the teachers conducting the COIL observed, and participants during the feedback session acknowledged, students gained active participation opportunities both individually and in small groups, enhanced ICT skills (such as those necessary to cope with the different tools they used to create the stories), improved language skills and soft skills such as collaborative writing, managing file sharing, or commenting on peer work, and developed intrinsic motivation and emotional awareness (Canals Botines and Leproni 2022) – a combination of essential skills for modern education (Margottini and La Rocca 2019) which supports Jones and Richards' (2016) idea that creativity as a collaborative and purposeful conduct is central (not optional) to successful language teaching and learning.

4.3. Addressing Diverse Learning Needs

The multisensory and multimodal nature of storytelling provides accessible entry points to language learning that traditional approaches may not offer, especially to SENs students. Storytelling creates “identity texts” – artifacts that hold personal significance for learners and validate their identities within the learning community (Cummins 2001). When combined with self-translation, these texts become powerful tools for developing metalinguistic awareness while affirming the value of each student's linguistic and cultural background.

For learners experiencing social disadvantage or marginalization, narrative creation and self-translation offer opportunities to articulate experiences that might otherwise remain unexpressed in the classroom.⁵ The act of translation becomes an act of empowerment, allowing students to bridge their lived experiences with new linguistic and cultural contexts. The process supports “translingual practice” – the strategic deployment of multiple linguistic resources to cope with social contexts (Canagarajah 2013), acknowledging and legitimizing the flexible, hybrid language use that characterizes many multilingual communities. This recognition is particularly important for heritage/minority language learners, who often inhabit complex linguistic landscapes where neat boundaries between languages may not exist.

As documented in the project notes, the combination of storytelling and self-translation addresses therapeutic pedagogical dimensions through validating multiple ways of knowing and expressing experience, opening spaces to develop approaches for learners with special educational needs, disadvantage and

⁵ See Freire's (1970) concept of “naming the world”.

marginality (Canals Botines and Leproni 2022). Students discover that their home languages are resources to be leveraged in the learning process.

4.4. Environmental Awareness through Linguistic Diversity

A key aspect of ecolinguistics is its attention to how language shapes environmental perception and action: functioning as dynamic systems, languages serve as reflections of their speakers' cultural principles, which emerge through their engagements with environmental contexts (Mühlhäuser 1996, 2003), ultimately producing linguistic diversity and variational complexity (Diamanti 2022: A194). The combination of storytelling and self-translation makes this relationship explicit by highlighting how different languages conceptualize human-environment interactions.

When creating stories in a second language, learners encounter new ways of describing natural phenomena, categorizing living beings, and expressing spatial relationships. The subsequent self-translation process brings these differences into sharp relief, prompting reflection on how language influences perception. As one COIL project participant observed, “I realized that describing a forest in [the target language] required me to notice details I might have overlooked in my first language”.

By slowing down (Cronin 2017), the linguistic transfer process through self-translation, learners develop greater sensitivity to both cultural and environmental nuances expressed through language. The process reveals the need for “a great multitude of stories, some of which may be invaluable in the reinvention of self and society in the transition to new ways of living and being” (Stibbe 2015: 193). Through storytelling and self-translation, learners become aware of the linguistic terrain they traverse (Steffensen and Fill 2014), recognizing how different languages offer different perspectives on the natural world and our place within it.⁶

The ultimate goal of integrating storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework is to foster participatory citizenship – an active engagement of learners in their communities and the broader world. This outcome emerges from what might be termed “narrative ecologies”, interconnected webs of stories that help individuals locate themselves within social and environmental systems.

By moving between languages to express personal and collective narratives, students practice the kind of flexible, contextually-responsive communication that characterizes effective global citizenship (Morgan and Ramanathan 2005), in line with the principles of Intercultural Communicative Language Learning (Liddicoat *et al.* 2003). This approach avoids the pitfalls of superficial

⁶ For instance, translating environmental degradation narratives makes different framings of responsibility visible. “The forest was destroyed” in passive English might become “hanno distrutto la foresta” in Italian, which grammatically requires acknowledging human agents (even if unnamed through the impersonal “hanno”). This linguistic difference prompts students to consider how language structures can either obscure or highlight human responsibility for environmental change. The Italian phrase “il mio paese” possesses a wide connotation, which in English is not available, needing to translate the phrase either with “my town” or “my village” or “my Country”, depending on the context.

multiculturalism by engaging deeply with the cognitive and affective dimensions of linguistic diversity: rather than simply celebrating difference, it invites critical engagement with how different linguistic framing affects perception and action in social and environmental contexts (Pennycook 2004).

5. Results and Findings

The analysis of data collected from the 76 student-teachers participating in the *Storytelling for L2 teaching* COIL project revealed significant outcomes across multiple dimensions of learning. This section presents findings organized thematically, drawing from quantitative analysis of story productions and qualitative analysis of participant reflections, forum discussions, and collaborative processes.

5.1. Narrative Production and Characteristics

The project resulted in the creation of 28 original stories across diverse narrative structures and thematic focuses. Analysis of story characteristics revealed several key patterns. *Narrative structures* were predominantly negative-to-positive causal (42%, n=12), followed by descriptive (35%, n=10), adventure/journey (16%, n=5), and circular/cyclical (7%, n=1). *Target age groups* focused primarily on 5-7 years (45%, n=13), then 11-12 years (32%, n=9), and 8-10 years (23%, n=6). *Character representation* comprised female protagonists (38%, n=11), male protagonists (31%, n=9), and non-human characters including bees, rabbits, fairies, and tree spirits (31%, n=8). The prevalence of non-human protagonists demonstrated participants' engagement with ecolinguistic themes and consideration of more-than-human perspectives in narrative construction.

5.2. Eco-Cultural Themes and Environmental Consciousness

Thematic analysis of story content revealed four primary areas where ecological consciousness manifested:

Theme 1 – Environmental Setting and Relationships: Stories frequently featured detailed environmental settings that played active roles in plot development. One representative example involved “an endangered honeycomb” requiring protection through community action.

Theme 2 – Cultural Characterization and Identity: Participants demonstrated sophisticated attention to cultural characterization, with careful consideration of character names, personal histories, and family backgrounds.

Theme 3 – Journey and Transformation Motifs: The majority of stories (58%) incorporated journey or transformation elements that facilitated exploration of cultural encounters and environmental awareness. These narratives often featured protagonists learning to navigate difference while developing ecological consciousness.

Theme 4 – Community and Collaborative Action: Stories frequently emphasized collective rather than individual solutions to challenges, reflecting

ecolinguistic principles of interconnectedness. Communities of diverse characters often worked together to address environmental problems or cultural misunderstandings.

5.3. Linguistic Development Outcomes

Participants reported significant improvements across multiple dimensions of language competence. Analysis of pre- and post-project reflections indicated enhanced comfort with creative language use. Participants reported finding words they wouldn't normally use, especially when describing environments and emotions, with increased awareness of how different languages conceptualize these experiences.

The self-translation component proved particularly effective in developing metalinguistic consciousness. Participants frequently commented on discovering “untranslatable” concepts and the need for creative solutions, realizing how much cultural knowledge is embedded in simple word choices.

5.4. Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Competence

The integration of storytelling and self-translation fostered significant development in cultural awareness. Participants demonstrated increased ability to examine their own cultural assumptions, questioning what they take for granted about their own cultural context.

Forum discussions revealed enhanced capacity for considering alternative viewpoints as participants engaged in discussions about cultural representation, character motivation, and appropriate adaptation strategies. The self-translation process highlighted cultural mediation skills, with participants making decisions about cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and contextual assumptions, developing “symbolic competence” (Kramsch 2009).

5.5. Collaborative and Digital Competences

The project structure fostered development of collaborative and technological skills. Participants reported significant improvement in using digital tools for story creation, sharing platforms, and multimedia integration. The peer review process proved particularly valuable for developing critical evaluation skills on both linguistic and cultural-ecological dimensions.

Working in international, asynchronous teams required participants to develop planning, coordination, and time management skills transferable to their future teaching contexts. One participant reflected: “Learning to give feedback on cultural sensitivity was challenging but important. It made me think about my own biases and how to discuss them respectfully”.

5.6. Transformative Learning Outcomes

Evidence of transformative learning emerged through analysis of participants' evolving perspectives. Many participants reported fundamental shifts in their

understanding of language education's purposes. Pre-project responses focused primarily on linguistic competence development, while post-project reflections incorporated broader goals including cultural awareness, environmental consciousness, and social responsibility. Participants also demonstrated increased awareness of environmental issues and the role of language in shaping environmental attitudes.

The project contributed to participants' development as reflective practitioners prepared to implement inclusive, culturally-responsive teaching approaches. Several participants created simplified versions of the activities for their teaching practicum, demonstrating practical application of project learning.

5.7. Challenges and Areas for Development

While outcomes were largely positive, analysis also revealed areas requiring attention. Some participants found the self-translation component cognitively demanding, particularly when working between linguistically distant language pairs; others struggled with evaluating cultural-ecological dimensions of stories, indicating the need for more detailed rubrics and exemplars. The international, asynchronous nature of collaboration created challenges for some groups, highlighting the importance of explicit project management support.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant potential of integrating storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework to enhance second language education while fostering ecological consciousness and inclusive learning environments. The results address the identified research gap regarding empirical evidence for ecolinguistically informed pedagogical approaches and provide concrete evidence for the effectiveness of narrative-based language learning.

6.1. Implications for Eco-linguistic Pedagogy and Inclusive Education

The study's findings support the proposition that language education can serve as a vehicle for ecological consciousness development while maintaining focus on linguistic objectives. The emergence of environmental themes in 67% of student-created stories, despite no explicit requirement for ecological content, suggests that engagement with narrative creation naturally provides space for student-teachers' marked environmental awareness. The effectiveness of storytelling aligns with recent research emphasizing the role of narrative in sustainability education (Bruder and Bouherar 2023; Kuusalu *et al.* 2023).

The integration of self-translation proved particularly effective in developing awareness of how linguistic choices both reflect and shape environmental understanding. Participants' recognition of "untranslatable" environmental concepts and their creative solutions for cross-linguistic communication demonstrate the development of ecological sensitivity alongside linguistic

competence, supporting the feasibility of transformative language teaching for sustainability.

The study's findings reveal significant potential for storytelling and self-translation approaches to support inclusive education and address diverse learning needs. The natural accommodation of different proficiency levels within collaborative storytelling groups validates theoretical arguments for narrative-based approaches in inclusive education contexts. Particularly significant was the emergence of multiple pathways for meaningful participation within collaborative storytelling activities. Participants could contribute through content development, linguistic refinement, cultural consultation, or creative enhancement, reflecting principles of Universal Design for Learning (Meyer *et al.* 2014; CAST 2018) while maintaining academic rigor.

The self-translation component proved especially valuable for heritage language learners, who found opportunities to bridge their multilingual identities through creative expression, validating arguments for pedagogical approaches that legitimate the flexible, hybrid language use that characterizes many multilingual communities (Canagarajah 2013). However, the study also revealed that some participants required additional support to engage effectively with translation tasks, particularly when working between linguistically distant language pairs, suggesting the need for differentiated scaffolding approaches.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The case study design limits generalizability across different educational contexts and cultural settings. The participant cohort, comprising student-teachers in their final year of study, represents a specific population with particular motivations and capabilities that may not transfer to other learner groups.

The study's duration provides limited insight into the long-term sustainability of learning gains or the persistence of ecological consciousness development. Future longitudinal research could examine whether ecolinguistic awareness influences participants' subsequent teaching practices and environmental behaviors. The international, online format of the COIL project may have limited the depth of collaborative engagement possible in face-to-face contexts.

Notwithstanding the positive outcomes demonstrated, the mechanisms underlying these connections remain incompletely understood, highlighting the need to isolate specific components of the approach to identify the most effective elements for different learning objectives. The study's focus on English as a target language limits understanding of how ecolinguistic storytelling approaches might function with different language pairs or in multilingual educational settings.

As language educators continue to explore the potential of integrating storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework, several promising directions for future development emerge as to digital technologies, environmental education integration, and participatory research. Digital

storytelling platforms, collaborative translation tools, and multimedia composition environments allow learners to create multimodal ecologies of meaning, combining written narrative with soundscapes, visual mapping, and authentic story exchange with distant communities. Deeper integration between language learning and environmental education can be achieved through narratives exploring immediate environmental contexts, examining how different languages conceptualize environmental challenges, and correlating indigenous and dominant language narratives about human-nature relationships. Future research could explore approaches that position learners as co-investigators through research journals tracking linguistic and cultural development, peer-collaboration across linguistic backgrounds, and development of learner-led frameworks for assessing ecological dimensions of language learning.

These directions promise to further expand the impact of this approach, contributing to the creation of narratives that support sustainable and equitable relationships across linguistic, cultural, and environmental boundaries.

6.3. Methodological Contributions

This study contributes methodologically by demonstrating the feasibility of mixed-methods approaches to examining complex pedagogical interventions: the integration of narrative analysis with thematic analysis provided complementary insights into both creative products and learning processes; the involvement of participants as co-creators of knowledge demonstrates the potential for research approaches that embody the ecological principles they investigate.

However, the study also revealed challenges in assessing ecolinguistic learning outcomes through traditional educational metrics, as the development of ecological consciousness, while evident in participant reflections and creative productions, proves difficult to quantify using standardized assessment approaches. Future research could benefit from developing validated instruments for assessing ecological consciousness development in language learning contexts.

The positive outcomes achieved by student-teachers suggest that ecolinguistic approaches could be effectively integrated into teacher preparation curricula. The participants' success in adapting the storytelling and self-translation approach for use with primary school pupils demonstrates the transferability of ecolinguistic pedagogical strategies across educational levels, supporting arguments for incorporating sustainability-focused approaches throughout teacher education programmes rather than treating environmental education as a separate component.

The project's emphasis on reflective practice provides a comprehensive framework for preparing teachers to address linguistic, cultural, and environmental challenges in diverse educational contexts. However, the fact that some participants required significant support to engage effectively with the cultural and ecological dimensions suggests the need for explicit preparation in ecolinguistic theories and practices within teacher education programmes.

7. Implementing the Approach: Practical Guidelines for Educators

7.1. Sequencing and Scaffolding Activities

Effective implementation of storytelling and self-translation requires careful sequencing and scaffolding to support learners through what can be cognitively demanding tasks. The following progression, which follows what was applied in the COIL project, provides a framework that can be adapted to different educational contexts:

1. Introduction and Familiarization

- Introduce diverse stories from target culture(s)
- Guide students to notice linguistic features, cultural references, environmental connections
- Build receptive familiarity before productive tasks
- Establish meta-cognitive foundation through reflection (for older learners) or guided noticing through age-appropriate scaffolding (for younger learners)

2. Guided Story Creation

- Provide narrative scaffolding framework (story spine template, character development prompts, setting description guidelines, conflict resolution patterns)
- Introduce key vocabulary and grammatical structures within storytelling context
- Use visual prompts to stimulate imagination while scaffolding language production
- Form collaborative planning groups (mixed-proficiency where appropriate)

3. Self-translation

- Begin with limited exercises on short passages
- Guide students to consider: what to translate vs. what to keep in original form; target-oriented vs. source-oriented approaches; cultural adaptation strategies; creative solutions for untranslatable elements
- Progress from structured exercises to more autonomous work
- Maintain records of difficulties and insights

4. Reflection and Analysis

- Provide structured opportunities for examining creative and translation processes
- Tools: reflective journals, forum discussions, peer feedback exchanges, self-assessment against rubrics
- Focus on cultural assumptions, environmental representations, idiomatic expressions

Throughout this sequence, maintaining what Van Lier (2004) calls “ecological balance” becomes crucial to ensure that cognitive demands are appropriately matched to support systems, and that linguistic objectives remain in harmony with content exploration, in the perspective that language learning is both about acquiring forms, and developing the capacity to cope with complex linguistic and cultural ecologies.

7.2. Assessment Considerations

Assessing learning in this integrated approach requires attention to multiple dimensions of development, beyond traditional language, to acknowledge the complexity of learning processes and the diverse ways in which competence manifests (Margottini and La Rocca 2019).

Assessment Instruments:

1. **Holistic Story Assessment Rubric** (4-point scale: Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Advanced)
 - Narrative coherence and structure
 - Cultural sensitivity and representation
 - Environmental consciousness integration
 - Linguistic accuracy and creativity
 - Character development and dialogue
2. **Translation Quality Assessment Framework**
 - Fidelity to source meaning
 - Cultural adaptation strategies
 - Creative problem-solving for untranslatable elements
 - Metalinguistic reflection quality
3. **Peer Feedback Protocol** (Structured prompts focusing on cultural elements, environmental relationships, translation choices, cultural authenticity)
4. **Self-assessment** (Students evaluate their own development across language proficiency, cultural awareness, ecological understanding)
5. **Authentic application** (Students share stories with real audiences, demonstrating capacity to engage across linguistic and cultural boundaries)

7.3. Adapting for Different Educational Contexts

While the case-study described earlier involved student-teachers, the storytelling and self-translation approach demonstrates remarkable adaptability across diverse educational contexts.

For early language learners (ages 5-7), the emphasis shifts to oral storytelling with substantial visual support. Self-translation activities focus on key vocabulary and concepts rather than extended texts. Teachers might use picture sequences to scaffold story creation (e.g. tools like visual story cards or digital platforms like Padlet), with translation occurring through collaborative discussion, towards developing basic ecological awareness alongside fundamental language skills. Reflection at this level takes the form of oral discussion, drawing, or guided questioning rather than written journals. Assessment may focus on oral expression, vocabulary use, and participation in collaborative storytelling.

Secondary students benefit from incorporating critical analysis of how stories reflect particular worldviews, and they can experiment with different literary genres and styles in both story creation and translation. The project's emphasis on interdisciplinary intersections becomes particularly relevant as students connect narrative work to history, science, and social studies curricula, also incorporating CLIL Translation challenges as opportunities to explore complex cultural and environmental issues, and to engage with more sophisticated metalinguistic analysis, examining how different languages structure environmental discourse and considering the socio-political implications of translation choices.

Adult learners may connect storytelling to professional or personal interests, making the approach particularly motivating. Self-translation supports specific communicative goals relevant to their lives, while the ecological dimension takes on practical significance as adults need to face real-world linguistic and cultural boundaries. Also, explicit engagement with ecolinguistic theoretical concepts, and application to real-world linguistic and cultural boundaries can be triggered.

Heritage language learners find particular value in using storytelling and self-translation to explore bicultural identity, which allows them to examine the “powerful relationship between language and identity” (Norton and Toohey 2011: 413) through personal narrative. Translation becomes a means of bridging generational divides, as students might translate family stories or explore how cultural narratives shift across languages. For these learners, validation of home language and culture becomes particularly important, and self-translation serves as a powerful tool for legitimizing their linguistic repertoires.

Mixed-ability classrooms present both challenges and opportunities for this approach, which naturally accommodates diverse strengths: groups can be formed to allow some students to contribute more to content development while others focus on linguistic refinement, to ensure balanced representation across proficiency levels, while allowing multiple pathways for meaningful contribution and opportunities for peer scaffolding.

As documented throughout the case study, this creates satisfying cognitive, social and affective development as learners support each other's growth, while the ecological perspective emphasizes that diversity strengthens rather than weakens the learning community. The flexibility of the approach makes it particularly valuable for inclusive educational settings, as it can integrate various entry points and forms of participation while maintaining high cognitive engagement for all learners.

8. Conclusion: Towards an Ecolinguistic Pedagogy

This paper has explored how the integration of storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework can enhance language teaching and learning while promoting inclusion and participatory citizenship. By creating spaces where languages interact without hierarchical dominance, this approach responds to the need “to re-orientate linguistics to ‘external landmarks’ that could lead the language wanderer from the structural wasteland into a fertile terrain of human activity, saturated by language, interactivity and co-existence” (Steffensen and Fill 2014: 7).

The study outcomes validate that analyzing and promoting storytelling techniques for the conscious use of narration and translation makes it possible to construct shared meanings while improving learning processes (Canals Botines and Leproni 2022). When students create stories in their target language and translate them into their first language (or vice versa), they develop critical language awareness essential for full participation in multilingual, multicultural societies, transforming narrative thought (Bruner 1987) into a tool for ecological understanding, allowing them to perceive how people, telling their own story, provide a meaning to their life experience.

The emphasis on contextual sensitivity, critical reflection, and ethical consideration supports Stibbe’s (2015) vision of a transformative ecolinguistics. In language classrooms implementing storytelling and self-translation, the experiential learning provided facilitates a combined ecosystem of language and thinking, wherein the word and the world are reconstituted to foster respect and participation.

The documented benefits for inclusive learning environments show that this approach addresses the need to move beyond static views of language as system (Norton and Toohey 2011). The integration of storytelling and self-translation recognizes language learning as a dynamic process of meaning-making that acknowledges boundary-crossing, multilingualism, and human agency, addressing the needs of diverse learners, including those with special educational needs, heritage language backgrounds, or experiences of marginalization.

Creativity emerges as central to successful language teaching and learning (Jones and Richards 2016; Canals Botines and Leproni 2022). The eco-narrative approach described in this paper places creativity at the heart of the language learning process, inviting students to become active participants in the construction of meaning across linguistic boundaries while developing linguistic competence alongside the ecological awareness necessary for responsible global citizenship.

In an era characterized by environmental vulnerability and cultural complexity, language education must move beyond instrumental communication to foster the kind of deep understanding that can support sustainable relationships between people, cultures, and environments, enabling students and teachers alike to reimagine language education as a practice of ecological engagement (Pennycook 2004). The integration of storytelling and self-translation within an ecolinguistic framework offers a promising path toward this vital educational goal. Through digital technologies, environmental

education connections, and participatory research, the on-going exploration of how storytelling and self-translation can foster ecological consciousness alongside linguistic competence can contribute to the creation of narratives that support sustainable and equitable relationships across linguistic, cultural, and environmental boundaries, tracing a pathway toward a more ecologically aware and socially responsible language education.

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