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Primary bilingual classrooms
Translations and translanguaging

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Introduction

This chapter considers the use of translation in primary classrooms. But most importantly, it attempts to differentiate translation from the concept of translanguaging. To draw a clear distinction, we focus on primary classrooms, and especially on those school settings where bilingualism and multilingualism are present. In some cases, a new language is being taught to language majority children (as an additional language) or language minoritized children (as a dominant additional language). In other cases, bilingual or multilingual minoritized children are being taught in two (or more) languages. The role of translation and translanguaging has had different histories in these diverse primary settings, and we will see how translanguaging rests on a different epistemology than that of translation. Translanguaging also has a much shorter intellectual history.

Translation has always been the bridge between two cultures, and two languages. In education, it has had an important role in the teaching of foreign languages, although it has often been neglected, especially since the mid-20th century as more communicative approaches to foreign language study became popular (Richard and Rodgers 1990). However, for language minoritized students, translation has never been an accepted strategy to make meaning, either in monolingual or bilingual or multilingual programmes of all types. Recently, however, translation as a pedagogical strategy has made some headway (Witte et al. 2009; Cook 2010; Pym et al. 2013; Tsagari and Floros 2013; Laviosa 2014, 2019) (in this volume, Ardizzoni and Holmes; Byram et al.; Corcoll and Mitchell-Smith, 2016; González-Davies, 2014; Hartmann, Hélot and Benert; and others).

In the 21st century, as bilingualism has been increasingly seen as a marketable global resource readily exchangeable in the marketplace (Petrovic 2015; Heller and Duchêne, 2012), the teaching of additional languages has moved to the primary level for language majority students. And as programmes in language awareness, second language, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), as well as bilingual programmes proliferate at the primary level, translation to learn an additional language has had somewhat of a comeback (see, for example, Prasad 2018). This trend has also been felt in bilingual and multilingual programmes especially for language minoritized communities, where the recent development of translanguaging
pedagogy (Garcia, Johnson and Seltzer 2017; Garcia and Kleyn 2017) has brought translation along, as a strategy to respond to new ways of understanding bilingualism (Garcia and Li Wei 2014). And yet, as we will see in this chapter, translanguage theory responds to a different epistemology about language and bilingualism/multilingualism than that of translation.

This chapter will first consider the role that translation has had in the history of language education, in relationship to the history of translanguage, specifically at the primary level. It will then present theories and research findings on translation in translanguage classrooms, before focusing on pedagogic approaches teachers have developed that take these findings into account. We then conclude by identifying future directions of translation and translanguage studies in the primary classroom.

Historical perspectives

From translation as bridge to keeping languages separate

Language education has historically followed the Greek and Latin tradition of identifying parts of speech and rules in a written text and then applying them to construct text in a new language. In some ways, translation as a means of studying a foreign language has been with us for a long time (Coleman 1929). Yet the grammar-translation method that became prevalent throughout the 18th and 19th century started to crumble particularly in the second half of the 20th century (Richard and Rodgers 1990). During this time there was greater awareness that language education needed to go beyond that of ‘foreign’ language study, since there were many learners of what were deemed to be not foreign, but ‘second languages’ (Cook 2016). And specifically, for our topic, language education started to move to the primary level.

The main challenge to the grammar-translation method came with Berlitz, the German American who at the end of the 19th century came up with the direct method. Although forbidding any type of translation, language learning in the direct method also included grammar and vocabulary, and not necessarily authentic communication. But as young children started learning an additional language, the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary was deemed inadequate. Young children were seen as not yet capable of reflecting about grammatical categories or about ‘equivalences’ in two languages and were said to have little metalinguistic awareness. Translation, especially for young children, became forbidden in the many approaches to language learning that followed the direct method.

There was little attention worldwide to the language learning of young children until the later part of the 20th century when there was a worldwide ethnic revival (Fishman 1985). This revival was spurred by the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia where multilingualism was rampant, the greater recognition of some regional minorities in Western Europe and of indigenous groups especially in Latin America and the Pacific, the Civil Rights struggles in the United States, and the ascent to power of the Québécois party. One of the pillars of the nascent field of language policy became acquisition planning (Cooper 1989), with an emphasis on who plans what language to be acquired by new users, for whom and how.

The new post-colonial geopolitical order, where actors with different linguistic practices were visible, encouraged the development of different approaches to language learning among young children at the primary level. On the one hand, after the Québécois party gained political ascendency in Québec, the dominant Anglophones supported the design of immersion bilingual education programmes for their children in order to make them bilingual. Especially prevalent were early-full immersion bilingual programmes where young Anglophone children started primary school totally through French. On the other hand, some minoritized
populations who lived in bilingual or multilingual contexts were given access to transitional bilingual education in the early grades, with the explicit purpose of having them shift to the dominant language later on. This happened in the United States, but also, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Only when those language minoritized groups had gained some measure of political power was there access to developmental bilingual education programmes for language revitalization. This was the case, for example, of the Māoris of New Zealand. But despite the bilingual education approach followed – immersion, transitional, and developmental – translation was said to be forbidden. Translation was also forbidden despite the political positioning of the group engaged in bilingual education, that is, whether they were language majorities seeking bilingualism, language minoritized groups forced into monolingualism in the dominant language, or language minoritized threatened groups reactivating a measure of political power.

In Canada, the immersion bilingual programmes at the primary level, designed for the Anglophone majority, followed the disdain for translations of the direct method. Young Anglophone children were immersed in French, and translations were strictly prohibited. The approach was based on adding a new separate language, French, to the dominant one, English, by ensuring that the Anglophone-dominant children maintained their Anglo identity intact. Translation was forbidden because children were expected to think, feel, and speak as Anglophones who spoke two separate languages, but not as bilinguals and certainly not as Francophone Québécois. Bilingualism was understood as the addition of a second language (an L2) to a first language (an L1); that is, bilingualism was said to be additive (Lambert 1974).

In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, language minoritized populations were expected to translate themselves into the colonial dominant group. Because language education was based on western epistemologies of language, and of the efforts exerted by nation states to construct themselves into a homogenous whole through one named language, the multilingualism of the indigenous population was erased and misunderstood. Instruction for indigenous minoritized peoples consisted of calquing what had been legitimated in western dominant contexts, most often in the colonial language. Transitional bilingual education became a post-colonial ‘experiment’ in most African and Asian countries, and a more democratic experiment in some countries of Latin America. The language of the ‘other’ also became regimented, its script developed so that it could be used to alphabetize the very young, but not throughout education. Bilingualism in this case was said to be subtractive (Lambert 1974).

In the United States, transitional bilingual education in the second half of the 20th century was experienced as a short-lived policy to improve the education of groups that had been conquered and colonized – Mexican Americans in the southwest, Puerto Ricans in the northeast, and Native Americans. It was this approach, grounded in the teaching of English to these groups, that was then used to educate the large immigrant populations that started arriving in the US from the latter part of the 20th century through today.

In all transitional bilingual education programmes, teachers were told to use only the language of instruction, whether that was the language designated to be ‘of the group’, or the dominant language – for example, English in the US. Translation was forbidden regardless of whether only one language was used until the transition to the dominant language took place, as in the case of many African, Asian and Latin American countries, or whether from the beginning there was some instruction in the dominant language as well, as was the case of programmes in the United States.

And yet, because it was impossible for these language minoritized children who were living in bilingual/multilingual societies to be educated in only one language, there was much use of what was said to be ‘code-switching’, that is, going from one language to another so that
students understood the lesson. That is, to avoid formal translation as a pedagogical strategy, teachers often were said to code-switch, something that was supposed to be avoided, even though many claimed its value in teaching. (See, for example, Martin (2005) for Africa, and Jacobson and Faltis (1990) for the United States.)

In language minoritized situations where it became possible to establish more developmental forms of bilingual education, translation became equally forbidden. The two languages were expected to have separate spaces, allocated through day, time, subject, teachers, room, even building! For example, the Kura Kupapa Māori (‘Māori philosophy schools’) independent primary schools generally often have a different ‘English language’ building. The idea is that for the other subjects, everything is done through Māori. But again, as in the cases discussed earlier, much of what is often described as code-switching was taking place.

**Back to translation as bridge**

As more language minoritized young children and the languages they understood were used in primary education, language education theories that relied on monolingual instruction in the ‘target’ language, without any translation, started to be challenged. This was a result of language minoritized communities acquiring some sense of themselves as bilingual agentic subjects, but not in the sense of additive bilingualism, as defined by earlier scholarship, or in the sense of subtractive bilingualism to which they had previously been subjected. Bilingual minoritized communities started claiming their more dynamic bilingualism (García 2009), and bilingual scholars started describing their language use through this more dynamic lens. Along also came the questioning of a language education approach to develop bilingualism that was basically monolingual, an approach to bilingualism in education that was, as García (2009) pointed out, monoglossic. Scholars started to view translation again as a possible legitimate strategy to learn the language of the other.

As the 20th century came to a close, the European Union, eager to construct a sense of European citizenship, started promoting the vision that European citizens should learn two additional languages besides their first language. The Council of Europe coined the term plurilingualism to mean the ability “to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural action, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures” (Coste, Moore and Zarate 2009, p. 11). The goal of language teaching in the European Union became plurilingualism as a competence (Hélot and Cavalli 2017). Primary schools started developing pedagogies that valued cross-linguistic awareness, with translation as an important strategy (Witte et al. 2009; Pym et al. 2013; Laviosa 2014, 2019).

This more dynamic plurilingualism became a European value as the complex multilingualism of language minoritized communities also came into view. Besides plurilingualism, terms like polylanguaging, polylingual languageing (Jørgensen 2008), metrolinguism (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015), translingual practices (Canagarajah 2013), and translanguaging (García 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010; Li Wei 2011, 2018; García and Li Wei 2014; Otleguy et al. 2015, 2018) signalled the shift of modernist understandings of language and bilingualism to the more complex linguistic experiences of both language minoritized groups and language minorities that accompanied globalization and a neoliberal economy (Blommaert 2010; García et al. 2017).

Dynamic multilingual practices under a variety of terms became acknowledged and more studied by sociolinguists in the 21st century. Two of those terms, however, became more used
by language educators and applied linguists – plurilingualism and translanguageing. Although used interchangeably by many, plurilingualism and translanguageing have different beginnings, goals, purposes, and epistemologies (see García and Otheguy 2019). A focus on the role of translation in language education enables us to more clearly mark the different epistemologies of the two terms, for translation bridges cultures and languages, which is what plurilingualism desires, whereas translanguageing dwells in the entanglements of cultures and languages as it makes visible power differentials.

From translation as bridge to transcending the bridge

Translation has largely been seen as simply rendering in another language what has been said in the first. Professional translators work on rendering in another language the ideas, messages, style, metaphors, and even feelings and emotions of the author of the work. Translation acts as a bridge between languages and cultures, but it is a crossing, enabling the monolingual reader to access material that has been written by a monolingual author, and expressing through another language the worldviews of another culture. Even though translation is a bridge, it acts as an over-pass between two or more languages, cultures, people, or identities. It connects, but keeps worlds and words separate.

As colonial empires crumbled, translation was used to enable readers to read the work of former colonies. And yet, as the Argentinean semiotician, Walter Mignolo, has said, translation became “a tool to absorb the colonial difference” (2000, p. 3). Translation, argues Mignolo, attempted to erase the differences that exist in the colonial experience, translating the experiences and knowledges of subaltern racial/ethnic/sexual bodies as if they were those of the colonizers. In that sense, the intellectual knowledges of those who are colonized are silenced and dismissed as folklore or magic. When translation is used today as a strategy in educational programmes that aim to simply develop the plurilingual competence of children, it is mainly done across dominant European languages. Thus, translation constructs a bridge that leaves power differentials intact.

The term translanguageing, however, was coined in Welsh to describe a bilingual pedagogy developed by Cen Williams (1994), who used English and Welsh to develop the bilingual performances and identity of Welsh children in primary classrooms. It was translated into English by Colin Baker (2001). Translanguageing is epistemologically different from translation. Translanguageing was coined ‘in the borderlands’ (Anzaldúa 1987) by bilingual scholars within a minoritized context. It has been said that translanguageing must be understood through decolonial theory, in which the thinking occurs from and with subaltern racial/ethnic/sexual bodies (García 2019, García and Alvis, forthcoming). In addition to fighting the effects of the exploitation and the domination that came with colonialism, decolonial theory insists on contesting the production of knowledge and subjectivities that remained after the elimination of the colonial administration (Grosfoguel 2002; Quijano 2007). Translanguageing works, as Mignolo has said, “towards the restitution of the colonial difference, that colonial translation attempted to erase” (p. 4). In many ways, translanguageing is positioned not as an overpass bridge to go from one language and culture to another, but in the fluid corriente of practices that work within the entanglement of words and worlds in which many minoritized bilingual children live. García et al. (2017) speak about the translanguageing corriente, to emphasize the fluidity and dynamism by which children who live in ‘the borderlands’ do language.
Research approaches and key findings

Translation is being used as an effective pedagogical strategy, but it is merely that. Translanguaging encompasses a theoretical sociolinguistic perspective that emerges from a bilingual minoritized context, which disrupts traditional understandings of language and bilingualism. This in turn has implications for pedagogical approaches. In this section, we will focus on research and findings that have had an impact on the development of translanguaging theory, especially as related to language education in primary classrooms.

The development of translanguaging theory owes much to the concept of heteroglossia advanced by Bakhtin (1981), as well as the proposal of the disinvolution of named languages put forth by Makoni and Pennycook (2007). Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia pointed to the diversity of features and voices contained within a single discourse; all language is then heteroglossic. Makoni and Pennycook took heteroglossia one step further, questioning the concept of named languages, and pointing to the ways in which the construction of a named language contributed to the dominance of some peoples and the exclusion of others. If indeed language was “heteroglot through and through” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 291) and named languages were social inventions (Makoni and Pennycook 2007), how then was it possible that bilingualism was understood as simply the addition of two languages, and that language education focused on that addition? This was the question that scholars working on translanguaging attempted to answer.

The term translanguaging spread beyond Wales and was used to describe the dynamic bilingualism of bilingual children and children in bilingual classrooms (García 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010; Creese and Blackledge 2010; Li Wei 2011; Canagarajah 2013; for Wales, see Lewis et al. 2012a, 2012b). Some language educators adhere to what García and Lin (2017) have called “a weak version” of translanguaging, arguing that bilinguals do have two linguistic systems (MacSwan 2017), although they deploy them in dynamic discourse. Many other scholars, however, adhere to a ‘strong version of translanguaging’ in which bilingual children are said to have a unitary repertoire of meaning-making signs (García and Li Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015, 2018). We adhere to this strong version of translanguaging theory which posits that when bilinguals ‘do’ language, they are not drawing from two separate linguistic systems, one that corresponds simply to one named language, separate from that of another named language. Translanguaging theory instead views the bilingual speaker’s psycholinguistic reality as being unitary, an extended repertoire of features and signs that have been assembled (Pennycook 2017), given how they have lived their lives and the people with whom they have had opportunities to interact (Li Wei 2011, 2018; García and Li Wei 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015, 2018; García 2019).

As we will see in the next section, teachers in translanguaging classrooms often use translation exercises. However, they do so not to promote the children’s intercultural communication with language that is ‘appropriate’ for the other group, as do those whose goal is to develop the children’s plurilingual competence. Instead, teachers in translanguaging primary classrooms use translation as a strategy to empower bilingual children so that they use their unitary semiotic repertoire to make meaning for themselves as minoritized beings, and thus develop their agency as bilingual subjects. These teachers are not looking for ways of saying things in the language of the other, but in the children’s own language and through the children’s own experiences and lives.

A translanguaging view of young children in primary classrooms enables us to see them as having complete and full repertoires. A translanguaging classroom, whether officially bilingual or monolingual, would insist that children’s full linguistic repertoire be made available to
them to make meaning of their lives and of the politics surrounding their language use. New linguistic features cannot be simply added as separate from those of the language children speak; children integrate them fully into their language repertoire as their own, and not simply as a second language.

When primary school teachers have what García et al. (2017) call a ‘translanguaging stance’, they may use translation. However, it is important to keep the epistemological difference between translation and translanguaging up front. Traditional translation, we repeat, upholds different named languages and makes possible for someone to communicate with someone said to speak another named language. The communication is intercultural, with each language and culture remaining intact. Translanguaging, however, works with the transculturación (Ortiz 1940) of people in most diverse societies. People who are intermingling with others and with different ways of doing language do not remain the same. Translanguaging makes the colonial difference visible. That is why translanguaging in itself is a political act (Flores 2014).

The term translanguaging is often used interchangeably with that of code-switching. However, like translation, code-switching is understood as a going back and forth between one named language and the other, which is not what translanguaging implies. Whereas code-switching refers to language use within a speaker or writer, translation is said to occur between different people and cultures. But translanguaging differs from both the concepts of code-switching and translation in that bilingual speakers are said to be drawing from a unitary linguistic repertoire to make meaning for themselves, a repertoire that is not simply cognitively dual. That is, because named languages are social representations, laypeople perceive signs as belonging to different linguistic systems. But for bilingual speakers, these signs are also part of their semiotic repertoire, a repertoire made up of signs that correspond to how and with whom they have lived and the opportunities for languaging that they have had.

When young bilingual children perform tasks with their own features, teachers with a translanguaging stance do not see their performances and acquisition as being ‘incomplete’ because they are not comparing them to the performances of so-called ‘native’ speakers. Instead, as we will see in the next section, they leverage the children’s full semiotic repertoire that has been constructed through their experience as racial/ethnic/sexual/classed beings. In so doing, teachers extend the meaning-making repertoire of young children and make them understand the complexity of their own repertoire and that of their listeners. Teachers help young children to become conscious of their audience. In selecting signs from their repertoire, children explore how to select the best clues for listeners who are also acknowledged to have a complex history as racial/ethnic/sexual/classed beings. That is, teachers help all children construct themselves as legitimate language users and to see ‘others’ in their complexity and languaging as a complex act.

The differences that we have drawn between traditional concepts of bilingualism/multilingualism, the more dynamic concept of plurilingualism, and the more radical concept of translanguaging leads to different pedagogical approaches. We focus in the next section on the pedagogical differences regarding traditional translation that became evident once the concept of plurilingualism and translanguaging made their entrance into applied linguistics in the early 21st century.

Pedagogic approaches and methods

Language education programmes that follow the plurilingualism ethos address the development of the two plurilingual components identified by the Council of Europe – (1) plurilingualism
as competence, meaning the capacity to use and learn more than one language, and (2) plurilingualism as value, that is, the development of linguistic tolerance or equal valuing of all varieties of language used.

The first component, plurilingualism as competence, has resulted in new directions of the so-called core foreign language education programmes. Whereas in the core foreign language programmes the language was the subject of instruction, in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes language is taught through content (Marsh 2002; Coyle 2008; Marsh et al. 2010). Because CLIL programmes start as early as possible, and because the additional language is used, rather than taught, they are based on similar principles to the immersion programmes described previously. However, because instruction is less intense, often lasting one to two periods of daily instruction, translation is a frequently used pedagogical strategy.

The second component, plurilingualism as value, has been responsible for the development of many multilingual awareness projects especially at the primary level. Some of these projects focus on developing plurilingual competence by contrasting, for example, different Romance languages (Aratújo and Sá and Melo 2009). Translation is often an important pedagogical practice in these programmes as young children become aware of the similarities and differences among different Romance languages. Some projects go beyond European languages and include migrant languages to make children conscious of the linguistic diversity in their communities (Perregaux 1995; Melo-Pfeifer 2015). One initiative among these lines funded by the European Commission in five countries is the Evalang project directed by Michel Candelier (see Candelier 2003). Hélot and Young (2006) report on a project they launched, the Didenheim project, in which young children were engaged with many languages, including those of the community in which they lived. In all these projects the goal is to have young children translate the experiences of others into their own languages. By doing so, they become aware and tolerant of others’ experiences, cultures, and languages.

The term translinguaging, as we have said, was coined to refer to a bilingual pedagogical approach. But because of its origin in a minoritized bilingual Welsh community, the pedagogical practice was a way to make Welsh children aware of the power of their own dynamic bilingualism, but also of the role that the English language had had in their oppression. Thus, from the beginning, translinguaging pedagogical practices have focused on making children aware of the ways in which language education norms have been used to minoritize communities so as to develop their criticality (Li Wei 2011).

When translation occurs, translinguaging pedagogical practices firmly support the learners’ subjectivities and ways of knowing as active bilingual subjects. Garcia et al. (2017) refer to three strands of a translinguaging pedagogy: (1) translinguaging stance, (2) translinguaging design, and (3) translinguaging shift. To get started, teachers need to develop a stance that children ‘do’ language with all the signs in their repertoire, linguistic and multimodal, and that all of their ways of language are valid, authentic, and important. To do so, teachers need to understand the political dimensions of named standard languages. Teachers who develop translinguaging practices must see the whole child, assessing them fully from different perspectives, and without relying solely on the use of a standard code. Instruction must then be designed carefully, insisting that translinguaging have a valid space, but also with flexibility, so that children are put in charge of instruction, with teacher guidance. That is why a translinguaging pedagogy always insists on the opportunity of shifts, as teachers respond to the inquiries being made by students about their own learning.
An example of how translation is handled by a teacher with what we might call a plurilingualism stance and one with a translanguaging stance may make this difference clearer.

- La señora Joanna is teaching Spanish in a CLIL fourth grade classroom in France. To ensure that students understand a text they are reading, she asks the children to translate the first two sentences into French. They do this without difficulty because they are all French speakers. She then asks them to translate it back to Spanish without looking at the Spanish text. She corrects their oral and their written translations and expects them to be very close to the original Spanish text.

- Cô Minh is teaching young children of Vietnamese descent in an after-school programme in the US. She reads the first paragraph of a Vietnamese folk tale, “The Tiger” in Vietnamese, showing pictures, acting out the scene, and using translation when the majority of students can’t understand. She then groups the children, gives them a recording of what she has just read in Vietnamese and asks them to write a script that acts out the first scene of the story. The children have different familiarity with Vietnamese, both orally and in writing. They negotiate among themselves how to ‘translate’ the story they have read for themselves into oral and written Vietnamese. Their written scripts contain what some would consider words in English and/or ‘incorrect’ Vietnamese. For example, one group writes, “Hi [Hai] con who [hô] dang dee [di] đến con song [sông] team [tim] dó ăn và nhin thấy một con thò. [Two tigers are going to the river to find food and see a rabbit]”. Cô Minh celebrates their use of Vietnamese and their adept use of recognizing Vietnamese sounds in their own words as a means to retell the story.

As a result of the collaboration between the City University of New York and the New York State Department of Education, the CUNY-NYSIEB project has been working with schools across the state that have a large number of emergent bilinguals (Garcia and Kleyn 2016). From the beginning, the project assumed a translanguaging theoretical stance about language and bilingualism (see Garcia 2009; Garcia and Li Wei 2014). An example of translation as performed with a translanguaging theoretical lens is the inquiry-based social studies project undertaken in the fall of 2018 in a dual language bilingual primary school, Dos Puentes. Under the leadership of the 2018–2019 project director, Dr. Ivana Espinet, alongside the former project director, Dr. Maite Sánchez, and Gladys Aponte, and with the strong collaboration of the principal, Dr. Victoria Hunt, and the teachers, students in each grade have been positioned as ethnographers of their communities. In the project they use translations only to make their bilingual lives visible to all. Rather than maintain the day’s target language (English or Spanish), students have been encouraged to use all of their linguistic and multimodal resources simultaneously, critically, and reflectively during this inquiry space.

To launch their main inquiry, “Why does language matter?”, a group of third graders began by individually, and then collectively, reflecting on how, when, and for what purposes they use language. Students realized that they share similar experiences. Almost all students are Latinx, mostly of Dominican descent. They live in the same neighbourhood, and they attend the same bilingual school. And yet, each of their repertoires is distinctively reflective of their individual lived experiences and the opportunities they have had. Throughout the project, students have led critical discussions about the language they use. They also analyze their language use and the connections to cultural practices by bringing their funds of knowledge into the classroom (Moll et al. 1992). By inviting family members into the classroom to share of themselves and
tell their stories, and also by bringing artefacts and tales from home, these third graders are also making room for different epistemologies and knowledge systems to be present in school.

As students have developed a more dynamic perception of language, the youth have also become critical of other sociolinguistic dynamics in their communities. For example, the third graders (8 to 9 years old) decided to walk around their community – a predominantly poor Latinx neighbourhood that is becoming increasingly diverse/gentrified – to interview community members and analyze the linguistic signs and language use outside of the school setting. In doing so, students noticed how business owners, customers, pedestrians, street vendors, and written signs use language in fluid ways that transcend the Spanish and English boundaries that are normalized by educational texts in schools. For instance, students discussed that business awnings contained words like *dentista, Dra.*, insurance, laundromat, and *precio especial*. There was a heated discussion about whether these were words from English or from Spanish, and why there was no translation of any of these words into the other language. The children came to the conclusion that the signs portray the overall multilingual identity of their community, and that they referred to the language of the community. They discussed, for example, why someone would have preferred Dra. instead of Dr. and agreed that Dra. signalled a female doctor, something that Dr. would not have communicated. And they agreed that there was no way to say laundromat any other way, for this was a context that in their experience only existed in NYC. To these third graders this was simply the language of their bilingual community.

The most notable conversation that the third graders had during their community walk involved students’ affirmation of the word *deliverista* on a storefront sign that read, “Buscamos un deliverista” [We are seeking a delivery person]. Words like *deliverista*, which emerge from ‘borderlands’ lived experiences, are often disparaged for being *Spanglish* (for a counter-view, see Otheguy and Stern 2011). Although students first questioned whether the term was a Colombian, Dominican, or Mexican word, they soon validated it as simply being part of their community’s fluid, yet often marginalized, language practices. That is, rather than translate themselves into dominant named languages, the children confidently translated the phrase through a translanguaging analytic. By being positioned as ethnographers and mediators of their unique linguistic identities, students have developed pride, self-awareness, and criticality, and have begun to understand that translation is uniquely different in every interaction they engage in, within and beyond their community. Translation, they have come to realize, goes beyond pleasing dominant listening subjects who adhere to monolingual conventions. Translation, if analyzed through a translanguaging stance, can be a way of making minoritized speakers visible and audible, offering them legitimation and empowerment as valid languages.

Conclusions and future directions

Translation has a different uptake in language theories that view languages on the one hand as autonomous structures and bilingualism as L1+ L2, and on the other hand more post-structural positions that understand language and bilingualism as a process of assembling signs to make meaning with others. Translation as a pedagogical practice then behaves differently when it is used in traditional language education programmes, in programmes that support plurilingualism, and in those that take up a translanguaging theoretical lens. When used within a translanguaging theoretical framework, translation can indeed work toward the restitution of what Mignolo (2000) called ‘the colonial difference’, with minoritized bilingual speakers able to translate for themselves and their communities with their own tools and epistemologies. For, as Audren Lorde (1979) famously said, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (n.p.).
Further reading


This is a practice-based approach to translanguaging for primary classrooms, focusing on diverse emergent bilingual students in the U.S. The book breathes life into translanguaging classrooms where we see teachers using tools for different purposes to meet the academic, social and instructional challenges that emergent bilinguals face.


This is a short introduction to translanguaging. Part I covers the antecedents and the theory of translanguaging, focusing on transformations of language, bilingualism, and the effects of creativity and criticality. Part II focuses on translanguaging and education, outlining its history and the way it is used by students and teachers. It ends with outlining principles of a translanguaging pedagogy.


Although focused on the US context, this text offers guidance to teachers about how to set up translanguaging classrooms. It presents vignettes of how three teachers – an elementary bilingual teacher, a middle school content teacher, and a high school English teacher – use translanguaging in their classrooms. It develops the purposes of translanguaging, as well as how to design instruction and assessment. In Part II, the three strands of a translanguaging pedagogy are developed – stance, design and shifts. Part III give us examples of how different teachers take up translanguaging to meet standards, to develop literacies and biliteracies performances, and to support the students’ socio-emotional well-being and social justice.


This is an edited special issue that links translanguaging to different theoretical perspectives – Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics, Freire’s critical pedagogy and critical literacies, and post-structural feminism. It does so by discussing how the interaction has been taken up in different classrooms and types of educational settings. As such, translanguaging is deepened and transformed.

Related topics

bilingual education, bilingualism and multilingualism, language education, plurilingualism, teacher education, translanguaging

References


