

2 Latinx bilingual students' translanguaging and assessment

A unitary approach

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Introduction

All over the world bilingual students are assessed through monolingual tests that do not capture all that they know and can do. The difference between how language is constructed in school assessments and the ways in which students *do* language is substantial, and this is exacerbated when racialized bilingual children are assessed in one or even two separate languages. Bilingual children's languaging does not fit neatly within the construction of language or bilingualism that schools have adopted, producing their minoritization and the resulting so-called 'achievement gap.' In this chapter we look at how translanguaging theory disrupts and questions the validity of monolingual and even bilingual assessments; and we consider what would be needed to make them just and appropriate for U.S. Latinx bilingual children. First, we use the term Latinx as a gender-neutral term instead of Latino or Latina. When we refer to Latinx bilinguals, we refer to the broad and diverse populations of Latinx individuals in the United States. The Latinx population in the United States is defined by its complexity. Latinx people from the United States can be indigenous to the United States, immigrants from many countries, children of immigrants, and combinations of these, and thus be multiethnic and multiracial. Their relationship to bilingualism is also complex, as Latinx people in the United States may speak a number and a combination of named languages such as English, Spanish, and other named languages indigenous to the Americas. Specifically, when we refer to racialized Latinx or emergent bilinguals, we refer to students who have been racialized by society because of their skin color or race.

We argue that translanguaging theory is especially important for the assessment of racialized bilingual students like U.S. Latinxs. Because of misunderstandings about bilingualism, school authorities often rely on assessments that are said to be bilingual, but these assessments are merely the addition of two monolingual assessments. True, assessments in two languages, in English *and* Spanish, give us a fuller picture of a bilingual child than assessment in one language only. However, these bilingual assessments fail to meet the bilingual child in the borderlands and *entre mundos* in which they live (Anzaldúa, 1987)

because they rely on an additive definition of bilingualism. They also do not reflect a way of languaging and living that is, as Anzaldúa (1987) says: 'Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders' (p. 84). How then can assessment be developed to work with the *unitary repertoire* of bilinguals, with the bilinguals' translanguaging, which does not respect the artificial boundaries of named languages constructed by nation-states and policed in schools?

Informed by the decolonial lens that has shaped translanguaging theory, we question traditional positions on language and bilingualism in society and schools and discuss what this means for assessments. We then describe ways of doing assessment 'otherwise' informed by translanguaging, and the import of these assessments for the education and lives of all bilingual students, and in particular racialized emergent bilinguals. Based on the work of Ascenzi-Moreno with reading assessments, we consider how translanguaging theory transforms how teachers can assess bilingual children's reading more accurately and justly. We then describe the efforts of López and his colleagues at Educational Testing Service to develop standardized content assessments taking bilingual students' translanguaging into account. We end by considering the reasons why these types of assessments, rooted on the bilingual children's ways of knowing and languaging, can transform the ideologies generally held about them, as well as the students' own subjectivities as bilingual Latinx children.

Language and raciolinguistic ideologies

We follow Latin American decolonial theorists (see, e.g., Menezes de Souza, 2007; Mignolo, 2000) in claiming that the way in which we conceptualize language today is a product of *colonialism*. That is, at the point of the encounter in the Americas, domination of Indigenous Americans was achieved not only by biologizing race, but also naturalizing 'Castilian.' Indigenous Americans were described as 'non-human' or 'less-than-human' (Veronelli, 2015), and thus languageless. This was the same process used later by Anglo-Saxons in the creation and expansion of the United States, as Africans were enslaved and the idea of 'Manifest Destiny' justified the forced removal of Native Americans and the taking over of Mexican territory. Race and language were again used to dismiss the humanity of the Mexicans in the territory, said to be 'Indian' or of 'mixed tribe' (Weber, 1973) and speaking 'a sort of jargon of their own' (cited in Nieto-Phillips, 2004, p. 88). Named as Castilian and English, the so-called languages were reserved for white Europeans.

The process of domination and oppression based on language and racial hierarchies has continued today through what the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) has called *coloniality*, exclusively legitimizing knowledge and language systems as those of white European males. This is a very different concept of language from that of Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and

Francisco Varela (1984) who coined the term ‘*linguaging*’ to refer to the act by which *all* human beings are constituted, as they communicate, interact, and respond to the reception of others.

U.S. Latinx have been racialized and deemed languageless, a product of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Assessments rendered in what has been normalized as ‘standard language’ have been important tools to validate these ideologies and to naturalize them in ways that we are hardly aware of them.

Bilingualism and translanguaging

Rooted in the same raciolinguistic ideologies, bilingualism was conceptualized as simply the *addition* of two autonomous language entities that correspond to the ways in which racially and socially dominant monolinguals use their language. Thus, the ways in which racialized bilinguals *do* language was looked down upon, as linguists went about finding ‘contact,’ ‘interferences,’ and describing divergence from monolingual patterns of speech in the form of ‘loans,’ ‘calques,’ and ‘code-switching.’ The thinking was that the bilingual speech of these racialized bilinguals was ‘incomplete’ (Montrul, 2008). Assessments of Latinx students in English and/or Spanish always confirmed their linguistic inadequacy, even when efforts were made to assess their linguistic performances in English *and* Spanish.

Increasingly, however, scholars pointed to the more *dynamic*, and not simply additive, language practices of bilinguals (García, 2009), developing translanguaging theory. Translanguaging centers the ways in which racialized bilinguals *do* language and *do* their bilingualism with a *unitary repertoire* that does not reflect dual separate linguistic systems or that has a dual psycholinguistic correspondence (García & Li, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015, 2019). Latinx bilinguals assemble and orchestrate different features and resources to do language (Li, 2017). In so doing, they construct a network of expanded signs and meanings that goes beyond, and is different from, that of monolingual English or Spanish speakers.

Translanguaging not only goes beyond the concept of named languages, but also beyond the construct of oral or written language, encompassing the trans-semiotizing aspects of sense-making (Lin, 2019). All language is a semiotic system encompassing not only the verbal, but also other multimodal resources such as visuals, gestures, bodily movement, and the deployment of other objects (Moore et al., 2020).

Translanguaging and assessment

Translanguaging theory reframes assessments for all, insisting that there is a distinction between the child’s ability to language, and the specific features of the child’s verbal language. The ability to do language consists of whether the child can language effectively for different purposes—to communicate, to

argue, to narrate, to tell a joke, to write different genres, to express content knowledge, etc. These language performances can be assessed regardless of the specific language features that the child uses. Distinguishing between general language performances and the use of specific language features that have been constructed as standard is important (García et al., 2017). Assessments that are just for Latinx bilingual children must focus on assessing the use of language, the languaging, in the sense given to us by Maturana and Varela. But many assessment tools today evaluate the children's use of the specific features of language that have been identified as consisting of the 'standard,' only because they match those used by the powerful in society. In so doing, racialized speakers are penalized for drawing on features that are prevalent in their repertoire, despite not being shared by the dominant communities that produce the tests.

Schools, and the curricula that they follow, remain deeply tied to the idea that language is a monoglossic entity that could be taught. And assessments have been the main tool to enforce and police linguistic behavior. By upholding only one language standard, the heteroglossic nature of language is dismissed (Bakhtin, 1981). But more importantly, these assessments then produce the failure of all those whose languaging is not contained by what has been constructed as the 'correct, standard, academic' language. Assessments grounded in a monoglossic perspective do not fully capture the knowledge and abilities that bilingual students possess and, even if these are bilingual assessments, may maintain the power hierarchy between different named languages (Abedi, 2011; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Schissel, 2020; Shohamy, 2011; Solano-Flores, 2011).

Translanguaging pedagogical practices have been often considered a scaffolding mechanism for bilingual students, and they can play a pivotal role to help them access and engage in curriculum. However, when conceived exclusively in this way, the transformative potential of translanguaging pedagogical practices is muted because it does not challenge teachers' thinking about the ways in which their racialized bilingual students do language with a unitary repertoire. Some transformational uses of translanguaging have taken root in education (see, e.g., CUNY-NYSIEB, 2021; Fu et al., 2019; García & Kleyn, 2016; García et al., 2017). Translanguaging pedagogical practices in literacy instruction (España & Herrera, 2020; Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2021), as well as in content instruction (Pierson et al., 2021; Poza, 2018), have been developed and explored. However, the relationship between translanguaging and assessment has been limited.

In this chapter, we first consider literacy and assessment before we turn to assessment of content taking into consideration the unitary repertoire of bilinguals. We describe current efforts to develop assessments in these areas that are rooted in understandings of translanguaging to meet Latinx bilingual students where they exist with their own languaging—in historical/cultural borderlands which only make sense to them by drawing on their unitary semiotic repertoire, on their translanguaging.

Literacy, assessment, and bilingual students

Current conceptualizations of reading emphasize that it is a process that not only involves language, social participation, cultural membership, and identity negotiation, but is also centered in the person and transcends language boundaries (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021, García, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2019; Kabuto, 2018). This definition of reading focuses on the dynamism of lived experience and thus emphasizes that when emergent bilinguals interact with text they do not do so in a piecemeal fashion, but rather in an integrated and *unified* way, merging their linguistic/semiotic resources to make sense of text.

García (2020) argues that the focus of reading instruction must shift from the monolingual text to the bilingual student. She writes, ‘the monolingual text with supposedly static linguistic features is transformed and mobilized by bilingual readers who bring their entire selves—their language, with its multilingualism and multimodalities; their emotions; their bodies; and their lives—into the text’ (p. 562). This shift toward centering literacy practices in the doing and being of the bilingual person must be mirrored in the assessment policies and practices which assess literacy.

Formative literacy assessment is touted as a powerful way to learn about students’ reading and thus support instruction, yet the ways in which teachers carry out formative assessments are often counter to this very intention. Rather than being instruments which support students’ literacy development, regularly the main function of literacy assessment is to report levels and sort and group students (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2016). But even when students are assessed in English and another language, monoglossic assessment practices do not allow teachers to understand students’ reading as they draw from their unitary repertoire. This mismatch between the intended purpose of assessment and actual implementation is particularly harmful for Latinx bilingual students (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021).

Running records is an example of formative literacy assessments that are widely used by classroom teachers. These assessments are used to glean an understanding of how students employ the complex and intertwined ‘pieces’ of the reading process—decoding, use of reading strategies, fluency, among others—within an authentic reading performance. Because this type of assessment is grounded in the experience of reading, it holds the potential for teachers to learn holistically about students as readers and knowledge-producers.

Reading assessments are often posed as neutral instruments; yet they are *always* rooted in theories of reading and ideologies about readers which are far from neutral. Current assessments are not only tethered to a monolingual framework, but also prioritize print over multimodal ways to engage in literacy (Serafini et al., 2020). This monolingual and monomodal foundation for assessment is problematic for all students because reading is increasingly considered to be contextualized, embodied, and emplaced, and therefore not a stable set of skills that are acquired through standardized procedures (Ascenzi-Moreno

& Seltzer, 2021; Compton-Lily et al., 2020). Literacy assessments grounded on translanguaging theory would consider the multilingual, multimodal, and multidimensional contextual nature of reading as bilingual readers draw from their unitary repertoire.

A translanguaging perspective on literacy assessment for bilingual students

In speaking about how to conduct literacy research with bilingual students, García and Kleifgen (2019) say that, 'instead of confining the literacy act to mechanical aspects of engaging with a printed static text, scholars [need to] be comfortable with texts and bodies in movement, in the moment-by-moment interaction with multiple signs and objects in unexpected ways, and in ways that go beyond the restricted ways in which institutions have defined them' (p. 561). Likewise, assessment of literacy needs to shift its focus from simply looking at the mechanics of how students engage with a printed text to how they make meaning in ways that are dynamic, shifting, interactive, and bodily and that are not bounded by a formal static text.

Traditional reading assessments asks students to demonstrate their understandings either writing or speaking. But a translanguaging perspective would go beyond these modes, allowing students to retell by dramatizing, drawing, gesturing, and using any aspect of their linguistic and semiotic repertoires. Again, a translanguaging framework in literacy assessment would acknowledge and leverage the bilingual students' *unitary* repertoire, reflecting the ways in which bilingual readers make sense of texts. Within reading assessments in classrooms, teachers can give students choices about how they would like to respond—choosing one or a combination of modalities rather than restricting students to one modality or one language.

A few studies have explored how literacy assessment can consider bilingual students' complex and unitary linguistic repertoire. For example, Briceño and Klein (2018) argue for the inclusion of a 'second lens' that allows teachers to determine how students' reading miscues may be the result of language-related approximations, or 'reading errors that are attributable to readers' language' (p. 3). While their research is not explicitly rooted in a translanguaging lens, they emphasize that bilingual students' reading is intrinsically tied to their linguistic repertoire. Bauer et al. (2020) also demonstrate that when students' translanguaging is part of the reading assessment process, the complexity of students' linguistic practices become more apparent. This sheds light on how bilinguals make meaning of text.

In working with running record assessments, Ascenzi-Moreno (2018) introduced the concept of *responsive adaptations*, which are flexible ways of adapting this assessment to consider students' translanguaging. Through responsive adaptations, bilinguals' dynamic reading practices are considered the norm. As students interact with text, they do so in a way that cuts across named language boundaries (Kabuto, 2017). For example, when a Latinx bilingual

student is thinking about a text or responding to it, they may draw on their entire semiotic repertoire, as well as experiences that they have. Miscues are then perceived not simply from a monolingual base, but from one that considers the bilinguals' unitary languaging and reading process. This stands in contrast to the common assumption that guides literacy assessment, that, for example, if you read a book in English, you should respond to it in English, or of traditional biliteracy assessment that requires performances in one language at a time (see Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018 for more detail on responsive adaptations).

Some teachers are beginning to engage with translanguaging as they conduct formative assessments of Latinx bilingual children's biliteracy. Take, for instance, Abby, a monolingual English-speaking teacher of English as a Second Language, who works with Emilia, a 5th grader from Honduras. Abby wants to know what Emilia can *do* as a reader. For this reason, Abby invites Emilia to respond to a text she has read in English using whatever languaging she wishes. In school terms, this means that Abby invites Emilia to respond in English, Spanish, in a combination of both, orally, in writing, by drawing, using images, acting and gesturing. In changing the way that the assessment is typically administered, Abby provides Emilia with the opportunity to use her full linguistic/semiotic repertoire in responding to the text. Through a translanguaging view of reading, movement across named languages and modalities is fluid. This is one type of responsive adaptation which shifts the assessment instrument to consider translanguaging.

It is true that this type of formative assessment of reading takes time. But it gives Abby a window into what Emilia understands when she reads a text in English. The alternative of requiring Emilia to respond to the text in English only would only mean that Abby would have limited information about Emilia as a person, a thinker, a reader, a language user, a knowledge producer. It is also true that this type of assessment requires teachers to go beyond what is required. Abby will have to use Google Translate and consult with bilingual teachers in the school to gain complete understandings of Emilia's performances. But in so doing, Abby will be performing the only role of a teacher of Latinx bilingual students that is ethical—understanding, as well as possible, what the children know and are able to do so that instruction can meet their gifts, as well as their needs.

Whereas assessments produced and performed by teachers are an integral part of instruction, teachers are also handed down standardized assessments by school systems. The next section considers standardized content assessments and how they may better engage with the translanguaging of their bilingual Latinx students.

Content assessments and translanguaging

In the United States students are typically required to demonstrate their content knowledge in what is deemed to be 'Standard English' (Escamilla, 2006; García, 2009; López et al., 2015; Shohamy, 2006). The interpretation of

those scores, especially for those Latinx emergent bilinguals who fall at the beginning point of the bilingual continuum, is simply not valid (Abedi, 2006; López et al., 2017).

Educators are finding ways to give bilingual students greater opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do (Roohr & Sireci, 2017). For emergent bilingual students at the beginning end of the bilingual continuum, accommodations are often provided. Teachers can translate the test or questions or words; they can also allow students to use bilingual dictionaries or glossaries; and they can add other supports when needed (e.g., pictures, graphic organizers). Some teachers can read the questions that have been posed in English in Spanish, or they can read the questions in English and Spanish. Furthermore, teachers can allow students to demonstrate their content knowledge in English or Spanish.

Although these bilingual accommodations are important, there are challenges to implementing them. Using, scoring, and interpreting bilingual content assessments might be challenging for some teachers, especially when they do not share the same linguistic resources and practices as their students. This could be mitigated by using multiple-choice questions, using multilingual translation digital applications to translate the students' answers, or using performance-based assessments that require students to produce something (e.g., projects, experiments). Although good first steps, these efforts of bilingual accommodations fall short because they rest on understandings of standard language as an autonomous entity and bilingualism as additive.

Recently scientists and psychometricians involved in construction of content assessments have started to develop assessments so that bilingual students can use all their available linguistic and semiotic resources to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in different content areas (e.g., mathematics and science). This is the work that López has been leading for Educational Testing Service (López, 2020; López et al., 2019). The idea is to enable linguistically adaptive bilingual practices within a single assessment context (Shohamy, 2011) in order to allow students to use different semiotic resources, enabling them to perform in writing, orally or graphically (Li, 2011).

With translanguaging as its theoretical underpinning, these assessments allow bilingual students to use their full unitary repertoire, drawing from all available language and semiotic resources *if they want to*. These content assessments incorporate the use of embedded bilingual accommodations or bilingual supports that are *always* available to the students and can be used whenever needed (López et al., 2017). The main goal of the embedded bilingual supports is to ensure that the English language demands of the items in the content assessment may not interfere with the students' ability to demonstrate what they know in science or mathematics, regardless of their language proficiency. Drawing on understandings of bilingualism that do not simply view the two languages as representing two very different knowledge systems, students are allowed to use their available linguistic (e.g., English, Spanish or both) and other semiotic resources (oral and written language) to help them

The screenshot shows a digital assessment interface. At the top, it displays 'ETS CBAL', 'Question 14 of 16', and a language selector set to 'Español'. The main content area contains the following text:

You have looked at changes in candle wax.

Water is part of a burning candle. The candle releases water gas when it burns.

Now compare changes in wax to changes in water.

Below this text is a photograph of a lit candle against a black background.

To the right of the candle image is a small avatar icon. Further right, the question text is repeated in Spanish: '¿Cómo esperarías que los modelos de agua como un sólido, un líquido y un gas fueran similares y diferentes de los modelos de cera como un sólido, un líquido y un gas?'.

Below the Spanish text are two numbered questions:

- Describe one similarity que esperarías que verías entre el **agua** y la **cera** en un modelo.
- Describe one difference que esperarías que verías entre el **agua** y la **cera** en un modelo.

Each question is followed by a large, empty text input field. Below each input field is a microphone icon and two buttons labeled 'record' and 'stop'.

Figure 2.1 Sample science item illustrating how translanguaging is acknowledged.

understand the language of the assessments and to help demonstrate what they know and can do in a content area.

Figure 2.1 shows an example of a content assessment with bilingual supports delivered on an online platform meant to assess the science understandings of students in 6th through 8th grade. The figure displays the English language version, although a Spanish language version is also available. The bilingual supports are always accessible so students can use them at any time, but they are not required to use any of them. In this English language version, initially, the students will always view the items in English, but then they can click on the language tab (*Español*) to view the item in Spanish; they can toggle back and forth between the two languages at any time. For constructed response questions, students are allowed to write or orally record their responses using their full repertoire. They can toggle to an oral response by clicking on the microphone icon; each response is recorded separately.

In Figure 2.1, we see that a few words are glossed in the English or Spanish tab (underlined words). If students hover over the glossed words, they can see synonyms or a picture for these words. This support does not apply to content-related terminology because understanding the meaning of these terms is usually considered to be part of what the content assessments are intended to measure. Finally, students can click on the picture of the avatar to listen to someone read aloud the directions and the questions in English and/or Spanish depending on the language tab they select. Only the text in the items is read aloud; symbolic and visual representations (e.g., science and symbols, models, figures, and tables) are not read aloud because understanding and using them is part of what these content assessments are intended to measure. The same supports are present in both language versions.

Since students have the freedom to perform language how they want, leveraging their full linguistic and multimodal repertoire. A conceptual scoring model is used to score the responses. Conceptual scoring allows scoring a response without regard to the language or mode in which the response is given (Barrueco et al., 2012). When using conceptual scoring, the same scoring rubric is implemented regardless of the language or mode that is used.

Since online bilingual content assessments use embedded bilingual supports, it is possible that students require additional time to complete them. Thus, students should be provided with ample time to use all their linguistic resources and language modes.

It is important to understand how these standardized content assessments are drawing from translanguaging theory. Because they are standardized assessments delivered on an online platform and machine scored, the instruments themselves differentiate between English and Spanish, and written and oral language. Despite what some may still perceive as limitations, these assessments allow Latinx bilingual students to show what they know by acknowledging their unitary repertoire and the ways in which they do language.

Besides providing ways of assessing bilingual students that are more just and inclusive than what we presently have, these content assessments could have a formative function, allowing teachers to determine not only what students know, but how they express those understandings, and the types of supports they need. At the same time, these content assessments could be used as end of instruction summative assessments to gather evidence of how well students are meeting their learning objectives in different content areas.

Conclusion

Solano-Flores (2011, p. 3) argues that assessments are 'cultural artifacts,' and thus the site of political and social forces which deeply affect the students who take them. In general, teachers are not made aware of how bilingual students draw from a unitary language repertoire to make meaning, and of the consequences for their education if this different knowledge system is not acknowledged. Consequently, teachers do not develop a critical take on assessments, even classroom-based ones. Teachers' learning experiences about assessment are focused on how they are administered and reported, and not on what they truly tell us about bilingual students.

Teachers can be in the forefront of moving the field toward assessments which more accurately capture the knowledge and language system of bilinguals, thus making them more equitable. Making room for bilingual students' translanguaging provides teachers with a more accurate picture of what students know and can do. Whereas shifts such as responsive adaptations are promising and a step in the right direction, when these assessments are adapted, they remain rooted in monolingual frameworks. Another less explored opportunity is related to the efforts described in this chapter, transforming assessments so

that they emerge from a translanguaging framework that taps and includes bilingual students' unitary repertoire.

The importance of this shift in the epistemes by which assessments are developed is obvious. Willingly or unwillingly, assessments have had the effect of producing and justifying the gaps in educational opportunities between the children of the dominant U.S. population, and those who have been racialized and rendered languageless.

In the case of bilingual Latinx children, monolingual or bilingual assessments based on monoglossic concepts of language and additive bilingualism have been responsible for their being left behind. With little or inaccurate and invalid information, educational decisions are made about Latinx bilingual children's capacities that render them not only bilingual (neither speakers of English nor speakers of Spanish) as teachers often say, but also cognitively deficient and culturally impoverished. Only by developing assessments that enable Latinx bilingual children to draw from their full linguistic/semiotic repertoire will Latinx bilingual children be judged fairly, assessed not in comparison to monolingual middle-class standards of language use and their knowledge/cultural system, but as true producers of their own knowledge, expressed through their own languaging.

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