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## Siting Bilingualism in New Mexican Borderlands

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### ABSTRACT

A Participatory Design Research (PDR) conducted with fifteen Chicana dual language bilingual teachers in New Mexico focused on expanding their understandings of their own translanguaging, so as to transform their concept of biliteracy and design their biliteracy instruction as a site for resistance and transformation of bilingual marginalized students. After reviewing how translanguaging shapes understandings of biliteracy, and describing the intervention done with the teachers, one teacher's emerging transformative stance toward biliteracy is highlighted, as she co-designs a borderland biliteracy unit within her Spanish Language Arts curriculum. The article shows how this teacher's instructional design impacts the students' biliterate learning by highlighting the work and writing of one student.

### KEYWORDS

Biliteracy; bilingualism; New Mexico; Chicana; dual language bilingual education; Southwest; translanguaging

### Introduction

Studying translations of Indian texts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to today by Euro-American scholars, post-colonial cultural theorist Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) posits that translation has become a significant *site* to “perpetuate colonial domination” (p. 3) since it “reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representations, or objects without history” (p. 3). Like translation, literacy in school has long been a *site* for perpetuating unequal relations among people. The ways in which schools conceptualize and teach language and literacy often produce unfair and disparate educational outcomes. Because literacy in the Global North depends on Western-dominant philosophical notions of reality and knowledge, it often renders students from dominant groups as literate, and constructs minoritized students as unknowing. This process is exacerbated in the study of biliteracy, represented in schools as simply literacy in two languages, having little to do with the lives of minoritized bilingual students who engage in it. When expectations of biliteracy are understood as simply literacy in two *separate* named languages such as English and Spanish, Latinx bilingual children are repeatedly characterized as having limited literacy in one or the other language, or of having incomplete biliteracy. Transforming our understandings of biliteracy can offer a *site* for resistance and transformation of bilingual Latinx people, especially those who have long lived, worked, and studied in the U.S. Southwest.

Our use of siting biliteracy in New Mexican borderlands extends Niranjana's use of *siting* to encompass not only how biliteracy, in the traditional sense, has become a site for domination, but also how the place, the site in which biliteracy is enacted, makes a difference. In this second sense of sitting, we are referring to the New Mexican borderlands. We argue that siting biliteracy in New Mexico exposes the process by which bilingual New Mexicans have become “objects without history,” as Niranjana argues. That is, for people who experience life in borderlands, the ways in which biliteracy has been constructed as simply double monolingual literacy magnifies the hegemonic

process that often accompanies the teaching of literacy. In *siting biliteracy in New Mexican borderlands*, we expose the hegemonic processes that have led to teaching biliteracy in ways that do not fit the history of colonization that New Mexicans have endured.

In this article, we focus on the work that Author 1, a self-identified Chicana New Mexican biliteracy specialist and researcher, did with dual language bilingual maestras in La Quebrada,<sup>1</sup> a large school district New Mexico. Author 1's Participatory Design Research (PDR; Bang & Vossoughi, 2016, described below) focused on engaging these bilingual maestras in understanding their own translanguaging to transform their concept of biliteracy, and thus design their biliteracy instruction differently. Author 2 provided support for the professional development, as well as the PDR design, and engaged with Author 1 in the analysis of the data.

We begin by drawing a distinction between the bilingual teachers in La Quebrada, New Mexico and bilingual teachers in contexts other than the American Southwest. We then describe our translanguaging conceptual framework and how translanguaging transforms understandings of biliteracy. By engaging these maestras in New Mexico with translanguaging theory, we show how Author 1 opened these teachers' own acts of bilingualism and biliteracy, and those of their students, to correspond to their lives more closely, languaging, experiences, and histories.

To do so, we follow Author 1 as she engages the teachers in her Participatory Design Research framework. We zoom-in on one of the teachers in the study, Maestra Otero, to show how the maestras' emerging understandings of biliteracy through a translanguaging lens impact their instructional design. We discuss the co-design of a *borderland biliteracy* unit within Maestra Otero's Spanish Language Arts curriculum in her dual language bilingual classroom. We end by sharing the work of one of Maestra Otero's students to show the effects of opening up new ways of conceptualizing and doing biliteracy.

### ***Distinguishing borderland maestrxs***

Although all Latinx bilingual teachers live in the cultural and linguistic borderlands described by Anzaldúa (1987), in our experience, New Mexico borderland maestrxs share much with other maestras Chicaxs,<sup>2</sup> and differ significantly from those in contexts other than the American Southwest. The *colonization* of the American Southwest runs deeply among Chicax teachers, whereas bilingual teachers in other regions of the country are often mostly immigrants, concerned with issues of *immigration* and its diversity.

Bilingual teachers in New Mexico cannot forget the domination of the Anglo-Saxon world as they walk upon land that was once inhabited by Native Americans and Hispano/Mexicanos (Lozano, 2018). They understand domination, as they live among Native Americans who were uprooted from their land and forced to live in reservations. They feel the pain of living in land where Spanish was once spoken and that was once Mexico, and where they have been mostly marginalized, especially as they have been joined by more recent immigrants. In contrast, Latinx bilingual teachers in states other than the Southwest do not have such recuerdos/remembrances. Even when bilingual teachers other than those who identify as Chicax recognize the direct and continued effects of colonialism, for example, among Puerto Ricans, they remember an Island, geographically separate from the United States. And even when Latinx bilingual teachers coming from other countries understand the domination of the White Spanish-speaking colonizers over the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and the imperialist control of the United States over Latin America since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they identify as immigrants (or migrants in the case of Puerto Ricans) or children of (im)migrants, not simply as colonized people. These differences in identification between, on the one hand, *colonized people, and*

<sup>1</sup>La Quebrada is a pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup>New Mexico has a complex history, and its bilingual residents often go by different names, depending on whether their families have been in New Mexico for generations or are recent immigrants. Nevertheless, the New Mexican teachers involved in this study self-identified as Chicaxs. For example, Maestra Otero repeatedly told Author 1 that she identified as Chicana because she shared with other Chicaxs in the Southwest a history of having been colonized, and a use of language that had much in common.

*their descendants* in New Mexico, and on the other, *immigrants and their children and grandchildren* in contexts with other sociopolitical histories, weigh heavily in the ways that bilingual New Mexican teachers feel and act.

Additionally, whereas Latinx bilingual teachers in other than the American Southwest have very different national affiliations, making the “Latinx bilingual” category the only one that is broadly appropriate, teachers in New Mexico are overwhelmingly of Mexican American Heritage, making a more cohesive group identification possible. Teachers who identify as Chicax or neomexicanxs naturally feel more indignation and pain at the processes of colonization that exerted its domination by naturalizing the language of the Anglo colonizers as the most valid language of laws and education and racializing the group.

Bilingual teachers in New Mexico most markedly feel the hierarchization of race, language and gender that has been at the heart of the process of what the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) has termed “coloniality,” that is, the continuation of the processes of domination and oppression based on racial, gender and language hierarchies after the colonizers left. When New Mexican maestrxs reflect on their socio-historical and socio-political experiences they may feel rage, but they overwhelmingly feel *pain*. During Author’s 1 year-long involvement with the bilingual maestras at La Quebrada, they cried as they reflected on their experiences, moved by the painful effects of colonization. In contrast, in our long-experienced working with bilingual teachers in U.S. contexts other than the Southwest most often feel *nostalgia* toward the past, but not necessarily the deep pain that Chicax bilingual teachers at La Quebrada demonstrate. These differences, with most Chicax bilingual maestrxs feeling the *pain of colonized people*, and other bilingual maestrxs mostly feeling the *nostalgia of immigrants*, is most important to consider when working with bilingual teachers. Before we look at how Author 1 went about working with these dual language bilingual teachers in ways that *pushed back on the effects that colonization has had on the New Mexican maestras’ understandings of language, literacy, and bilingualism*, we review the theoretical concept of *translanguaging* and reflect on why it is a good fit for the actual languaging experience of borderland maestrxs.

### **Translanguaging: bilingualism from a borderland perspective**

As a biliteracy specialist at La Quebrada school district, Author 1 was charged with supporting dual-language bilingual education (DLBE) teachers in the implementation of a translanguaging biliteracy approach and documenting its effectiveness. She immediately spotted what seemed like an irreconcilable difference between the dual-language bilingual programs’ language allocation policies of strictly separating two languages and insisting on language performances with standardized linguistic features only, and the ways in which the teachers existed, lived, acted and languaged. As someone who was educated in New Mexico, Author 1 knew that teachers acted with intertwined corrientes, culturally and linguistically, and with the pain of colonized racialized people.

Schools have always insisted on developing “language” as if this was a system of linguistic structures disconnected from the lives of people. But as many scholars have argued (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), this “language” now taught and considered the key to educational success was constructed, and it is the *effect* of colonization and nation-building. Borderland maestrxs understand this best because the violent encounter with Europeans is very much a part of their own consciousness.

At the point of the encounter in the Americas and subsequent colonial processes, domination of Indigenous Americans was achieved by biologizing race and naturalizing “Castilian,” which was just coming into being as a standardized language with the 1492 publication of Antonio Nebrija’s *Gramática de la Lengua Castellana*. Nebrija acknowledges in his Preface that “Siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio.” In contrast, Indigenous Americans were described as “non-human” or “less-than-human” (G. A. Veronelli, 2016; G.A. Veronelli, 2015), and thus languageless.

The Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela (1984) distinguished human beings from other living organisms by coining the term “*linguaging*,” the human capacity to communicate which allows us to interact, and at the same time observe the reception of others. As Maturana and Varela have said, “We are constituted in *linguaging* in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others” (Maturana & Varela, 1998, pp. 234–235). When the Spanish colonizers *reduced* the Indigenous natives to “less-than-human,” the human capacity of *linguaging* by Indigenous Americans was erased, interrupting the process of communication that allows all of us to *become, to emerge* as human beings.

Early scholarship on bilingualism and bilingual education continued the tradition of seeing bilingualism as the “addition” of a “dominant language” to another “dominant” one (Lambert & Tucker, 1972) in order to be able to communicate and dialogue with equals. But this conceptualization of bilingual education as being “additive” did not consider raciolinguistic groups that had been dominated and whose *linguaging* capacity had been wiped away.

In the 1980s, Chicana and Puerto Rican scholars of bilingualism started to systematically deconstruct the notions of additive bilingualism that had been fabricated through studies of the only people who were said to engage in language – dominant White sequential bilinguals. By focusing on the *linguaging* of those who had been rendered less-than-human by processes of colonization and its subsequent coloniality, another understanding of bilingualism started to emerge. In the Southwest, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) explored “*el lenguaje de la frontera*,” as a “*modo de vivir*,” “neither español ni inglés, but both.” A way of *linguaging* and living that is, as Anzaldúa (1987) says: “Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders” (p. 84). By studying the *bilingualism of Latinx groups in culture-specific ways*, scholars started shedding the additive bilingual notions of the past, bringing us closer to the reality of the dynamic bilingualism of minoritized racialized communities (Author 2).

The concept of additive bilingualism had not considered the bilingualism of groups who had suffered the indignities of colonization and global capitalism, making their *linguaging* invisible and not worthy. The term *translinguaging* came to occupy that space that centers not on languages as constructed and naturalized by nation-states in their colonization and nation-building efforts, but on the *linguaging* (Maturana & Varela, 1984) of people who are valued. *Translinguaging* centers the ways in which racialized bilinguals *do* language and *do* what we call 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, García, & Reid, 2015, 2019). The unitary repertoire which *translinguaging* theory supports includes not only what is traditionally called “the linguistic,” but also what others call “the paralinguistic,” that is, all the other multiple modes such as gestures, visuals, the auditory, body movements, smells, etc. through which people make meaning (García & Kleifgen, 2020).

The question then for Author 1, as she worked with her borderland Chicana teachers, was how to ensure that she brought forth the *maestras’ continuous becoming* of their own meaning making, so that they could re-shape the notions of language, bilingualism and biliteracy that had been handed down to them in ways that always found them lacking. Because the work with the teachers was based on the development of biliteracy, we review next how *translinguaging* reshapes traditional conceptualizations of biliteracy.

### ***Translinguaging and biliteracy***

In the 1980s, there was increased attention to the idea that literacy is not an autonomous skill, but is deeply influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic factors (Street, 1985). As Bertha Pérez (1998) has eloquently said, literacy practices are *culture-specific ways of knowing*. It follows then that biliteracy cannot simply be reduced to the ability to read and write in two separate languages, especially when the *modo de vivir* and of *linguaging* of Chicana borderland people is “neither español ni inglés, but both” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). The questions then would be: What would be ways of doing biliteracy for Chicana borderland *maestras* that would leverage their culture-specific

ways of knowing and their translanguaging as valid? How could they establish a reciprocal relationship with other texts and others? How could written school texts, written in standardized languages, “speak back” and establish a valid dialogic communication with Chicana borderland people so that they can truly become and emerge as competent and educated human beings? For Author 1, the answer laid in understanding how translanguaging reshapes biliteracy.

In describing reading through a translanguaging lens, García (2020) says: “Translanguaging turns our attention to the real action of bilingual readers with their full semiotic repertoire and away from what is perceived to be the monolingual/monoglossic language of the text” (p. 558). That is, borderland-specific ways of knowing shape their literacy acts by assembling all their meaning-making resources and acting on them to read themselves as agentive beings. To do that, teachers have to, as España and Herrera (2020) have said, identify temas/themes, and then to find textos. David et al. (2019) have described ways of engaging with translanguaging and literacy through professional development. Textos have to be energized and animated through the translanguaging actions of borderland people. As García (2020) says: “Texts may be said to be in English or in Spanish, but bilingual Latinx readers do not read in English or in Spanish nor do they read in English and Spanish” (p. 557). In animating the written text through the readers’ translanguaging interactions as they bring themselves fully into the literacy act, written texts are activated to “listen” and interact with empowered bilingual readers as they engage in meaning-making for themselves (García & Kleigen, 2020; Noguerón-Liu, 2020). That is, translanguaging enables the opening of a space in which readers can become, can emerge, by making meaning with other characters, other worlds, other cultures, other times, with mutual and shared respect to be and act as bilingual selves, and not simply as monolingual literate beings.

Monolingual readers have always enjoyed a space to bring their background knowledge into the literate act. And yet, racialized bilingual readers have been deprived of a meaning-making empowering space where they can act as themselves (Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2021). As Author 1 started the project, she was conscious of answering the question of how, and if, a translanguaging stance and design for biliteracy could address borderland bilingual maestras’ culture-specific ways of knowing.

### **A PDR project: educating for borderland biliteracy**

Participant Design Research (PDR) is a decolonizing methodology among a newer generation of research epistemologies (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Gutiérrez et al., 2016). It is related to other forms of participatory research such as Participatory Action Research (PAR). It shares with PAR a commitment to horizontal equal participation, and “challenges traditionally hierarchical, closed models of research and knowledge production” (Torre, 2009, p. 112). As Torre and Ayala (2009) have said, PAR collectives “create new spaces whereby co-researchers enjoy new parts of themselves, and new forms of relationships with each other, experiences that often-run counter to traditional social hierarchies” (p. 389). Like PAR, PDR is not simply a methodology, but a philosophy about knowledge creation that is culture-specific and collective (Alonso & Le, 2020; Rivera et al., 2018).

Unlike PAR, PDR introduces *interventions* to effect social and educational change, in this case what we called a *borderland biliteracy* approach that takes into consideration the racialized bilingual community’s translanguaging. Author 1’s overarching research question was: How can a borderland biliteracy approach shaped by translanguaging inform biliteracy pedagogical practices that can transform the teaching and learning of historically marginalized bilingual students?

PDR is precisely a relevant research methodology for Author’s 1 work *with* maestras in La Quebrada, New Mexico, for as Bang and Vossoughi (2016) have said: “Learning environments, particularly those in which *place are central*, are always pregnant with decisions about making settler and/or Indigenous peoples present and towards what ends. From this perspective, equity efforts that fail to engage Indigenous presence may indeed reproduce inequities rather than transform them”



(p. 176, our italics). By centering New Mexican experiences with settler colonialism and focusing on the indigenous New Mexicans of the territory, biliteracy was redefined to fit the community's own translanguaging.

Author 1 entered the Professional Design Research (PDR) Project as District Biliteracy Specialist, and thus, she received Review Board clearance from La Quebrada school district, and she obtained consent from the fifteen teacher participants who volunteered to participate. The teachers all taught elementary grades (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) and had been born or were long-time residents of New Mexico. They had significant teaching experience, with an average of 9 years of experience as bilingual teachers. Because of her role in La Quebrada school district, Author 1 had conducted observations in the teachers' classrooms prior to starting the project. She knew that these DLBE maestras taught literacy in English during the English instructional space as if the children were monolingual English-speakers, and taught literacy in Spanish during the Spanish instructional space as if the children were monolingual Spanish-speakers.

Because of her experience teaching in New Mexico, Author 1 also knew that the Latinx children in these classrooms fell along all points of the bilingual continuum. Despite the teachers' insistence that they followed La Quebrada's language allocation policy strictly, Author 1 had occasionally observed that the children, and sometimes the teachers, did otherwise.

Before the professional development, the teachers had little understanding of translanguaging, although they had some understanding about cross linguistic connections when implementing biliteracy instruction. After significant dialogue, their questions were many, both about instruction and assessment. For example, one teacher asked: "How can I assess students' complex language practices?" And another one said: "I have curiosity about translanguaging assessment and what evidence can I use to support translanguaging in my classroom for learning" (Teachers' Questions, 08/12/2019). Author 1 developed interventions *with* the DLBE maestras to do biliteracy in ways that disrupted the violence that had accompanied the construction of Latinx students as colonial subjects and historically marginalized and *co-designed* with them actionable plans for equitable forms of teaching biliteracy in New Mexico.

Author 1 challenged the borderland maestras to consider the purpose of the knowledge they produce to subvert the social conditions of bilingual New Mexicans, and the ways their languaging and literacy practices had been marginalized in schools. That is, as Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us, Author 1 wanted to engage these borderland maestras in theorizing "from the flesh" about the community's language and literacy practices.

### ***Setting the stage for borderland biliteracy understandings***

In the sessions with Author 1, the maestras were encouraged to use their entire meaning-making repertoire, sometimes using what they would call Spanish, or English or both; other times, showing images and work, pointing, role-playing, gesturing, sharing texts and other material as they maximized communication across participants. It was this first collaborative effort to *listen* to each other, regardless of semiotic features being used, that started to open up a space for true authentic communication among equals and for the teachers' "becoming."

The Chicana borderland maestras first spent much time reflecting and describing the image on the cover of the *Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning* (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). Author 1 followed protocols learned from what Author 2 in her work with CUNY-NYSIEB (2020) called Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry (for a description, see García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 46-47). This type of inquiry was based on the descriptive work of Carini, (2000) as continued by Cecelia Traugh (see, for example, Furman & Traugh, 2021). Author 1 used this framework to develop the Chicana borderland maestras' sense of looking closely at what they were observing, their data. She was careful to separate faithful descriptions of what was seen, from what was felt, and from what they interpreted the image to be. That is, the process called for three stages:

- (1) Description of what there is,
- (2) Feelings about what there is,
- (3) Interpretation of what there is.

To first ensure that they were describing *what they were actually seeing*, Author 1 asked the group questions such as:

- What is it that you see? ¿Qué ven?
- ¿Cómo is it depicted? With qué colores? ¿Con what lines or formas? In what plano/part del papel does the image appear?
- Where is the beginning of the wave/earth/water and their end? How is that depicted?

Author 1 then moved to try to develop the group's permission to *feel and to hold emotions* as they look. Questions such as the following were then asked:

- Close your eyes and listen, what do you hear/oyen?
- Does it taste or smell?
- How is it to your touch?

It is after a thorough description, involving the five senses, that Author 1 then moved to the third stage, *interpretations* of the image:

- What do you think the river corriente of the cover means?
- Why is it depicted in diferentes colores, sometimes bleeding/blending into each other?
- ¿Why do the las olas/waves crest and fall? Is there life beneath the surface? Is it visible?
- Why is student bilingualism seen as olas? What do you think that means? What is the relationship of the image to your own bilingualism? To that of your estudiantes?

The group then turned to reflecting on the *words in the title* in the cover, starting with the subtitle, Leveraging student bilingualism for learning:

- What do you think leveraging student bilingualism for learning means?
- What relationship do you think exist between the olas/waves and translanguaging?

It is only then, after a thorough description of what is seen and felt, and what the teachers think it all means, that the borderland maestras entered into reading the text with Author 1. As they made meaning of the text, they started developing a translanguaging *stance*, eventually *co-designing* translanguaging instruction and assessment for borderland biliteracy and engaging in the instructional *shifts* that were needed to adjust to their students' different translanguaging corriente (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).

### ***Developing a stance on borderland biliteracy***

The task for Author 1 was to have the maestras look into themselves, to their open heridas (Anzaldúa, 1987). By recognizing their heridas, the teachers could then visualize/hear/feel/think/smell/taste their own translanguaging and ways of being and knowing that have been hidden below the surface. Author 1 undertook to bring to the surface these borderland existences, acknowledging the pain, but also slowly healing and bridging the distance that had been created between those who language with the structures of power and those whose languaging had been made invisible, hidden under the surface, covered so as not to be listened to or seen.



Through reading themselves and reading the three case studies of the teachers in the book, the borderland maestras started developing a translanguaging *stance*. They started understanding that the dynamic bilingual practices of their communities had been left out of the design of dual-language bilingual programs, and that unless concepts of bilingualism and biliteracy were transformed, the domination and marginalization of their community through schooling would continue. They focused on the question of how to delink from the *colonial matrix of power* (Mignolo, 2000) that has constituted bilingualism as simply two separate linguistic systems and biliteracy as two separate monolingual interactions around monolingual texts. Little by little, these teachers became conscious of their students' languaging. They came to see and hear that their students had a linguistic repertoire that might be different from English-speaking or Spanish-speaking monolinguals, or even from that of sequential bilinguals, or bilinguals in other sites and contexts; but they also came to acknowledge their own and their students' unitary repertoire, their translanguaging, and to understand its potential in the empowerment and *re-existence* of the community. Most importantly, they started becoming conscious of how their own biliteracy instruction in school had been responsible for depriving them of a meaning-making empowering space where they could act as their bilingual selves (Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2021; Noguero-Liu, 2020).

### **Co-designing borderland biliteracy instruction and becoming aware of shifts**

Once teachers developed a translanguaging *juntos* stance, then it was important to co-design classroom instruction and assessment purposefully so that students' entire language repertoire was leveraged in ways that developed their creative and critical use of their own languaging. As we will see in the case of Maestra Otero described below, the objective of literacy lessons became not simply language-specific performances with specific linguistic features of what is said to be English or what is said to be Spanish. Instead, the objective of a translanguaging *instructional design* for biliteracy was to develop the human capacity to make meaning of written texts so as to enable students to become, to emerge as creative, critical, inquisitive, imaginative beings. The focus was on developing students' language performances to explain, persuade, argue, evaluate, imagine, think creatively and critically, and all the other human pursuits that are advanced through a meaningful education. The emphasis then became to "see," to "find," what *there is* in their bilingual student, their strengths, their many *presences*, and to fit their instruction to what is, not what *is not*, what they are lacking, *their absences*. Through their *collective looking at what there is*, these teachers developed an awareness, a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) of the translanguaging *corriente* that flows through their classrooms. They became aware of it; they saw it; they smelled it; felt it.

As they became aware of the translanguaging *corriente* so that they could design literacy instruction and assessment in ways that responded to it, teachers also became more comfortable shifting instruction to accommodate to their students' own *corriente*. Just as the translanguaging instructional design focused on bilingual students' presences and what they do with language *in everyday activity*, *instructional shifts* adapt to the presence of students, to their lives and existence in borderlands, not simply to the national designs of school systems or to language policies handed down by school administration.

We describe here the findings of how *one* of the maestras in the group, Maestra Otero, brought her emergent bilingual students' translanguaging to the surface and recognized the translanguaging *corriente* of her students as important to design a *borderland biliteracy unit*. We base these findings on data collected from an interview conducted with Maestra Otero at the end of the professional development cycle, as well as observations, field notes, and student work, as she implemented the borderland biliteracy unit she co-designed with Author 1.

### **Maestra Otero and an emerging translanguaging stance \***

Maestra Otero had taught Kindergarten-8<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual education for 15 years in La Quebrada School District. In those fifteen years, the ways in which bilingual education was enacted had changed, now more forcefully insisting on a “dual language model” that separated the two languages strictly.

Maestra Otero was born and raised in the South Valley of Albuquerque, New Mexico. She grew up understanding Spanish and was able to revitalize her languaging practices through bilingual education, exchange programs and morning *cafecito* with her *abuelos*.

Maestra Otero was teaching third graders in a dual language bilingual classroom. Three-fourths of her students identified as Chicax, Mexican American or neomexicanx, and the others were of mixed Mexican American-neomexicano/Native American heritage, a result of the proximity of the school to a Pueblo town. The dual language bilingual education program was designed with the community in mind – a community that wanted to revitalize and develop the bilingualism in English/Spanish and biliteracy of their children.

For an entire year, Maestra Otero participated in Author 1’s Translanguaging PDR project. She was interested in designing a translanguaging unit aligned to the New Mexico Content Standards, focused on social justice, where students were engaged in biliteracy performances to read and write as bilinguals.

In an interview with Author 1 after a whole year of study about translanguaging, Maestra Otero reflected on how she had transformed her stance from one that had always held English and Spanish as separate to a more holistic view that started from the lives and linguistic performances of bilingual children living in borderlands:

My translanguaging stance springs from a current that has always flowed in my veins. I once compartmentalized my bilingualism as it played out in various contexts; Spanish to pray and speak with my grandparents, formal Spanish in high school and college, English at school, Spanglish at home and with cousins or neighborhood friends. I realize now, however, that my bilingualism is a linguistic movement within that guides my actions, emotions and responses. This personal experience allowed me to embrace the translanguaging stance with an open heart that allows me to see students holistically in terms of their linguistic repertoire. (Interview, 7/12/20)

Maestra Otero expressed that her stance “springs from a current” in New Mexico. Her choice of the word “springs” expresses her *renacer/rebirth*, her *re-existence* as someone anew, her becoming. And this is followed by recognizing her European and Indigenous heritage that has always run “in her veins.” Ms. Otero understands physical borders that DLBE programs require in terms of language allocation, but as a borderlander, she knows that tapping into the students’ *corriente* can also create their own springs. It is Maestra Otero’s renewed subjectivity produced through a translanguaging stance that then guides her actions to teach biliteracy differently.

### **Maestra Otero’s co-design for biliteracy in Spanish language arts**

With Author 1’s help, Maestra Otero co-designed a borderland biliteracy unit for her third graders during the time allocated to Spanish Language Arts called *Encuentros: Diferentes Puntos de Vista*. The unit focused on the historical *encuentro* between europeos and natives. It was also meant to bring an encounter of different ways of languaging and points of view among her third graders.

To design her unit, Maestra Otero followed España and Herrera (2020) three “T’s” – *temas*, *textos* and translanguaging. First, she selected a *tema* that was meaningful to her students who embodied the results of the *encuentros*. Then she selected two *textos* which enabled the students to ideas. Finally, she thought about how to imbue translanguaging throughout the unit.

Maestra Otero doesn't view her students by homogenizing their experiences, creating false categories of "English language learners" or "Spanish language learners." She was able to see each of her students' singularities in all their complexities, shaped by their different *encuentros* at different historical junctures.

For this unit for her Spanish Language Arts class, and in her own words, she wanted to "holistically use her students' linguistic repertoire" to brainstorm and discuss ideas before writing their opinion text in Spanish. In other words, she distinguished between the final *product* of the unit, a written opinion text rendered in Spanish, and the *process* through which this would be achieved, which needed to draw on the children's entire repertoires of meaning-making.

For this unit, she thought about four components – opening up a translanguaging space, identifying instructional objectives, planning task-based performances, and her teaching/learning cycle. She posed herself four corresponding questions to guide her design:

- Why and how would she open a translanguaging space?
- What were her instructional objectives, how was she to assess what was learned by students, and how would she assess the role of the translanguaging space in her own teaching?
- What task-based student performances would give her the required information about her students' learning?
- What would be her teaching/learning cycle? (Artifact, 10/11/19)

We discuss each of these four components separately, although Maestra Otero's design called for their *encuentros* and interrelationships.

### **The translanguaging space**

A translanguaging space (Li, 2011) refers to an instructional space for the act of translanguaging, as well as a space created through translanguaging. Bilingual students' creativity and criticality is fostered in this translanguaging space (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2011, 2017).

Maestra Otero realized that to be inclusive of all her students' different life and linguistic performances, and to create learning encounters that gave all students in the classroom the same opportunities to learn and to eventually write an opinion piece in Spanish, she had to open a *translanguaging space* so that students could enter into learning with their own full beings and points of view, and not just as Spanish speakers.

Her goal was to get the students to write a text in written Spanish, but she knew that her students were much more, and knew much more, than a single language, and that they had different ways of making meaning. Although the written texts she provided the students to read, as well as the text she expected them to produce were in Spanish, she knew that to make sense of these texts, students had to discuss them and reflect upon them using all their meaning-making repertoire, which went way beyond the written language of the text. Maestra Otero then had a purpose for opening up a translanguaging space. In planning the unit, she also considered the relationship between the translanguaging space and her objectives and tasks.

### **Designing instructional objectives**

Teachers with a translanguaging stance learn to distinguish between what (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017) called *general linguistic performances* and *language-specific performances*. Teachers of language minoritized children usually focus on their students' *language-specific performances*, that is, their exclusive use of linguistic features of one named language to perform classroom tasks. In many dual-language bilingual classrooms, teachers recognize children's language only when it is emitted with the language features "of the day," "of the time," "of the teacher" or "subject," depending on the type of language allocation policy they follow. The thinking is that students must have the right language "input" and communicate with the appropriate language "output," and that otherwise, students will be confused and will not become bilingual nor biliterate. Thus, when the bilingual child is confronted

with a speaking or writing task, they are expected to only use those specific language features, and when confronted with a listening or reading task they are expected to make sense of the text only with the language features that “belong” to the language of the text. This is the way that much bilingual and biliteracy instruction has been constituted, and that is reflected also in assessments, which invalidate children’s performances unless they are rendered with the language features that match the questions.

In contrast, *general linguistic performance* refers to speakers’ ability to perform with language, the ability to tell a joke, explain, argue, compare, contrast, evaluate. Teachers with a translanguaging stance understand that to know what a student knows and can do with language, they must draw from their entire language repertoire, and that it is important to differentiate between different types of language performances.

Maestra Otero’s unit objective for her students’ **general linguistic performance** reads:

- Students will be able to compare/contrast the most important points in two historical fiction texts about the encounter between Spanish explorers & Native Americans.
- Students will understand the difference between comparing, focusing on finding similarities, and contrasting aiming to find differences.
- Students will argue the similarities and contrasts by providing evidence either textual, as given in the text, or textual/graphic/body evidence that they have produced jointly. (Artifact, 10/11/19)

Maestra Otero also has **Spanish Language-specific performance objectives** which read:

- Los estudiantes resumirán todos sus puntos de vista oralmente utilizando solamente lo que se considera como “español oral,” omitiendo todo lo que quede fuera del español oral de la escuela. [Students will orally summarize all points of view using only what is considered “oral Spanish,” and omitting everything that falls outside of what school considers oral Spanish].
- Para comparar, los estudiantes utilizarán palabras tal como “de la misma forma,” “igual que,” “de forma similar,” “como.” [To compare, students will use words such as . . .].
- Para contrastar, los estudiantes utilizarán palabras como “por otro lado,” “mientras que,” “por el contrario,” “a diferencia de,” “por otra parte,” “en cambio.” [To contrast, students will use words as . . .].

Maestra Otero understands that a translanguaging lesson design needs to assist students in general linguistic *and* language-specific performances. It is important for her to promote her students’ general linguistic performances for inclusion of all puntos de vista and for the students’ translanguaging corriente to flow freely. By distinguishing between the two, she can promote the learning of children as different as Anita and Mario. Both, born in the United States and living in homes where Spanish is not spoken are considered “Spanish language learners,” and yet, their general language performances are very different. Mario clearly understands the concept being taught and can generate ideas from the Spanish language texts. In contrast, Anita cannot easily ideate or imagine. She needs much more scaffolding and help from others. By observing the children’s entire languaging performances carefully, Maestra Otero can differentiate between children’s use of all their languaging to perform certain tasks and performing the tasks with specific language features.

### **Planning task-based performances**

*Task-based performances* allow teachers to engage with and evaluate students’ entire repertoire. Although most language teachers are especially focused on developing and evaluating bits and pieces of language, task-based performances put the emphasis on the students’ use of their entire semiotic repertoire.

Maestra Otero is teaching Spanish Language Arts. She wants to ensure that students develop linguistic features associated with Spanish, but her most important objective is to *educate bilingual* children. To educate them, she needs to engage them holistically – emotionally, intellectually, physically, imaginatively, culturally, linguistically.

Because she is teaching Spanish Language Arts, she gives the students two texts written in Spanish. First, they work on the first text. She engages the students in a *shared reading* of the text, as the students follow her reading. She then breaks them up into small groups for *guided reading*, ensuring that the group is linguistically heterogenous, so that there are children who fall along different points of the bilingual continuum. In groups, the students read the text, discuss them, query their peers for things some don't know or understand, and collaboratively make meaning of the Spanish-language text with all their linguistic and semiotic repertoire, regardless of whether it is English or Spanish, or acted out, or visualized. After they finish the reading, the students discuss what it means, using again all their semiotic repertoire. They repeat the process with the second text, starting with the shared reading and then the guided reading in groups.

Maestra Otero then engages the whole class in discussion of how these texts compare. For the discussion, Maestra Otero encourages them to use their entire multilingual/multimodal repertoire.

### **Organizing the unit around the teaching and learning cycle**

To organize the unit, Maestra Otero relies on the Teaching and Learning Cycle (Brisk, 2015) to make sure her students can conceptualize, visualize and feel the historical *encuentros* and their own *encuentros*. She divided the unit into three phases:

- Phase 1 *Deconstruction of Text*: This phase occurred during the shared reading, as the teacher asked many questions, but also during the guided reading, as the students asked questions not only of Maestra Otero, but especially of each other and then discussed what they did not understand.
- Phase 2 *Joint Construction*: From the beginning of the shared reading, the teacher's questions guided students to start constructing their written texts.
  - During the guided reading part, and in the discussion that ensued, students worked to compare and contrast the two texts.
  - They first wrote their ideas using all their written resources, English and/or Spanish.
  - They then discussed their ideas and filled in their graphic organizers, this time using Spanish only. Peers helped each other, and some students used Google Translate and books as resources.
- Phase 3 *Individual Construction*: After an in-depth discussion of the texts with whatever resources students had, and what made them similar and/or different, they used their graphic organizers to write an individual text in Spanish. (Artifact, 10/11/19)

### **Discussion**

As a borderlander, Maestra Otero's bilingual philosophy and biliteracy instruction has shifted because of Author 1's intervention. She focuses more on teaching based on the languaging of the students, their *corriente*, recognizing that it is the richness of their bilingualism that creates the curriculum and moves the learning current in a positive, engaging, and productive direction. By designing curriculum that holds the language as a priority for the *product* of instruction, and that provides differentiation and planned times for translanguaging for the *process* of learning, Maestra Otero made content accessible to all and created spaces for her students' translanguaging *corrientes* to flow freely among each other. As a result, her students were able to better engage with written texts, discuss essential questions, and eventually construct written texts.

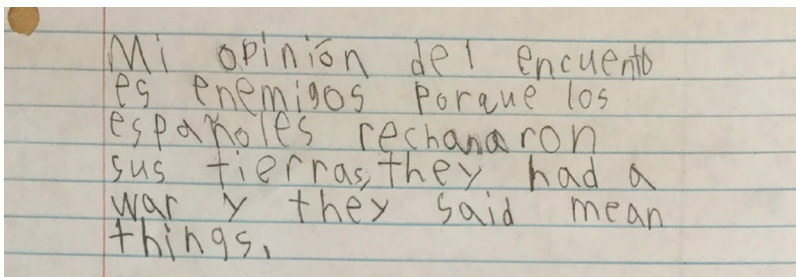
As a bilingual borderlander New Mexican, Maestra Otero straddled the Spanish and English linguistic borders that her dual language classroom attempted to control and that stopped the flow of ideas. To counteract the language allocation policies in the school, she engaged in a borderland biliteracy conceptualization and design. By bringing all the students' meaning-making repertoires together/*juntos* it created a *corriente* that brought forth jointness in resolution. In her own words, "It is because language has flowed naturally throughout the unit that I was able to harness this natural energy to shaping proficient Spanish writers." (Interview, 07/12/20)



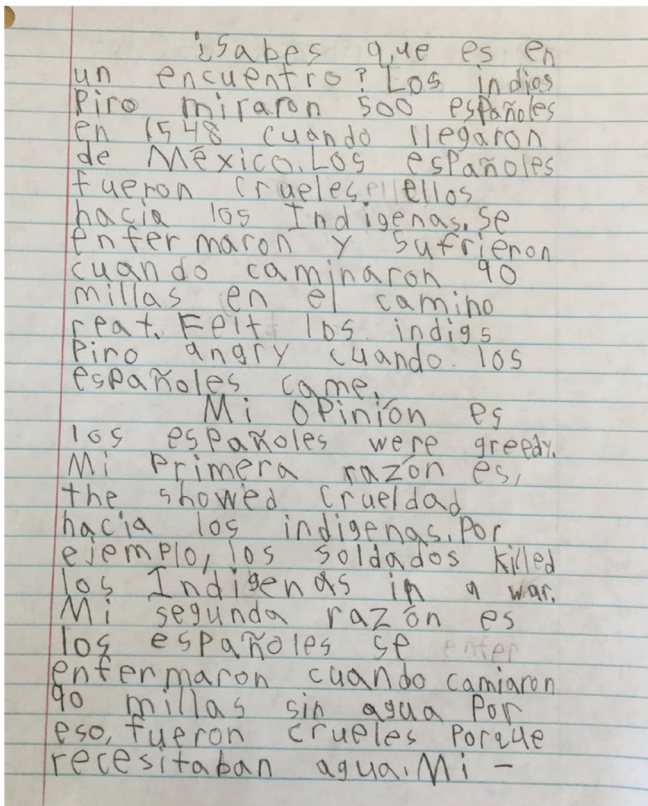
### Valentina: writing a "Spanish language" essay

To show the impact of Maestra Otero's *borderland biliteracy design* in her students' learning and text production, we focus here on one of her students, Valentina. Valentina is of mixed Chicana/Mexican American and Pueblo Native American Heritage. Valentina's parents are delighted that her neighborhood school has a schoolwide Spanish/English DLBE program, and Valentina has been part of the DLBE program since kindergarten.

After the whole class discussion of the two texts, and to assess the students' written production of Spanish without assistance or group discussion, Maestra Otero gave the students a prompt and asked them to respond in writing in Spanish. The prompt was: "Were the Indigenous and the Spaniards friends or enemies?" Valentina replied in writing on December 13, (Figure 1, top. For a typed transcript of this essay, and the next one, see Appendix 1):



Mi opinión del Encuentro  
 es enemigos Porque los  
 españoles rechazaron  
 sus tierras, they had a  
 war y they said mean  
 things.



¿sabes que es un  
 encuentro? Los indios  
 pero miraron a los españoles  
 en 1548 cuando llegaron  
 de México. Los españoles  
 fueron crueles hacia  
 los indígenas. Se  
 enfermaron y sufrieron  
 cuando caminaron 90  
 millas en el camino  
 pero los indios  
 pero angry cuando los  
 españoles came.  
 Mi opinión es  
 los españoles were greedy.  
 Mi primera razón es,  
 they showed cruelty  
 hacia los indígenas. Por  
 ejemplo, los soldados killed  
 los indígenas in a war.  
 Mi segunda razón es  
 los españoles se enfermaron  
 cuando caminaron  
 90 millas sin agua por  
 eso, fueron crueles porque  
 necesitaban agua. Mi -

Figure 1. Valentina's essays 12/13 and 12/20.



Two things can be observed in Valentina's first writing. First, she does not have any explicit understandings of the historical events. Secondly, she cannot truly sustain her writing in Spanish, changing to English to add more details.

During the group dialogue, Valentina was observed debating with her peers about whether the Spaniards were friends or foe. From Valentina's point of view, she thought that "los españoles fueron crueles a la gente indígena" ["The Spaniards were cruel to the indigenous people"] because in her Pueblo community she had heard oral histories about the suffering, illnesses, and death that Indigenous people suffered at the hands of the Spaniards. Through the discussion with peers in ways that did not limit her to one language or another, Valentina was able to "enter the texts" written in Spanish with her own experiences and cuentos. In so doing, she was transformed from being seen as having "incomplete" Spanish to one who had expert knowledge. This not only brought the text to life for herself, but for the others who did not share her Native American background.

Following the graphic organizer that the group had rendered together, Valentina then wrote a three-paragraph essay in Spanish a week after the first, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. The first page of the essay appears in [Figure 1](#) (bottom). The difference between Valentina's performance on the 13<sup>th</sup> and a week later, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, is striking.

Valentina's rendition in written Spanish now is longer. Regardless of many inaccuracies and language developmental indicators, Valentina now masters certain discourse markers. She starts with a question, which she renders with the interrogative sign in Spanish. In the first paragraph she lays out her position that indeed the Spaniards were cruel and how the Native Americans were angry. In the second paragraph, she lists the reasons for her position and gives examples. True, Valentina still cannot produce an entire essay in Spanish. And at times, her feelings can only be expressed in English – – "felt," "angry," "greedy." But one senses that this is the beginning of a process of developing a voice, a voice that can project feelings of injustice, a voice that will be important for a nine-year-old to make sense of the unjust world which she has inherited.

For Maestra Otero, it is the development of the children's voice that is paramount. Maestra Otero is convinced that the specific language features associated with Spanish will grow because Valentina is using her full being, her critical historicity as a racialized student, and her entire language repertoire to contribute something meaningful.

When questioned by Author 1, Maestra Otero mentioned that by "planning for a general linguistic performance where students could orally compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in texts in Spanish and English or bilingually, my students were able to be more expressive and critical about the content in the text." (Interview, 07/12/20) Further, Maestra Otero offered her students an opportunity to read culturally responsive/high interest texts about the Spanish encuentros by which students like Valentina were exposed to different versions of the encuentros, allowing students to build upon one another's thinking, reflect at a deeper level, and make meanings that contribute to their transformation as agentive beings.

## Conclusion

In centering the lives and translanguaging of borderland maestras in New Mexico, biliteracy was reconstructed not as separate interactions with print in two different languages, but as a way of interacting with written texts, with the full potential of lives lived in borderlands. In so doing, leveraging translanguaging in literacy instruction has the potential of counteracting the effects of colonialism to liberate texts from the control of those with institutional power. Through translanguaging, minoritized bilingual students engage with texts to make meaning with their own practices, understandings, and worldviews.

By transforming traditional concepts of bilingualism and biliteracy, constructed with monolingualism in mind, this study developed more equitable forms of learning and teaching that not only advance fundamental knowledge, but also benefits historically marginalized bilingual communities.

This borderland biliteracy then offers a *site* for resistance and transformation of the education of minoritized students in DLBE programs, opening up spaces where they can bring their whole histories, beings and performances into the school texts.

It is crucial to emphasize potential pitfalls in the adoption of translanguaging pedagogies, if not done with care and with a thorough grasp of the underlying theory. In Maestra Otero's classroom, the English language allocation policy, as well as the Spanish language allocation policy of the DLBE program remain. What is transformed is the ways in which children engage in those spaces to learn, not only with the language that has been assigned to the instruction, but with their whole being and languaging.

The teachers who took part in the biliteracy PDR often shared how their newly adopted translanguaging stance was held close to their heart, for they felt that bilingual education for many years had no name for bringing to light the importance of leveraging bilingual students' unitary language repertoire. For these borderland maestras, the transformation of their understandings of biliteracy emerges from their own bilingual racialized existence, instead of from the monolingual understandings handed down by educational authorities. This transforms the biliteracy site from one that keeps bilingual performances in borderlands out, to one that invites them in.

By insisting that literate (and biliterate) acts must be performed monolingually, U.S. education, and even bilingual education, have become instruments of the coloniality apparatus that keeps minoritized bilinguals failing to achieve the potential that literacy offers. Translanguaging in literacy instruction is one way of counteracting this coloniality. And albeit with differences, it would be important for ALL bilingual teachers throughout the U.S. to become critically conscious of the relationship between coloniality and how literacy and biliteracy operate in their classrooms.

## Disclosure statement

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## Appendix: Transcript of Valentina's essays, 12/13 and 12/20

### Valentina's writing 12/13

Mi opinión del encuentro es enemigos porque los españoles reclamaron sus tierras, they had a war y they said mean things.

### Valentina's writing 12/20

¿Sabes que es en un encuentro? Los indios Piro miraron 500 españoles en 1548 cuando llegaron de México. Los españoles fueron crueles. Ellos hacia los Indigenas. Se enfermaron y sufrieron cuando caminaron 90 millas en el camino real. Felt los indios Piro angry cuando los españoles came.

Mi opinión es los españoles were greedy. Mi primera razón es the showed crueldad hacia los indigenas. Por ejemplo, los soldados killed los Indigenas in a war. Mi segunda razón es los españoles se enfermaron cuando camiaron 90 millas sin agua. Por eso fueron crueles porque necesitaban agua . . .