

## Feature Article

# Translanguaging in Action: Pedagogy that Elevates

Jessica Dougherty, Ed.D, Western Oregon University

### Abstract

*Developing the skill set of ESOL and bilingual educators is a critical task considering ESOL/bilingual education is a continually expanding field. Culturally and linguistically responsive teachers benefit from acquiring knowledge and expertise in a variety of ESOL and bilingual approaches in order to meet student needs in PK-20 educational systems. The use of translanguaging in ESOL and bilingual classrooms is investigated in this small-scale, qualitative research project. This article explores teacher candidates' experiences implementing the translanguaging approach during their clinical experience. The research investigates the benefits of creating a space for multilingualism in educational settings, employing effective translanguaging strategies, and discusses the results of these actions. A suggested instructional plan is outlined for applying translanguaging in the classroom. Recommendations are made for including the translanguaging approach in professional learning, pedagogical practices, and practitioner reflection.*

**Keywords:** *Translanguaging, translanguaging space, translanguaging pedagogy, ESOL/bilingual education, emergent bilingual, teacher candidate*

### Introduction

I have been in the profession of bilingual and ESOL education for 24 years. My journey led me from serving as a bilingual classroom teacher to becoming an instructor in an ESOL/bilingual program in higher education. My grandparents passed on their legacy for being passionate about quality ESOL/bilingual education for emergent bilinguals, as they learned English as an additional language themselves, and were also bilingual educators. This is one of the reasons I pursue this work. It directly affected people I adore and admire, and I saw firsthand the influence it had on their lives. This led my efforts in this research and also inspires me in my everyday work as an instructor and supervisor of teacher candidates in this vocation. Quality ESOL/bilingual education is not only an act of effective practice, but is also an act of social justice since it promotes an additive philosophy surrounding emergent bilinguals and provides equal access to curriculum through instructional strategies that promote comprehension (García, 2009). I am deeply committed to preparing teacher candidates, and informing all educators,

about practices that can make an impact on emergent bilinguals academically, cognitively, socially and emotionally.

As the field of ESOL and bilingual education continues to grow, newer educational approaches that have been practiced in other countries have surfaced in the U.S. in order to better meet the needs of emergent bilinguals at all levels of education. Considering that emergent bilinguals make up nearly 5 million of the student population in K-12 schools in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2018), it is imperative that educational practices evolve and expand so students at all educational levels comprehend subject area and course material while developing languages within their linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging is one such approach, as it utilizes all the languages spoken by educators and students to purposefully and simultaneously deliver instruction and teach language through the employment of specific strategies. In order to fully implement this approach, educators are responsible for opening a “translanguaging space”, which is the creation of “a space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience” (Wei, 2011, p. 1223). In an educational setting, this act invites emergent bilinguals to engage in social, academic, and cognitive tasks in languages of their choice. Therefore, the translanguaging space places value and purpose on all languages, which facilitates a balance in power of languages used by participants and contributes to increased participation, academic success, and positive identity development. Additionally, it can be integrated into any ESOL or bilingual program model in order to elevate students, teachers, instruction, learning, and language development in PK-20 classrooms.

### **Defining Translanguaging**

Translanguaging is defined as “the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential (García, 2009, p. 140). A critical aspect of translanguaging is that it is an integrated approach to teaching language and is not the teaching of two separate languages (Cummins, 2005). It is an opportunity for emergent bilinguals and teachers to go beyond translation and to engage in the process of delivering comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987) and producing comprehensible output (Swain, 1985) using the proffered language/s of the emergent bilingual. Furthermore, by opening a translanguaging space and creating a multilingual setting, bilingual students are given the opportunity to access the delivered instruction and demonstrate knowledge without the barriers that exist with single-language use. Concurrently, the utilized linguistic features of each language employed during instruction can be analyzed to encourage language acquisition.

It is important to note that translanguaging is different from code switching. Velasco and García (2014) describe code-switching as the alternation between languages during a conversation to replace or translate a word, whereas, translanguaging is a flow (or “corriente”) of comprehending input, applying knowledge, and synthesizing a conversation, a task, or a lesson while employing the features of all the languages utilized in the class, along with the cultural nuances and identity associations of the language (García et al.,2017).

In summary, in an educational setting, translanguaging is the act of utilizing the full linguistic repertoire of all students and teachers in order to interact socially, academically, and cognitively, which can lead to identity exploration and formation. Translanguaging is acknowledged as a philosophy of educating ESOL and bilingual students (García, 2009), an instructional approach for teaching emergent bilinguals (Williams, 1996; Baker, 1996), and a method for developing bilingualism and biliteracy (Hornberger & Link, 2012). It is also recognized for promoting social justice (Flores, 2013), as it creates an environment that attempts to equitably distribute social and academic resources by engaging in multilingualism.

### **Translanguaging Benefits**

Multiple benefits have been associated with the translanguaging approach. These advantages are displayed in the academic, cognitive, and social realms of the emergent bilingual. Research has indicated that translanguaging has been directly connected to positive identity formation, lesson completion, increased participation, expanded vocabulary, and learning gains in math and reading (Breton-Guillen, 2020; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Makalela, 2015; Musanti & Rodriguez, 2017). Ultimately, translanguaging not only contributes to increased academic success, but to the social-emotional wellbeing of the emergent bilingual as they journey through their scholastic careers. Consequently, the use of this approach provides rich opportunities for PK-20 students to display their understanding and expertise of academic content areas completely, instead of being restricted to simply translating their thoughts, responses, and knowledge.

### **Translanguaging Strategies**

Transferring the philosophical aspects of translanguaging to pedagogical implications is essential in order to reap the full benefits of this approach. These strategies can be implemented in any classroom—mainstream, ESOL, and bilingual. Celic and Seltzer (2011) have developed a very useful translanguaging guide that offers specific suggestions for integrating translanguaging strategies effectively, such as multilingual cooperative grouping and research, use of multilingual texts and resources, preview-view-review, vocabulary inquiry, sentence building, syntax transfer, or the use of cognates. These strategies have been successfully implemented in classrooms across the globe, from Wales to Africa to the U.S. (Baker, 1996; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese &

Blackledge, 2015; Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Makalela, 2015; Musanti & Rodriguez, 2017; Williams, 1996).

Translanguaging strategies unfold in educational settings both spontaneously and purposefully. When a teacher has a foundational understanding of translanguaging practices and has opened a “translanguaging space” in their classroom, Moment Analysis, or “spur-of-the-moment actions,” take place to meet the academic and social needs of the lesson or interaction that is occurring. In addition to Moment Analysis (Wei, 2011), purposeful planning of translanguaging allows an educator to create a comprehensible subject area lesson, while also factoring in anticipated language demands prior to the instruction in order to foster language development alongside content area teaching. In this case, an educator can integrate the use of specific translanguaging strategies, such as cognates, vocabulary inquiry, sentence building etc. to promote content learning, cross-linguistic connections, and language development. Below is an example of how this could potentially be carried out in any PK-20 classroom based on my research.

General Content Lesson	General Content Lesson with Translanguaging
Vocabulary introduction	Vocabulary introduction with multilingual labels Vocabulary introduction with cognates Vocabulary inquiry
Teach content	Teach content with preview-view-review Teach content using multilingual texts Teach content with multilingual dictionary Practice sentence building with content vocabulary Use syntax transfer when necessary
Group practice of content taught	Multilingual groups for discussion Multilingual groups for projects Use of multilingual texts and resources Sentence building Syntax transfer
Independent practice of content	Multilingual reading and writing Syntax transfer: individual conferences

*Table 1.* Plan for Infusing Translanguaging Strategies in Lessons.

In conclusion, the translanguaging approach offers a foundational philosophy of embracing and utilizing the full linguistic capabilities of educators and students in order to purposefully and

spontaneously use specific strategies that promote academic support and language development while contributing to identity formation and providing an equitable learning environment for emergent bilinguals. In order to understand this approach further and investigate how and why educators appropriate translanguaging, this study explored the use, appropriation, and impact of translanguaging by elementary teacher candidates. This study followed teacher candidates in particular because there is a gap in the literature regarding teacher candidates' use of translanguaging in their teaching. The following were the research questions explored:

### **Research Question #1**

How are the participants appropriating the translanguaging approach?

### **Research Question #2**

What factors contributed to the participants' use of translanguaging?

### **Research Question #3**

What are the participants' perceptions of the significance of implementing the translanguaging approach?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Three teacher candidates, who were selected through purposive sampling, voluntarily engaged in this study. They were enrolled in a teacher education program at a local university. The participants were undergraduate students pursuing initial teacher licensure, the ESOL endorsement, and the bilingual specialization. The university and school district involved in this research collaborate to prepare ESOL and bilingual teacher candidates. Each participant was placed with an ESOL/bilingual clinical teacher (mentor). All participants had taken ESOL/bilingual methods courses at the university prior to the study, which included the topic of translanguaging.

### **Data Collection**

Three processes were used to collect data to answer the research questions. One tool included face-to-face interviews which were conducted individually throughout the research project using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). The interviews occurred near the beginning, middle, and end of the study. They were a reflection of all experiences related to the use of translanguaging during the course of the investigation, not just a reflection of observed lessons. These interviews were held at the elementary school where the research took place in a private conference room of the participant's choice. I completed transcription and a three-step coding process, which included initial, focused,

and thematic coding following each interview (Grbich, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). A member check was conducted with each participant to ensure accuracy of the transcription before the coding process and provide validity to the data (Kornbluh, 2015).

Observations were another tool used since they provide direct, firsthand information pertaining to the topics under investigation. A minimum of two direct observations were completed for each participant. These observations focused on the pedagogical implementation of translanguaging and the corresponding impact on teaching and learning. An observation form (Appendix B) was utilized to record translanguaging pedagogical practices as defined by Celic and Seltzer (2011) as well as Gort and Sembiante (2015).

Lastly, fieldnotes were compiled during each of the observations (Emerson et al., 2011). These notes elaborated on the translanguaging practices that were observed and documented details about the impact the practices had on the participants' teaching and their interactions with their students and mentors during the observation.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data revealed several themes that support the notion that translanguaging is beneficial, which promotes the continued and expanded use of translanguaging in educational settings. The research analysis noted that translanguaging can be used successfully both in an impromptu fashion and a purposefully planned manner, translanguaging strategies can create an impact on students' comprehension of directions and subject area content, and that the translanguaging space fosters identity formation and increased participation. The participants' perceptions of the positive impact of translanguaging, coupled with the support of mentors, directly influenced their appropriation of translanguaging.

It is important to mention that the data analysis process revealed that all three research questions should be answered in a unified manner rather than dissecting each separately. This resulted from the participants' interview responses which stated that the research questions—how they appropriated translanguaging, what factors contributed to their use of translanguaging, and their perceptions of the approach—became an integrated cycle where each of the three questions impacted and intertwined with the others. Participants repeatedly noted that they acquired the translanguaging approach due to factors such as, mentor support, pre-planning, student responses, and their perceived benefits of translanguaging. When asked what contributed to the use of translanguaging in their teaching, Participant 1 noted that the mentors' modeling of pre-planned translanguaging strategies facilitated their acquisition of the approach:

Once you actually see them [translanguaging strategies] put into practice [by mentors], it's interesting how the students respond to them. I think the strategies that were selected [by mentors] were so that we can see how they're practiced. Normally, I don't think of the end result, I think of the process. When it's [translanguaging] planned out, we saw the fruits of how it's happening and where it is happening.

Similarly, Participant 2 also credited their translanguaging appropriation to obtaining knowledge of translanguaging strategies and how to use them spontaneously after opening a "translanguaging space," when they commented:

...just using it [translanguaging] and just having it in the back of my mind. I'm aware that this it's translanguaging and, sometimes, if we're working on vocabulary, this just happened in a small reading group yesterday, some of the vocabulary words resemble English words and so I said, "What is a word that is similar to this in English?" The student said the word and then said, "I know it in English and I see it in Spanish, now I know what it is."

This is one example of how Moment Analysis and spontaneous use of translanguaging strategies, such as vocabulary study and cognates, can elevate a lesson by offering the educator tools for creating comprehensible input. Noticing this increase in comprehension and a possessing a stronger ability to create clarity within a lesson were definitely additional reasons for participants' continued integration and appropriation of translanguaging. This is evident in the following comments by Participant 3:

I think just having the extra [translanguaging] strategies and just being mindful that having both languages helps [student] understanding. Just knowing which strategies I can use and how I can connect English to Spanish and not just using languages as a way of communication, but using them as a way to help [students] learn better. It can be used as a tool for giving instructions and helping the students understand the material better.

Participant 2 added, "I think it's [translanguaging] just helped them understand more and make connections between both of the languages. It's easier for them to have both languages because it helps them develop both." This shows agreement with the notion that participants appropriated and used translanguaging when they perceived students were making gains in language development and content area comprehension.

Additionally, participants recognized a connection between the use of translanguaging and students' social-emotional well-being in the following comments from Participant 1:

I tend to pay attention a lot to how they [students] are emotionally. I know if this was purely English, they would have a lot more difficulties understanding the learning or even making friends with others. So because everyone is equal with Spanish and English, it gives them [students] a boost of confidence and self-assurance because they can use both

[languages]. I think it mostly helps them feel confident because they can use the other language and it's a resource for them. For example, there are moments when a student sees they don't know English, but they can go back to Spanish and that elevates them.

In concurrence, Participant 3 shares similar feelings in their statements below regarding how translanguaging affects their students, which ultimately reveals reasoning for how and why they are appropriating and using translanguaging:

I guess in instruction, it's [translanguaging] helped me see that it's one way I can make sure students feel they can say what they know. They know there's not that pressure that they're going to say something wrong because whatever language they say or explain things in helps them be sure or confident and not make them worry whether it's (the language) right or wrong.

Observations and fieldnotes provided an effective opportunity to further explore participants' appropriation of translanguaging. During the observations, I frequently noted scenarios where participation greatly increased due to the participants' opening a "translanguaging space" (Wei, 2011) and their implementation of translanguaging strategies. One example of this is in a classroom where the lesson was being taught in English. The teacher posed a question in English and only one student hand was raised to offer a response. When called upon, the student delivered their answer in Spanish. Once the teacher praised the student for their response and reminded students that it was acceptable to answer in Spanish even though the lesson was in English, many students' hands raised with eagerness to participate. This is a perfect example of how opening a "translanguaging space" allowed for the flow of both languages, as is described by "translanguaging corriente" (García et al., 2017). Following this discussion, the teacher candidate continued the lesson employing the use of translanguaging strategies, specifically vocabulary introduction with multilingual labels and cognates, multilingual reading and writing, and sentence building. This ultimately led to increased student participation and comprehension, along with development of the lesson content and language learning.

Fieldnotes also recorded an instance during an observation where one participant explicitly opened the "translanguaging space" at various times throughout the teaching segment. During one instance, they simply stated, "You can answer in English or Spanish." That offer resulted in several new students contributing to the discussion instead of the same few who were participating previously. The participant ended up with so many students joining in that they were able to elevate everyone's speaking and critical thinking opportunities by conducting a multilingual group discussion through partner sharing where they participated in vocabulary inquiry relating to the content area vocabulary. This same type of interaction occurred frequently during all the observations as soon as the participants realized the translanguaging approach was affording them the opportunity to engage all students by simply using all the students' languages for directions, instruction, and collaborative grouping. These realizations occurred during

instruction and post-teaching reflections, and ultimately contributed to the appropriation and increased use of the translanguaging approach throughout this study.

Participants also revealed that the use of translanguaging, and their positive perceptions of the approach, prompted them to connect back to their own prior schooling experiences and their bilingualism. This inevitably helped them shape their identity as an emergent bilingual and as an ESOL/bilingual educator. This connection produced a profound effect on the teacher candidates and greatly impacted their appropriation and use of translanguaging. Participant 2 commented, “I think it’s [translanguaging] just something I’ve done in school, especially in Spanish classes, and then in some of my [ESOL] classes.” Reflecting on their personal use of translanguaging helped them develop their identities as language teachers themselves and contributed to the appropriation and use of the approach.

Participant 1 noted similar emotions, which are detailed below:

I know that if I would have had been in this type of classroom growing up, it would have been amazing to have been able to use both languages and see that they both have their own time for when we’re using them for a purpose. It’s not like we speak in Spanish because it’s easier.

Participant 3 further explained that they saw how both languages were used in a meaningful way with translanguaging in their clinical experience, which confirmed their idea that it would have been a benefit for them in their past schooling experiences. These conversations during interviews elucidated the fact that as participants were using translanguaging, they were also developing their own identities as emergent bilinguals and as bilingual educators, which promoted further appropriation and use of translanguaging. This is evident in the following comment:

I think it’s [translanguaging] important because prior to all of this [participating in the study], I didn’t realize that I, myself, use translanguaging all the time. We use them [translanguaging strategies] all the time. We use them without even knowing, and so I see it [translanguaging] in a positive light because it’s something that as an ELL, I use, so I can transfer that to my students so they can use their assets.

This data analysis directly answers the research questions and exhibits that the translanguaging approach was used and appropriated by the participants due many factors and perceived benefits. Some of these factors and benefits are mentor modeling, strategy knowledge, the impact of preplanned and spontaneous strategy use on students’ academic progress and language development, effect on student participation and social-emotional well-being, and the connections made to their own identities as emergent bilinguals. Translanguaging was clearly appropriated for specific and meaningful reasons that led to the development and success of the teacher candidate and the students they serve.

## **Recommendations**

This study supported prior research in the field regarding the benefits of translanguaging, but it also revealed concepts about how and why teacher candidates appropriate the translanguaging approach. The findings convey that the participants perceived multiple benefits for their students and for themselves due to the implementation of the translanguaging approach. Conclusively, this contributed to the permanent opening of a “translanguaging space” in their classrooms and continued implementation of translanguaging strategies in their daily practice. This data supports the following recommendations:

1. Translanguaging coursework and/or professional development: Educators should be exposed to coursework and/or professional development directly related to the translanguaging approach, which might include the study of the translanguaging guide developed by Celic and Seltzer (2011).
2. Planning and implementation: Purposeful planning of translanguaging strategies accompany every lesson (see Table 1), while leaving space for translanguaging strategies to be implemented spontaneously to meet the needs of a particular moment in a lesson.
3. Data collection: Educators collect observational and anecdotal data during the use of the translanguaging approach to determine the effectiveness of opening a “translanguaging space” and the use of particular translanguaging strategies.
4. Observations: Record teaching samples for self-observation and reflection on the use of the translanguaging approach in a teaching segment or invite a colleague/mentor to conduct an observation followed with a reflective professional discussion on the use of the translanguaging approach in the observed lesson.

These steps will facilitate the integration of translanguaging into classrooms at all levels in order to elevate educators’ practices. It is possible that implementing these recommendations will foster a deeper desire to appropriate the translanguaging approach because of the results they can produce, such as increased student comprehension, support in language development, and encouragement of social-emotion well-being for emergent bilingual students.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Elevating Pedagogical Practices with Translanguaging**

Translanguaging is one approach that contributes to excellence in ESOL/bilingual education and has the potential to empower emergent bilingual students as well as the educators who employ the approach. Opening a “translanguaging space” sets the tone for respect and use of all languages represented in a classroom. This invitation fosters positive, productive engagement in academic and social interactions so that the translanguaging teachers and students are positioned to engage in equitable and productive teaching, learning, language development, social-emotional growth, and identity formation. With this knowledge, the obvious next step is action and advocacy. The evidence is clear, and now work needs to be done to support emergent

bilinguals. It is my hope that educators will employ the strategies and suggestions offered in this article and also promote the use of the translanguaging approach in their educational system in order to fortify teaching and learning in ESOL and bilingual educational spaces.

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### Author

**Dr. Jessica Dougherty** is a visiting assistant professor in the ESOL/bilingual education program at Western Oregon University. She teaches courses within this program and supervises teacher candidates in their clinical experience. Additionally, she currently serves as the coordinator of the ESOL endorsement program. Her research focus is primarily regarding ESOL and bilingual educational practices, such as translanguaging, and programs that support ESOL and bilingual teacher candidates, including the Bilingual Teacher Scholars program and the Salem-Keizer Collaborative.

This article is dedicated to the author's grandparents, Emma and Candelario Campos, who were bilingual educators and activists in Oregon and Texas, and who were the author's inspiration for pursuing a career in the field of bilingual and ESOL education.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview Questions

The definition of translanguaging, along with a list of strategies can be found [here](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Translanguaging-Guide-March-2013.pdf) (https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Translanguaging-Guide-March-2013.pdf) and will be available to teacher candidates before and during the interview.

RQ1: How are bilingual teacher candidates appropriating the translanguaging approach?

- What is the purpose of translanguaging in your classroom?
- How do you regard the translanguaging approach?
- Which translanguaging strategies have you used in recent lessons?
- Why did you select those strategies?
- How is translanguaging carried out in your classroom?

RQ2: What facilitated the bilingual teacher candidates use of translanguaging?

- What contributed to your knowledge and use of translanguaging?

RQ3: What are the bilingual teacher candidates' perceptions of the use of the translanguaging approach?

- Has the use of translanguaging affected your teaching? How?
- Has the use of translanguaging affected your students? How?
- Will translanguaging affect your future teaching? How?

**Appendix B**  
**Observation and Fieldnotes Chart**

Translanguaging Strategy	Teacher Candidate Actions	Student Actions	Result	Additional Notes