



Translanguaging

navegando entre lenguas – pedagogical translanguaging for multilingual classrooms

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Potential impact	medium
Timescale	long term
Keywords	translanguaging, linguistic repertoire, linguistic resources, identities

What is it?

Most of the world population speaks two or more languages, which means many classrooms are intrinsically multilingual. In addition, education in more than one language is currently being promoted across the world, and there is an increasing interest in exploring how bilingual speakers are educated, reflecting “the shift from monolingual ideologies in the study of multilingual education to multilingual ideologies and dynamic views of multilingualism” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020, p. 300). This change in interpreting multilingualism is supported by the emergence of concepts such as translanguaging. Nowadays, the term *translanguaging* is used in various contexts (for example, bilingual and multilingual education, English-medium instruction, or language teaching, including Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL; see Cenoz & Gorter, 2020, pp. 305-306). *Everyday* or *social translanguaging* refers to how multilinguals tactically use their whole linguistic repertoire for communication purposes. Rather than indicating what languages are,

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translanguaging focuses on what multilingual speakers do with languages, which is to fluidly navigate across them. Therefore, the boundaries between languages become more diffused.

Pedagogical translanguaging or *translanguaging education* alludes to the “intentional instructional strategies that integrate two or more languages and aim at the development of the multilingual repertoire as well as metalinguistic and language awareness” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020, p. 300), thus “a translanguaging classroom is any classroom in which students may deploy their full linguistic repertoires, and not just the particular language(s) that are officially used for instructional purposes in that space” (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017, p. 2). Consequently, the principles of pedagogical translanguaging can be applied to any classroom, at any level, and on any subject where more than one language is proactively being used (see examples in Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; García et al., 2017; Mazak & Carroll, 2016).

In the context of multilingual classrooms, facilitating pedagogical translanguaging represents a way to vindicate bilingual and heritage speakers’ identities, and contributes to social justice. In the case of language teaching, pedagogical translanguaging plunges into the recurrent debate on the suitability of using additional languages, on top of the target language, for instructional purposes. It directly challenges the well-established conception of maximising the exposure to and the practice of the target language in the classroom by discouraging teachers and learners from using other languages they might speak or be familiar with.

Examples

One of the most detailed accounts on how a translanguaging pedagogy can be implemented in a variety of contexts is presented by García et al. (2017), who take three very different multilingual educational settings in the United States as examples of translanguaging classrooms (fourth-grade dual-language bilingual education, eleventh-grade English-medium social studies classroom, and seventh-grade English-medium maths and science classes). The idea is

that learners' linguistic repertoires are resources, not deficits; the collaboration between teachers, learners, and, depending on the context, parents encompass (1) the construction of multilingual ecologies in translanguaging classroom spaces (hanging bilingual posters and signs, having books in many languages in the class library, using audio-visual materials in different languages); and (2) the planning and designing of class activities and assessment instruments that take into account a variety of strategies related to pedagogic translanguaging (among others, using translation tools to make meaning, allowing learners to express themselves employing their whole linguistic repertoires, facilitating reading and listening comprehension activities that require using two languages, etc.).

An example from a different context is given by Makalela (2016), who describes his work on implementing translanguaging practices in a university language course in Sepedi (an African language) for pre-service teachers who are speakers of languages from the Nguni group. The activities carried out include multilingual lexical contrasts, reading comprehension, and listening tasks using at least two languages (for example, reading in one language and answering questions or orally discussing the content of the text in another), or comparisons between different cultural conceptualisations across languages. Other strategies highlighted in other studies include the use of cognates, establishing comparisons between languages' structures and features, sharing linguistic biographies, or working with the local linguistic landscape as part of the learners' social context (Cenoz & Arocena, 2018).

An important point to make is that the language teacher does not need to master all the languages spoken by students to implement a translanguaging pedagogy, but

“ to enable the students to explore their ideas through the linguistic resources they possessed [and to rely] on their input to explain some of the language- or culture-specific construct [that might come up]” (Makalela, 2016, p. 18).

Benefits

When learning a new language, learners frequently turn to the additional languages they speak as a starting point or as a compensation strategy; implementing translanguaging practices leverages all this previous knowledge and highlights the differences between languages, supporting the development of learners' interlinguistic reflection and metalinguistic awareness, which, in turn, contributes to an increase in learners' linguistic competence and autonomy. Translanguaging has plenty of potential as a scaffolding learning practice, however, its greatest impact relies on its capacity to transform how multilinguals (and multilinguals in the making) perceive their relationships with the languages they speak and, ultimately, their identities and themselves.

Potential issues

The use of translanguaging pedagogies might be received with apprehension by both teachers and learners due to the introduction of additional languages into the classroom, thus, it is essential to manage their expectations appropriately and to encourage reflection on what would work for their multilingual learners. Moreover, pedagogical translanguaging requires careful planning to be conducted successfully, and that means investing in resources and in teacher training. Designing assessment instruments and rubrics in the context of a translanguaging classroom can represent a challenge as well.

Looking to the future

Translanguaging pedagogies have already been successfully implemented in a variety of contexts. It would be worth it to continue highlighting its advantages and bringing educational authorities on board. The potential of translanguaging education and its long-term impact still need to be fully explored, thus, specialists need to keep on testing its validity via empirical studies, especially in contexts where learners might not share the same additional languages, and

language teachers should be encouraged and given opportunities to consider how it can benefit their current practices and their learners.

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Resources

- Jim Cummins on Language teaching methods and translanguaging: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrQQVkcINPQ>
- Ofelia García on Translanguaging: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=511CcrRrck0>
- Translanguaging resources: <https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/>
- Li Wei on Translanguaging as a theory of language: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnOx8GjPvj4&t=68s>



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