



From the

AERA Online Paper Repository

<http://www.aera.net/repository>

Paper Title A Preservice Teacher's Use of Biographical Reflexivity to Develop a Translanguaging Stance

Author(s) Ryan W. Pontier, Florida International University; Ehsan Abbasi, Florida International University

Session Title Meeting the Needs: Centering Multiple Dimensions of Language

Session Type Paper

Presentation Date 4/12/2024

Presentation Location Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Descriptors Bilingual/Bicultural, Teacher Education - Pre-Service

Methodology Qualitative

Unit Division K - Teaching and Teacher Education

DOI <https://doi.org/10.3102/2101497>

Each presenter retains copyright on the full-text paper. Repository users should follow legal and ethical practices in their use of repository material; permission to reuse material must be sought from the presenter, who owns copyright. Users should be aware of the [AERA Code of Ethics](#).

Citation of a paper in the repository should take the following form:
[Authors.] ([Year, Date of Presentation]). [Paper Title.] Paper presented at the [Year] annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved [Retrieval Date], from the AERA Online Paper Repository.

A Pre-Service Teacher's Use of Biographical Reflexivity to Develop a Translanguaging Stance

Abstract

This qualitative study investigated how a TESOL pre-service foreign language teacher's perspective of translanguaging evolved throughout a 6-week minimester course focused on translanguaging. To support understanding of how Mel, the focal teacher, considered perspectives with which she previously disagreed, we drew on the concept of biographical reflexivity. We used thematic analysis to analyze data, which included the course syllabus and Mel's oral contributions that were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Findings show that as she worked to make sense of translanguaging as a theory, practice, and pedagogy by reflecting on her own experiences and juxtaposing them with course content, Mel wavered between agreement and disagreement regarding inequality, linguistic imperialism, discrimination, and identity development. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: translanguaging, teacher education, biological reflexivity, foreign language education

A Pre-Service Teacher's Use of Biographical Reflexivity to Develop a Translanguaging Stance

Objectives/Purpose

Translanguaging has gained widespread visibility in the research community over the last 15 years. Used as a critical lens for understanding bi/multilinguals' use of linguistic and semiotic resources, many scholars have argued that we are entering a post-multilingualism era (Li Wei, 2018; Tian et al., 2020), noting that language comes from a unitary system and is accessed naturally without the imposed boundaries of the nation-state. Simultaneously, others have denied the unitary system (e.g., MacSwan, 2017), calling for a multilingual view of translanguaging. In spite of extensive research on the use of minoritized languages as a valuable resource for teaching (e.g., Moll et al., 1992; Paris, 2012), competence is still predominantly measured based on proficiency in the target language. In other words, in the face of efforts to recognize and incorporate learners' multiple languages into TESOL and modern language education, the target language is still considered the primary language of instruction and the main marker of academic success (Gee, 2004). It is no surprise, then, that when teachers are presented with translanguaging, they often experience tensions regarding previous knowledge and experiences (Authors, 2022a; Deroo & Ponzio, 2019; Tian et al., 2020). These tensions are often the result of training and/or personal experiences in second language acquisition (Authors, 2022b), which may create negative perceptions and/or misconceptions of dynamic bilingualism broadly and translanguaging specifically.

Given these ideological perspectives and related experiences, this study investigated how a TESOL pre-service language teacher's perspective of translanguage evolved throughout a condensed 6-week minimester course focused on translanguaging.

Theoretical Framework

To support our understanding of how teachers consider perspectives with which they previously disagreed, we drew on biographical reflexivity (Ruokonen-Engler & Siouti, 2014), which was developed from biographicity, or how individuals reflexively come to terms with the social world (Alheit, 1995). When engaging in biographical reflexivity, “students with a migration background start to reflect biographically on their own and their family’s experiences of migration and living as a member of a minority group in [dominant] society” (Ruokonen-Engler & Siouti, 2014, p. 254). Furthermore, “The need to speak up seems to emerge out of the need to challenge dominant and often stigmatizing discourses and negative perceptions about migrants and to open up new ways of thinking about these issues” (p. 254), such as translanguaging.

Method

Author 1 identifies as a white bilingual male raised in a monolingual English-speaking family in a predominantly monolingual and monocultural white upper middle class community. His experiences developing English-Spanish bilingualism and living in multicultural areas as a student and a 2nd and 3rd grade teacher challenged him to understand multilingualism from a dynamic perspective. Doctoral studies, research, and experiences teaching in higher education have shown and invited him to participate in the natural, creative, critical, and intelligent ways that we “do being bilingual” and to challenge the generally accepted “proper” ways of languaging. Author 2 also describes himself as a white bilingual male. He spent most of his life in a monolingual Farsi-speaking community. After completing his studies in English-related majors (literature and TEFL), he entered the teaching profession. As a teacher, he had the

opportunity to interact with ESL students, learn about their unique way of languaging, and gain insights into the benefits and drawbacks of second/foreign language learning programs.

The focal class, “Translanguaging and TESOL” (pseudonym), took place in a multilingual and multicultural city where Spanish and English are commonly used, though many other languages are prevalent. The course met twice per week for three hours and twenty minutes, and the first author served as instructor. García & Li Wei (2014) served as an anchor text, and peer-reviewed empirical studies supported students’ developing understanding of translanguaging. The four PhD and five Masters students all identified as multilingual and multicultural. They were new to the term *translanguaging*, and they discussed experiences related to multilingualism in education and work, expectations surrounding language use, social justice and power, and sociopolitical messaging around multilingualism. One student, Mel, was particularly outspoken on these issues. We chose to learn more about her given such a high level of participation and her journey from questioning translanguaging to seemingly full acceptance. Mel identified as a Spanish-English bilingual originally from Nicaragua. At the time of the class, she was a pre-service world language middle school teacher in her late 20s working toward her Masters of Science in Foreign Language Education.

Data Sources and Analysis

We drew on Braun and Clarke (2006) to engage in thematic analysis of the data. We first reviewed the course syllabus together to become equally familiarized. Mel’s in-class oral contributions were copied and pasted from the original transcript with timestamps into a standalone file to focus only on her. We read Mel’s contributions focusing on and making notes regarding her opinion of translanguaging. For our next reading, we revised initial ideas that needed to be elaborated, and new annotations emerged. We generated initial codes and searched

for themes by organizing codes into different groups based on similarities. We read the transcript again, grouped comments, and highlighted the theme that emerged from each group. At this point, we reviewed and merged themes. Finally, we engaged in critical conversations and challenged each other's understanding and definition of themes, and assigned a title to each category. Final themes were *traditional second language acquisition theories as a concern*, *updating the notion of social justice*, *the ability to support positive identity development*, and *contemplating translanguaging as a pedagogy*.

Results

Mel's struggles with translanguaging were couched within a sociopolitical context. As she worked to make sense of translanguaging as a theory, practice, and pedagogy, she wavered between agreement and disagreement on the topics of inequality, linguistic imperialism, discrimination, and identity development. Between recognizing her unintentional translanguaging in the past and her subsequent experiences in "Translanguaging and TESOL," Mel developed a nuanced perspective of translanguaging that included ideological multiplicity (Henderson, 2020), or the notion that a person can simultaneously experience dissonant points of view. In fact, she initially disagreed with using translanguaging as the primary instructional method for language teaching but viewed it as an acceptable tactic for students to improve their language acquisition. Mel's perspective of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy was not based on theory or intentional practice; rather, it was influenced by subconscious personal experience ("And let me tell you, even before I knew it, I had already started doing some translanguaging myself last semester when I was teaching"). But throughout the semester, Mel's approach shifted, and she felt compelled to accept translanguaging as a leading teaching strategy. In this nonlinear process of exploring the theoretical grounds for employing translanguaging in

the classroom (Authors, 2022, 2023; Henderson, 2020), there were many questions, disagreements, resolved concerns, and agreements, many of which were based on anticipated practical challenges.

Mel's original disagreement with enacting translanguaging pedagogy was influenced by a focus on traditional expectations of second language teaching and learning. Her reliance on Krashen's (1985) input model--a common aspect of instruction in foreign-language education programs (Chen, 2020)--led her to believe that input should be monolingual in the target language. However, as Mel continued to contemplate translanguaging, her viewpoints widened and allowed space to consider the theoretical advantages of translanguaging, including its relation to the notion of social justice--specifically, eliminating inequality--and the ability to support positive identity development. These more nuanced views on the social and political impact of translanguaging developed the more she leaned toward supporting translanguaging.

I was brought up like that--the proper English, the proper Spanish. But then now, with this translanguaging, everything has a value and everything should be allowed. But is it really allowed? Are we allowed [to translanguage]? ... They might argue, "but we are not going to be able to understand each other. That's why we need to have a standard." But then I say, "but why does the standard have to be a standard? Why can't the standard be some other standard? Who said?"

She understood that a standard dialect (or a monolingual approach to language learning) is arbitrary, albeit permeated with issues of power and privilege, yet translanguaging had the ability to challenge such political power. For example, she later added, "I feel sometimes something like translanguaging might be a little too strong for some people. You know, like some people in power might find this a little too much, too intense, too dangerous."

Mel deepened her interrogation of translanguaging as a form of social justice as she juxtaposed it with her own bilingual experiences in school. “So I understand if you’re to be taken seriously in ... class, I need to speak a certain [monolingual] way. *And* I need...to translanguage. But you know in most classes...I know that there are power structures. So, then what?” (emphasis added). For example, “When I was 11 ... would try so hard, I would go, ‘how can I make my brain not think in Spanish?’” She then added:

I feel like they’re telling you, “ok, you’re ok, but if you want to succeed, you have to conform to this.: That’s...you have to conform. You have to conform. If you want to be successful, if you want those people to hear you, and to acknowledge you, you have to conform to be like them. Even though you know that they’re wrong and you’re right. But you still have to play along with that.

Mel subsequently wondered if students would have better performance in the classroom if they considered it a “safe space,” characterized by trust, motivation, validation, and understanding. For instance, Mel noted, “Kind of like saying, ‘I trust you, I know you can do this,’ and you know, when you get that kind of motivation, you produce better.” She added that a teacher translanguaging and/or acknowledging the knowledge bilingual students bring with them and encouraging them to draw on that knowledge using their full communicative repertoire would help their positive identity development.

We [teachers] make students feel validated. We are letting them know that, yes, you have something, you know, like you can show me something. You have skills because yes, you cannot do it in English, but you can add, you can, you still know the process of photosynthesis, you know. So we are letting them know that they know something.

These examples show how Mel felt that the ability for students to achieve more social justice, be their true selves, and utilize their home language for establishing and maintaining a safe place opened the door for deeper consideration of translanguaging as a facilitative strategy for teaching and learning in the language classroom. Her contributions considered how perceived difficulties could serve to limit translanguaging opportunities, but when contemplated positively, could lead to a burgeoning of opportunities.

Scholarly Significance of the Study

This study sheds light on practical challenges that might prevent the integration of translanguaging into language curriculum. Despite attempts to acknowledge and include the various languages used by learners in TESOL and modern language education, Mel's perspective is not unfamiliar to many scholars who agree with the prevalent approach to ESL/EFL/foreign language teaching and learning that prioritizes the target language as the main means of instruction and the primary measure of academic achievement (Gee, 2004). Mel's doubts regarding concepts such as linguistic hierarchy, standard language, one nation-one language, mother tongue, and language segregation (Fallas-Escobar, 2020) dovetail with her call for the incorporation of translanguaging as a valuable resource in language education (Moll et al., 1992; Paris, 2012). Although the biases and preconceived notions held by schools and society against translanguaging pedagogies can have an adverse effect on teachers' ability to implement these practices in their classrooms (Deroo & Ponzio, 2019), Mel felt a conviction to create an inclusive learning environment for students to feel safe to give voice to their real self and foster a feeling of being connected to others (Robinson et al., 2020). Future research could benefit from further investigating how teachers use their full linguistic repertoire—and encourage their students to do the same—in ESL/EFL/foreign language contexts in which translanguaging is frowned upon.

References

Author. (2022).

Authors. (2023).

Alheit, P. (1995): Biographizität als Lernpotenzial: konzeptionelle Überlegungen zum biographischen Ansatz in Erwachsenenbildung (pp. 276- 307). In Krüger, Heinz-Hermann/Marotzki, & Winfried (Eds.), *Erziehungswissenschaftliche Biographieforschung*. Leske & Budrich.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Chen, C. (2020). The application of affective filter hypothesis theory in English grammar teaching. *Journal of Contemporary Education Research*, 4(6), 71-74.
<https://doi.org/10.26689/jcer.v4i6.1294>

Deroo, M. R., & Ponzio, C. (2019). Confronting ideologies: A discourse analysis of in-service teachers' translanguaging stance through an ecological lens. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 42, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2019.1589604>

Fallas-Escobar, C. (2020). EFL instructors' ambivalent ideological stances toward translanguaging: Collaborative reflection on language ideologies. In Z. Tian, L. Aghai, P. Sayer, & J. L. Schissel (Eds.), *Envisioning TESOL through a translanguaging lens: Global perspectives*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47031-9_15

García, O., & Li Wei. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765>

Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: a critique of traditional schooling*. Routledge.

Henderson, K. (2020). Language ideological multiplicity and tension within dual language bilingual education teachers. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 21(2), 1–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1791708>

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.

MacSwan, J. (2017). A multilingual perspective on translanguaging. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), 167–201.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216683935>

Li Wei. (2018). Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9-30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx039>

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzales, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Toward a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice: Qualitative Issues in Educational Research*, 3(2), 132–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93–97.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>

Robinson, E., Tian, Z., Crief, E., Prado, M. L. (2020). Learning to teach English for justice from a translanguaging orientation. In Z. Tian, L. Aghai, P. Sayer, & J. L. Schissel (Eds.), *Envisioning TESOL through a translanguaging lens: Global perspectives*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47031-9_7

Ruokonen-Engler, M-K., & Siouti, I. (2014). 'Doing biographical reflexivity' as a methodological tool in transnational research settings. *Transnational Social Review - A Social Work Journal*, 3(2), 247-261.

Tian, Z., Aghai, L., Sayer, P., & Schissel, J. L. (Eds.). (2020). *Envisioning TESOL through a translanguaging lens: Global perspectives*. Springer.