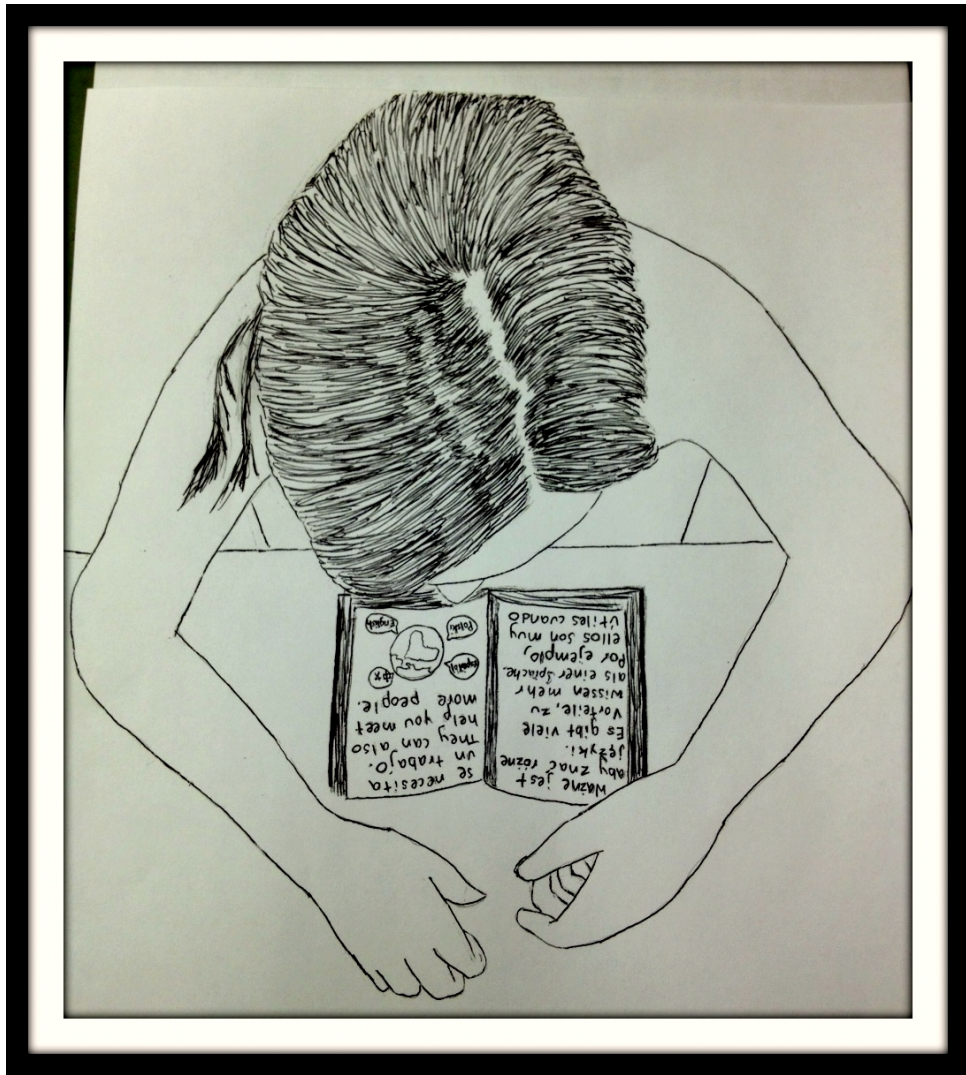


TRANSLANGUAGING: A CUNY-NYSIEB GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



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THEORIZING TRANSLANGUAGING FOR EDUCATORS*

Ofelia García

This guide offers you practical assistance on how to use translanguaging to help facilitate more effective learning of content and language by bilingual students. But you might not have heard of translanguaging before, or you might not understand what it means, and how it differs from other pedagogical approaches for teaching bilingual students. This introduction to translanguaging will help you see that:

1. Translanguaging challenges monolingual assumptions that permeate current language education policy and instead treats bilingual discourse as the norm.
2. Translanguaging refers to pedagogical practices that use bilingualism as resource, rather than ignore it or perceive it as a problem.
3. Translanguaging goes beyond traditional notions of bilingualism and second language teaching and learning.
4. Translanguaging describes the practices of all students and educators who use bilingualism as a resource.

The introduction ends by giving you other sources to expand your theoretical understanding of translanguaging.

1. TRANSLANGUAGING AS NORMAL BILINGUAL DISCOURSE

What is translanguaging?

Translanguaging refers to the *language practices* of bilingual people. If you've ever been present in the home of a bilingual family, you will notice that many language practices are used. Sometimes the children are speaking one language, and the parents another, even to each other! Often both languages are used to include friends and family members who may not speak one language or the other, and to engage all. If a question is asked, and someone gets up to consult Google for the answer, family members write in the search box items in one or another language, and often in both, to compare answers from different sites. In an English-Spanish bilingual home the television might be tuned into an English-language channel, while the radio may be blasting a Spanish-language show. But if you listen closely to the radio program, you will notice that the call-ins are not always in Spanish. Sometimes they're in English only, with the radio announcer negotiating the English for the Spanish-speaking audience. But many times, the radio announcer also reflects the language practices of a bilingual speaker, with features of Spanish and English fluidly used to narrate an event, explain a process, inform listeners, or sell a product. Indeed what is taking place in this bilingual family, their flexible use of their linguistic resources to make meaning of their lives and their complex worlds, is what we call translanguaging.

But isn't translanguaging what others call "code-switching"?

Absolutely not! Notice that translanguaging is not simply going from one language code to another. The notion of code-switching assumes that the two languages of bilinguals are two separate monolingual codes that could be used without reference to each other. Instead, translanguaging posits that bilinguals have *one linguistic repertoire* from which they select features *strategically* to communicate effectively. That is, translanguaging takes as its starting point the *language practices of bilingual people as the norm*, and not the language of monolinguals, as described by traditional usage books and grammars.

What is the relationship of translanguaging to language?

Translanguaging takes the position that language is *action* and *practice*, and not a simple system of structures and discreet sets of skills. That's why translanguaging uses an -ing form, emphasizing the action and practice of languaging bilingually.

Isn't translanguaging a temporary discourse practice out of which people transition when they're fully bilingual?

Absolutely not. There are no balanced bilinguals that use their languages in exactly the same ways. Rather bilinguals adapt their language practices to the particular communicative situation in which they find themselves in order to optimize communication and understanding. As with the family at the beginning of this Question/Answer section, translanguaging is the norm in bilingual families. And bilingual families do not stop translanguaging.

Is translanguaging a valid discursive practice?

Indeed. The most important language practice of bilinguals now and especially in the future is their ability to use language fluidly, to translanguage in order to make meaning beyond one or two languages. Translanguaging builds the flexibility in language practices that would make students want to try out other language practices, increasing the possibilities of becoming multilingual.

Translanguaging is not something that those who do not know do. It does not connote ignorance, or alien status, or foreignness. On the contrary, translanguaging is a language practice of the many bilingual American students in our classrooms.

2. TRANSLANGUAGING AS PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES THAT USE BILINGUALISM AS RESOURCE

But if translanguaging refers to the discourse practices of bilinguals, how is it that this guide uses translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy?

This guide both leverages translanguaging as the discourse practices of bilinguals, as well as develops translanguaging pedagogical strategies that use the entire linguistic repertoire of bilingual students flexibly in order to teach both rigorous content and language for academic use.

How does translanguaging help students develop language for academic purposes?

All teaching uses language to communicate concepts and to develop academic uses of language. Usually the language of instruction is similar to that of the students' home, and although differences exist, there is some continuity. But in the case of bilingual students, the language used in either monolingual or bilingual programs *breaks abruptly* with their range of language practices. For bilingual students to develop the language practices used in academic contexts they must practice those uses, regardless of whether they can use the form required in school. Translanguaging affords the opportunity to use home language practices, different as they may be from those of school, to practice the language of school, and thus to eventually also use the appropriate form of language.

Just as a Major League baseball pitcher develops his expert pitching form through practice, language users must develop their forms through practice. Translanguaging strategies enable bilinguals to incorporate the language practices of school into their own linguistic repertoire. If students cannot appropriate the language practices of academic work as their own, they cannot possibly develop fitting language for this work.

In what ways does translanguaging offer teachers ways to teach rigorous content to bilingual students?

All learners must "take up" the concepts taught, as well as the language used in school. If students do not understand the language in which they're taught, they cannot possibly understand the content and learn. Translanguaging provides a way to make rigorous content instruction comprehensible. Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy offers more direct ways to teach rigorous content, at the same time that academic uses of language are developed.

By using collaborative group work and multilingual partners, translanguaging extends and deepens the thinking of students. The expansion of available multilingual resources for teaching opens up worlds, experiences, and possibilities. And the ability to read and write multilingual texts enables students to gain different perspectives. Translanguaging simply has the potential to expand thinking and understanding.

Isn't it better to teach any language solely through that language? Shouldn't English only be used to teach English? Shouldn't Spanish only be used when teaching Spanish?

For many years this was the assumption. And this assumption has been the basis of many bilingual education and English as a second language programs. But in the last two decades, international research has conclusively established that new language practices only emerge in interrelationship with old language practices. Thus, bilingual education programs, as well as English as a second language programs, are creating opportunities for students to use their entire linguistic repertoire and not just part of it to develop bilingualism and/or develop language practices that conform to the academic uses of language in school, as well as to learn rigorous content.

How does translanguaging as a pedagogical tool affirm the identities of bilingual students?

A bilingual person is not two monolinguals in one, with each language linked to a separate culture. Instead a bilingual person is one person with complex language and cultural practices that are fluid and changing depending on the particular situation and the local practice. Translanguaging supports the ability of bilingual students to have multiple identities that are not exactly like those constructed in monolingual contexts or in other contexts. It actually buttresses the multiple and fluid identities of bilingual students.

Why is translanguaging particularly effective with bilingual students?

Bilingual students' language practices, in English or their home languages, are often stigmatized. For example, many US Latino students are told that they speak "Spanglish," connoting poor command of the language, when the features that US Latinos display may have more to do with normal contact with English. Translanguaging permits students' and teachers' to acknowledge and use the full range of linguistic practices of bilinguals, and to use these practices for improved teaching and learning.

How does translanguaging help students develop metalinguistic awareness?

Putting language practices alongside each other makes possible for students to explicitly notice language features, an awareness needed to develop linguistic abilities.

Is translanguaging as a pedagogical practice a simple scaffold that should be removed once students become bilingual?

Absolutely not. As the many strategies shown in this guide, translanguaging is a pedagogical strategy that should be used to build on bilingual students' strengths, to help them use language and literacy in more academic ways, to pose challenging material, to notice differences in language, and to develop bilingual voices.

How can translanguaging alleviate some of the inequities that bilingual students face in monolingual education systems and even in some bilingual education programs?

In most bilingual situations, one language group is more powerful than the other. Keeping the two languages separate at all times creates a linguistic hierarchy with one language considered the powerful majority language, and the other minoritized. But by making use of flexible language practices, translanguaging releases ways of speaking that are often very much controlled and silenced. When new voices are released, histories of subjugation are brought forth, building a future of equity and social justice.

How does translanguaging fit with the Common Core State Standards?

Translanguaging provides a way of ensuring that emergent bilingual students receive the rigorous education that will allow them to meet Common Core State Standards, even when their English language is not fully developed. In fact, this guide indexes the Common Core State Standards that go with each strategy in the side-bar. In addition, the theory of translanguaging fits well with the theory of language as action that is contained in the Common Core State Standards. Translanguaging offers bilingual students the possibility of being able to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize and

report on information and ideas using text-based evidence; engage with complex texts, not only literary but informational; and write to persuade, explain and convey real or imaginary experience, even as their English is developing.

3. TRANSLANGUAGING BEYOND TRADITIONAL BILINGUALISM AND SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

How is translanguaging different from additive bilingualism?

In the 20th century, bilingualism was seen as “additive,” as the simple sum of two languages. But additive bilingualism doesn’t capture the complexity of a bilingual’s linguistic repertoire. As we said before, a bilingual’s language repertoire is not made up of two distinct and separate languages that are linearly and separately acquired and used. Bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one, and bilingualism is not simply the sum of one language and the other. Ofelia García speaks of *dynamic bilingualism* in describing the complex language practices of bilinguals, shedding the notion of additive bilingualism, and recognizing translanguaging as a bilingual discursive norm.

How does dynamic bilingualism relate to translanguaging?

In the 1980s Jim Cummins posited that there was an interdependence, a Common Underlying Proficiency, among the languages of bilinguals. Cummins and other scholars view bilingual competence from a cognitive perspective. But the concept of dynamic bilingualism refers to a bilingual competence that is not based on cognitive differences, but on the different practices of bilinguals. Dynamic bilingualism refers to the repertoire of bilingual language practices that can only emerge and expand in interrelationship with each other and through practice and socialization. Dynamic bilingualism is enacted precisely through translanguaging.

Dynamic bilingualism values the complexity of the language practices of bilinguals, as it recognizes the ability of bilinguals to adapt to the communicative situation of the particular moment. Translanguaging is the enactment of this dynamic bilingualism.

How can translanguaging help in sustaining a minoritized language?

Translanguaging recognizes and values the language diversity and multilingualism of the community, while enabling students to practice their home languages and literacies. Actually translanguaging, more than any other practice or pedagogy, *sustains* home language practices. Notice that we’re here speaking of sustainability of language practices, and not of simple language maintenance. Because we view language as practice, we believe that minoritized languages in bilingual communities must be practiced in interaction with their plural social, economic and political contexts. It is not enough to maintain the static languages of the past. It is important to bring these practices into a bilingual future.

How does translanguaging disrupt the idea of second languages and first or native languages?

The academic literature often refers to second language teaching, second language learning, second language learners, second language acquisition. These students are told they have “first languages” and “native languages.” Translanguaging disrupts all these concepts. First, by insisting that there is one linguistic repertoire, students are seen as being positioned in different points of a bilingual continuum and not as possessors of a “native” or “first” language, acquiring a “second” one. Second, by focusing on the linguistic continuum to which bilinguals have access, translanguaging goes beyond categories of language, whether English, French or others, and first or second. Third, by insisting that the bilingual practices of translanguaging are what bilinguals do with language, translanguaging disrupts the hierarchy that place “native” English speakers as having English, and thus superior to those who are acquiring English as a “second” language. Translanguaging permits bilinguals to appropriate all language practices as their very own, including those in English, and those for academic purposes.

How does translanguaging disrupt the idea of “heritage” languages?

By placing dynamic bilingualism at the center of language use, translanguaging disrupts the idea that the minoritized language is only a “heritage” language that is static in form, as used in the past. As part of a bilingual repertoire, speakers

select features that are socially assigned to one language or the other, bringing all language practices into a bilingual future. Translanguaging permits speakers to appropriate all language practices as their very own, and use them in bilingual contexts, including the language other than English that now becomes part of a bilingual repertoire and is not simply assigned to the category of “heritage,” taught only in heritage language classes. Instead, these practices in the language other than English are used in interaction with English throughout the child’s education.

4. STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS AND TRANSLANGUAGING AS RESOURCE

Which students would benefit from translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy?

All students would benefit from the translanguaging instructional contexts and strategies offered in this guide. For students who speak but one language at home, these translanguaging strategies would “awaken” them to language diversity, and would build the linguistic tolerance the world needs, and the linguistic flexibility that would enable them to learn additional languages throughout their lives. For students who speak languages other than English, besides English, at home, these translanguaging strategies would validate their home language practices, even when there is no instruction in their home languages. For those who are developing an additional language like English, those we call emergent bilinguals, these translanguaging strategies may be the only way to teach rigorous academic content, as well as developing language.

What is the difference between referring to students who are developing English as emergent bilinguals, rather than English language learners?

Our conceptualization of language as practice and of translanguaging as languaging bilingually makes us understand that it is impossible to simply be a learner of any language, without incorporating features of the new language into one linguistic repertoire. Thus, language learners are not simply “adding” a “second” language. Instead, new language practices are emerging as students become bilingual. Speaking about emergent bilinguals reminds us that by developing the new language features that make up English, students who are learning English are indeed becoming bilingual. Understanding this simple fact would mean that all educators, and not just bilingual ones, would need to understand bilingualism and leverage translanguaging in instruction.

When do students stop being emergent bilinguals?

According to our view of language as action, a speaker never “has” a language, never stops learning how to use it, especially as life experiences change. That is why college students take English as a subject since their use of English becomes more complex. A speaker only uses or performs a language according to the opportunities or affordances he or she is given. Thus, we’re all emergent bilinguals in certain situations, at certain times.

Why is translanguaging particularly important in the education of emergent bilinguals?

Emergent bilinguals are at the initial points of the continuum of bilingualism. Thus, they are unable to understand instruction in another language. Translanguaging facilitates comprehension and allows emergent bilinguals to tackle challenging academic tasks in a language they are yet developing.

Which types of educators are able to enact translanguaging?

Just as translanguaging strategies would be beneficial for all students, translanguaging strategies can be carried out by all educators, although their use might differ as strategies are adapted to the types of students they teach and their own strengths. Both bilingual and monolingual teachers can carry out translanguaging strategies if they consider the bilingualism of their students a resource for teaching and learning. All that is needed is a bit of good will, a willingness to let go of total teacher control, and the taking up of the position of learner, rather than of teacher. The beauty of translanguaging strategies is that they can be carried out by different teachers in many different classroom contexts — monolingual general education classrooms, bilingual classrooms, English as a second language classrooms, even foreign language classrooms!

MORE ABOUT TRANSLANGUAGING

Where can I read more about translanguaging?

The term translanguaging was first used in Welsh by Cen Williams to refer to a pedagogical practice where students alternate languages for the purposes of reading and writing or for receptive or productive use. Ofelia García used the term and expanded it in her book, *Bilingual Education in the 21st century: A global perspective* (2009). Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell. The theoretical underpinnings of translanguaging are further developed in her other work that can be found in www.ofeliagarcia.org. Many authors are now using translanguaging as a conceptual tool to better understand the language practices of bilinguals and the teaching strategies that must accompany those practices. In particular, we refer the reader to the work of Adrian Blackledge, Suresh Canagarajah, Angela Creese, Jim Cummins, Nancy Hornberger, Li Wei and Peter Sayer. Following are some of the essential readings to expand on your understandings of translanguaging from a more theoretical perspective.

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- Hornberger, Nancy and H. Link. 2012. Translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms: A bilingual lens. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 15(3): 261-278.
- Li Wei. 2010. Moment analyses and translanguaging space: Discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth in Britain. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43(5): 1222-1235.
- Sayer, Peter. Forthcoming. Translanguaging, TexMex, and bilingual pedagogy: Emergent bilinguals learning through the vernacular. *TESOL Quarterly*.

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