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Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEA) Journal
Volume 8 Nomor 1, Juli-Desember 2024
e-ISSN : 2597-3819
p-ISSN : 2597-9248
DOI : https://doi.org/10.31539/leea.v8i1.12612

BILINGUALISM, TRILINGUALISM, MULTILINGUALISM, AND POLYLINGUALISM: SOFTENING LANGUAGE BOUNDARIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN CLASSROOMS

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Submit, 03-10-2024 *Accepted*, 30-12-2024 *Publish*, 31-12-2024

ABSTRACT

South African society is highly diverse with 12 official (including the South African sign language) languages used for teaching and learning. This society is multilingual, multicultural, and multireligious. Translanguaging is simply a pedagogical term used to describe the natural ways bilingual/multilingual individuals use their languages in their everyday lives. This paper suggests translanguaging pedagogy to soften language boundaries in South African multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Hence, educators working with multilingual learners must remember that a positive teaching foundation translates across language barriers. This paper is discussed qualitatively using an extended literature review examining both national and international studies that are relevant to the topic. These sources were identified and analyzed. The result from this extended literature review shows that translanguaging goes beyond theory to critical pedagogical practice. Also, it shows that effective teaching strategies based on empathy and acceptance should easily translate from monolingual to multilingual learners. Therefore, there is a need to employ a translanguaging strategy in the classroom to center the marginalized languages in South African classroom space. This extended literature review offers a prototype for teachers, education actors, and policymakers to re-imagine South Africa's bi/multilingual classrooms through the lens of translanguaging.

***Keywords*:** South Africa; translanguaging; bi/multilingualism; extended literature

INTRODUCTION

Second-language acquisition and multilingual education have attracted more attention to Multilingualism for many years. According to Canagarajah (2011b), even

though most educators or teachers do not allow or promote translanguaging, it occurs secretly in multilingual classrooms (Canagarajah, 2011b).

Translanguaging has evolved over the years and now refers to how bilinguals flexibly use their linguistic repertoires (Canagarajah, 2011a; García, 2009; Wei, 2011). Translanguaging goes beyond traditional notions of bilingualism, and its strong proposition of second-language teaching and learning as its driving force is built on a heteroglossic conception of bilingualism, the term referring to the ability to flexibly operate between languages available to students (García, 2009). Historically many languages have been separated for national or political reasons, so new strategies such as translanguaging are always being researched. In multilingual South Africa, translanguaging accepts the existence of different languages (English, isiNdebele, isiZulu, etc.) defined by countries and states (Wei & García, 2022). Therefore, in translanguaging's interpretation of multilingualism, identified languages are subordinated to dynamic linguistic and semiotic processes.

According to Cenoz (2013), there are almost 7000 languages worldwide. Thus, some languages enjoy a hegemonic status in the world's countries because there need to be one, two or more languages that speakers across the globe can universally understand. Therefore, with the spread of world languages such as English across the globe (Piller et al., 2020), there has been a need for people to learn English as an additional language. Translanguaging draws more attention to bilingual or multilingual language users' holistic linguistic repertoire as their linguistic resource. It echoes other previous notions, such as code-switching, which entails using native languages as a pedagogical strategy (Li, 2018). Translanguaging, therefore, has become the dominant discourse in the enterprise of multilingualism over the years. Yafela & Motlhaka (2021) explained this "multilingual turn" as a new approach to multilingualism which began to recognize the synchronic use of more than one language for content teaching and learning, which led to a paradigm shift from the language as a problem to the language as a resource orientation.

Considering multilingualism as a tool for economic and social progress, Schwarzyl & Vetter (2019) posit that in an interconnected and transnational world, it is multilingualism rather than monolingualism that becomes a tool for economic development, access, and social cohesion. Hence, languages should be seen as socially constructed, that can foster inclusivity, and build social and economic development, but not something that can pollute each other. Thus, when the language as a resource orientation is applied in education practice, acknowledging multilingualism becomes a translanguaging practice in teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Terms such as flexible bilingualism, trans-lingual practices, trilingualism, multilingualism, polylingualism, code-switching, code meshing, and language brokering have been used to refer to translanguaging. Orellana & García (2014) described translanguaging pedagogy as "a liberating approach for teachers, allowing them to turn their focus away from standardized language practices toward opening classroom spaces for students to fully translanguage in their learning experiences" (as cited in Donley, 2022, p.4).). As a result, Translanguaging creates an enabling environment for multilingual learners through which they can be able to develop their multilingual identity and skills (Song et al., 2022).

Translanguaging, therefore, entails closing and making invisible the boundaries between languages. This results in making hazy boundaries into a single linguistic repertoire where there is no L1 OR L2 but only a language of learning (Zhang & Jocuns, 2022). MacSwan (2022) argues that permitting learners to switch languages as needed can contribute to improving problem-solving skills and critical thinking, as they learn to navigate and synthesize information from different linguistic frameworks. Furthermore, translanguaging fosters a sense of belonging and enhances confidence for all learners, especially where teachers validate and incorporate their L1 into classroom activities (Gort, 2019).

METHOD

I was able to incorporate previously published data because I employed a conceptual research approach. I chose this approach because there is a wealth of prior studies on pedagogical translanguaging in South African schools and because I wanted to synthesize the ideas to create a more in-depth grasp of the subject by looking at and exploring this notion in greater detail. To properly explore the concept of a translanguaging pedagogy, a variety of data were collected from numerous studies conducted in various multilingual educational settings both nationally and internationally to provide legitimacy.

The current study used qualitative data collection techniques in conjunction with a systematic review methodology. Impellizzeri and Bizzini (2012) state that systematic reviews are among the most popular review kinds and are "considered to provide the highest level of evidence" (p. 495). Samnani, Vaska, Ahmed and Turin (2017) state that a systematic review entails methodically examining, synthesizing, and contextualizing the body of current literature on a subject. It is a specific methodology that locates existing studies, selects and evaluates contributions, analyses and synthesizes data, and reports the evidence in such a way that allows reasonably clear conclusions to be reached about what is and is not known.

Using a variety of electronic databases, the evaluation procedure includes finding pertinent research online, selecting studies for in-depth analysis by applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and then rating the chosen studies.

In order to gather information and look into the pedagogical translanguaging in teaching and learning in South African classrooms, data was gathered from a variety of electronic databases, including Google Scholar. The data was gathered between 2019 and 2024 since it is recent, relevant, and has received scholarly review, making it suitable for use in the research.

FINDINGS

The South African classroom space provides a different context for the concept of multilingualism. South African classroom space is multilingual as learners understand and speak the English language and other local South African languages. However, there has been a shift in the multilingual nature of South African classrooms because of the migration of some displaced people from other African countries due to war, hunger, and unemployment in their various countries. As a result, South African learners and migrant learners are multilingual speakers for whom English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish is one of the languages in their linguistic repertoire, but not necessarily their first language.

There is a great discrepancy between translanguaging and additive bilingualism which is highly embedded in the language in South African education policy. There is an important caveat in the epistemological and practical differences between additive bilingualism and translanguaging. Additive bilingualism mostly employs code-switching methods during teaching and learning. Code-switching uses two or more separate languages and shifts from one code to another (Makalela, 2015). This often carries the language-centred connotation of language interference. The worrying outcome of this practice is that learners who use minority languages try to adjust their language and grammatical structures so that they can fit into the dominant language (Cooks-Campbell, 2022). Wei (2011) argues that this negotiation of meaning in the language user's tongues leads to a meaningful and coordinated performance by the language user because it transforms the language user’s personal history, experience, beliefs, and cognitive ability. Translanguaging, therefore, is seen as a space where discursive practices are used to negotiate meaning in the language user’s tongue (Ali et al., 2023).

Wei (2023) distinguishes between pedagogical translanguaging and translanguaging pedagogy. While pedagogical translanguaging involves utilizing translanguaging practices to facilitate teaching and learning processes by harnessing

students' native languages to improve their learning of the target language, translanguaging pedagogy pertains to a more expansive methodology of teaching and learning that revolves around the fundamental tenets of translanguaging (Wei, 2023). According to Wei (2023), these tenets involve the appreciation and regard for students' linguistic and cultural heritages and establishing a secure and all-encompassing classroom environment wherein all students can engage and acquire knowledge.

Cenoz & Gorter (2022) state that translanguaging has been adapted in classroom settings as a pedagogy that supports employing two or more languages while standing against the language separation ideologies widely rooted in many schools. I look at translanguaging as a means of creating opportunities for communication with other languages, doing activities in the classroom by using two-way translation, reassuring learners to write in all languages they know, and having learners share their work with the South African multilingual audience.

Pedagogical translanguaging in South African multilingual classrooms is a fascinating topic that has gained significant attention in academic research. According to the reviewed studies (Kemende and Charamba, 2023), bilingual or multilingual learners use translanguaging as a tool to achieve particular communicative objectives. Though curriculum specialists currently do not commonly acknowledge pedagogical translanguaging in South African classrooms as a valid teaching approach, and teacher preparation programs have not approved it either (Ramothwala et al., 2022) there is evidence of it happening naturally in our classrooms. The study has delved into the literature that advocates for pedagogical translangauging and has shown that it has a clear affective and symbolic role on students/ learners and there is evidence of academic benefit that can also be seen, albeit indirectly in many cases. By activating learners'/students' multilingual and multimodal repertoires, pedagogical translanguaging plays a key role in facilitating learning. Translanguaging, as pedagogy has shifted understandings of multilingualism. Yafele and Makalela (2022) demonstrate translanguaging as moving fluidly between multiple languages. Thus, there is a developing need for translanguaging approaches in multilingual exchanges in South African multilingual classrooms (e.g., Makalela 2015; Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe 2020; Yafele 2021). Pedagogical translanguaging has unlocked new teaching and learning possibilities in a multilingual community such as South Africa. This has created an enabling environment for multilingualism to survive and thrive in South African classrooms.

Another dimension of research has framed translanguaging as a means of achieving social justice for children of linguistic minorities by enabling them to view their multilingual practices as a strength (Wei 2023; Wei, 2024), a crucial aspect of

who they are (Ndhlovana & Charamba, 2023), and a means of challenging the dominance of traditional monolingualism (Makalela 2019; Charamba 2022). Additionally, translanguaging has been promoted as a means of enhancing language proficiency generally through associated pedagogical strategies (Kirsch & Seele, 2020).

Studies have highlighted some of the benefits of this approach, examining its impact on learners' language development, cognitive abilities, and overall academic performance. It has been shown that when our learners are encouraged to use their native languages alongside the target language which in our context in English, it not only supports their language skills (Cummins, 2019) but also enhances their cognitive flexibility (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021) and even problem-solving abilities as they will be able to draw from their prior experiences. This has proved to promote a positive classroom environment where learners feel valued and motivated to participate actively in their learning. Setati et al. (2019) explored how students in South African mathematics classrooms used translanguaging to enhance their understanding of mathematical concepts. Letting learners discuss problems in their home languages, they found that they could better articulate their reasoning and engage with complex ideas. In another study by Jansen (2021), the use of translanguaging highlighted literacy development among early learners. Educators encouraged learners to read in both their home languages and English, which helped improve their reading skills. Likewise, in the case study she conducted with three learners in different grades, Garcia (2020) observed the learners' disruption of the monoglossic language of the text by bringing their whole self into the text, yielding a desirable outcome for these learners who were initially classified as having a reading deficiency and had a challenge understanding History textbook written in advanced English. Translanguaging space enabled them to emerge as competent readers.

DISCUSSION

There is a lot of research on translanguaging in English language learning. The prevalence of multilingualism in many African countries, especially in South Africa, where translingual practices are common, not only outside the classrooms but inside the classroom as well, has encouraged its application in the second language learning process (Atar & Rafi, 2024; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Even though the English language in most South African schools is a medium of instruction, practitioners use predominating home languages to ensure understanding. Therefore, the translanguaging approach is commonly used in South African classrooms because learning in a single language is challenging since the learners have diverse languages, hence the English language is used as a First Additional Language. Mkhize (2016)

examined how translanguaging practices allowed learners to express their cultural identities. In a township school, learners used their home languages to share stories and cultural knowledge, which enriched classroom discussions and created a sense of community.

It is also important to note that by using a learner's language or allowing them to use their language, their sense of identity is enhanced, and this gives them a sense of belonging and appreciation. It is, therefore, important for teachers/practitioners to encourage the use of learners' home languages and incorporate them into their practices. The use of the use of multiple languages will facilitate greater learning in multilingual South African classrooms. Translanguaging does not know any boundaries between different languages. Its focus is on the learner's linguistic repertoire and what they can do with it. This allows learners to assemble their language use in ways that fit their communicative needs (Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2018). Hornberger & Link (2012) support this claim when they note that "translanguaging shift lens from cross-linguistic influence on how multilingual intermingle linguistic features"(p.12).

Ngubane, Ntombela & Govender (2020) found that bilingual teachers use translanguaging practices for pedagogical and clerical purposes, enhancing learners' cognition of writing concepts and stimulating active participation. Translanguaging also serves as a useful learning resource in multilingual contexts where English is an obstacle, restoring bi/multilingual learners' identity. Likewise, Mbirimi-Hungwe (2020) found that translanguaging improves students' comprehension of difficult academic concepts taught in English. Charamba and Zano (2019) used a mixed methods design, with 30 tenth-grade students to understand the role of language in the academic performance of science students taught in a different language. The interview responses revealed a significant difference in academic achievement between the two groups in the post-test. Thus, through translanguaging, students' academic performance is improved, with reasoning power and better comprehension of concepts. According to García (2011), this bridges linguistic and cultural boundaries and increases reasoning power through integrated multilingual practices in the classroom. The current paper, therefore, emphasises that translanguage as a means to soften language boundaries in South African multilingual and multicultural classrooms opens room to consider learners' L1 used in everyday communication.

CONCLUSION

The overall contribution of this study is that it highlights the efficacy of pedagogical translanguaging in South African multilingual classrooms where the majority of learners come from highly diverse backgrounds and contexts. This undoubtedly causes complexities in certain practices, especially when there are contradictions between practices and policies as highlighted in the paper. On the one hand, the policies assume a view of languages as discrete, isolated entities (Makalela, 2015), and on the other hand, practices show languages as interdependent entities that are embedded in complex sociolinguistic realities. In this sense, a broader understanding of pedagogical translanguaging in multilingual contexts is necessary. Such an understanding acknowledges and promotes all discursive resources of bi/multilingual learners in South African classrooms.

The ease with which most South African teachers take to pedagogical translanguaging affirms what has been said previously that multilingualism is the South African lingua franca (Schoeman et al., 2023). The monolingual mindset is, however, still pervasive in some teachers (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021) and should be addressed at all levels of the education system if it is to change. In South Africa, multilingualism has existed for generations, and in order to fully utilize the talents of all of our learners, our teachers ought to be prepared and supportive of multilingual practices. I conclude by recommending official recognition of multilingual pedagogical practices and policies that valorise learners' and teachers' multilingual practices. There is a need for more attention to pedagogical translanguaging and I claim the importance of adapting translanguaging to the challenges of everyday South African society. This paper challenges some traditional notions such as 'target-language-only pedagogies'. I argue for the need and incorporation of translanguaging pedagogy with more critical content and more inclusive teaching and learning programmes in translingual/multilingual South African classrooms. South African teachers must adopt a translanguaging pedagogy to successfully promote and implement learning strategies such as code-switching, code meshing, and language brokering, which allow multilingual learners to challenge socially accepted dominant languages, like English, and develop and strengthen their critical literacy skills and many other learning skills.

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