

Toward Inclusive Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms

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As the world moves to a post-COVID stage and movement of goods and people across borders resumes, we need to rethink how we communicate and educate students about communication in a superdiverse world with increased presence of minoritized languages and varieties. The growing evidence of translanguaging practices among plurilingual speakers in multilingual societies and linguistic minority communities across the globe (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Oliver et al., 2020; Seals & Olsen-Reeder, 2020; Straszer et al., 2022) has prompted greater attention to equity and linguistic social justice issues in language education. Pedagogical translanguaging has been put forward as an “all encompassing” (Li, 2018, p. 9) practice to address linguistic inequities and injustices in the classroom. While it is a step forward in countering monolingual ideology and the dominant-language-exclusive policy and sanction, I draw attention to the “selective” nature of much of the current pedagogical translanguaging approach and argue for “inclusive translanguaging” that capitalizes on all of the languages, cultures, and identities of plurilingual speakers who have historically received marginalization, including their non-dominant dialects or mother tongues.

The goal of pedagogical translanguaging is to develop flexible, plurilingual spaces in the classroom where learners’ full linguistic repertoires can be leveraged as a resource in meaning-making or communication (García, 2009; Vallejo & Dooly, 2020). With this transformative promise, all of the students’ languages should be considered assets for meaning making. Studies on teachers’ translanguaging practices, however, have indicated that translanguaging practices have been highly “selective” in endorsing either the standard forms of English and/or dominant minority language (or variety) while excluding non-standardized Englishes and/or minority languages or varieties. Therefore, this selective translanguaging has served to exclude speakers’ linguistic repertoire in non-dominant languages or varieties and in turn, perpetuate entrenched linguistic hierarchies and reproduce deficit ideologies toward these languages and varieties.

In the North American context, pedagogical translanguaging has attended to the bilingual repertoire of speakers of English and minority languages (e.g., English-Spanish, English-Korean, English-Chinese). However, such progressive practices can also be limiting and cause harm due to the exclusive attention to the standard varieties of minority languages. For example, since most Spanish-English dual language bilingual education programs in the U.S. require standard Spanish

with strict language separation policies, translanguaging is therefore mostly restricted to students' resources in standard American English and Standard Spanish; and other vernacular forms of Spanish are excluded from instruction and pedagogical translanguaging (Friere & Feinauer, 2020). Similarly, studies of English-Chinese translanguaging have focused on English and Mandarin (the official language) with little attention to other Chinese varieties (or "Chineses") such as Cantonese, Fujianese, and Hakka (Li et al., in press). Lack of attention to these non-dominant L1 languages can cause educational and psychological harm. Wu and colleagues (2014) found that neglecting Chinese 7th and 8th graders' non-dominant forms of true L1 varieties by imposing institutionalized surrogate heritage language (Mandarin) in instruction led to increasing frustration and alienation among these students in the classroom, causing them to gradually lose interest in learning Mandarin because of the hegemony of Mandarin over their heritage language varieties and irrelevance to their own imagined identities and desires.

Similarly, outside North America, numerous studies have documented a similar selective approach of valuing dominant languages or varieties over minority languages in English language teaching with few exceptions. In English medium classes in Nepalese schools where students often speak mother tongues (e.g., Bhojpuri) other than the official language, Nepali, it has been found that teachers often exclusively enact or encourage translanguaging in English and Nepali while neglecting or forbidding students' use of mother tongues in formal classroom instruction, which further widens the educational and linguistic inequities among these marginalized students (Sah & Li, 2020). In their study of translanguaging in EFL classes in Indonesia, Rasman (2018) found that while translanguaging is helpful for students' English learning, the statuses of English, Indonesian (the national language) and Javanese (a local language) are constructed differently with Javanese being least valued and used in the classroom and therefore, the translanguaging pedagogical practices failed to maximize students' linguistic potential. As well, in their studies of Swedish-Kurdish translanguaging spaces in a Swedish elementary school, Straszer et al. (2022) revealed that even though the Kurdish classroom was perceived as a safe space for using a variety of languages, Kurdish was the preferred one even when varied linguistic resources were visible and audible both inside and outside the classroom. Further, there were no translanguaging or representation of students' diverse languages outside the Kurdish classroom, demonstrating very concrete and visible language hierarchies. In sum, this body of research suggests that selective translanguaging that aligns with a prevalent linguistic hierarchy that devalues plurilingual learners' non-dominant languages and identities serves as a "threat" to these students' educational advancement and wellbeing (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017) and is a violation of their "linguistic human rights" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994).

Moving forward, to ensure more inclusive, rather than selective and exclusive, translanguaging, there is a need for intentional teacher development in awareness-raising and strategy learning and adoption (e.g., those in Cenoz & Santoz, 2020) as teachers are policy and pedagogy enactors in the frontline. Efforts must be made to understand teachers' beliefs and values toward plurilingualism and raise their critical awareness of the monolingual and one-language-only ideologies that are still prevalent in many schools and societies. As well, teachers need sustained professional support in understanding translanguaging as pedagogy and in exploring ways to successfully utilize it in the English (and/or content) classroom as few teacher-education or professional-development programs provide specific courses or strategies on this topic. Most such adaptation in instruction is often left to individual teachers. Therefore, there is a need for more connected or whole school/program approach (Oliver et al., 2021) to promoting inclusive translanguaging practices.

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