WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW

ABOUT TRANSLANGUAGING

by

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SUMMARY OF PROJECT

This project addresses the question, what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students? Beginning with an review of the translanguaging approach as a research paradigm, I then discuss the type of interactive, collaborative, peer-led professional development that I believe is most effective. I then describe the setting and audience of the project, and illustrate the project in greater detail.

Research paradigm

Translanguaging is both epistemic and practical--that is, it is a way of conceptualizing language, as well as a method that guides language instruction and use in classroom settings. Theoretically, translanguaging is based on the concept of linguistic repertoire, where the totality of language features to which a person has access are understood as part of an integrated, disaggregated system. This is in contrast to the the traditional understanding of languages such as English, Spanish, etc., as bounded, separate entities. In the place of languages with strict boundaries as independent, abstract systems, translanguaging recognizes languaging, which is the process of using and combining the various language features to which a speaker has access, regardless of the abstract language system to which they supposedly belong, to create the meaning that is most appropriate to the context at hand.

Understanding translanguaging involves a switch from viewing a language as an abstract, bounded system that we master, to languaging as drawing on language features as available and appropriate. This challenges many sacred beliefs about language, such as mother tongue, L1 and L2, as well as the stability of concepts like English, Spanish, etc. These abstractions are useful up to a certain point, but they do not capture the ways in which bilingual speakers actually use,
create, and acquire language, nor do they support emergent bilinguals to develop their competencies and access their full abilities in schools. Among the goals of this project is to open up a translanguaging space (García & Wei, 2014) that allows speakers to move freely between different codes, draw on their unique experiences and environments, and to combine language features in ways that are both creative and critical.

**Method**

The method of this project is an interactive, collaborative, peer-led professional development session. Adults learn best in an interactive environment where they can process and manipulate new information directly and actively as they learn it. Effective professional development is collaborative because adults working together allows them to build a shared understanding of new material, air concerns and answer questions, and work together to situate information in the specific contexts in which they work. Peer-led professional development breaks down the divide between audience and expert, allowing teachers to learn from each other, to feel free to make and learn from mistakes and misconceptions, and to establish a framework for continuing collaboration beyond the session.

**Setting and audience**

The setting for this project is the weekly professional development time after school on Mondays that most New York City public schools have implemented since the most recent teacher contract was ratified several years ago. The audience will be self-selecting non-ESL teachers from all grades and disciplines who want to learn more about serving emergent bilinguals. The presentation will take place over a period of 65 minutes during one day after school.
**Project description**

The project is an interactive slideshow on translanguaging, with frequent breaks for interaction and discussion. Its purpose is to expand the participants’ conceptual understanding of language and the processes by which language is used and learned, so that they may be more comfortable thinking of themselves as language teachers, regardless of their discipline. While I believe that both teachers and students have much to gain from the adoption of translanguaging practices, this presentation seeks primarily to introduce translanguaging as a theory and an approach to teaching. Using the slideshow as a point of departure for interaction, discussion, and reflection, I will introduce the concept of translanguaging and its conceptual foundations, drawing a contrast between this and traditional ways of thinking about languages. Then we will explore some applications of translanguaging in educational contexts, and discuss how these enhance the learning environment. Finally, we will reflect on what we have learned, pose questions for the future, and speculate about how we might apply this new understanding moving forward.
COPY OF PROJECT
Young people in general, and young people of color in particular, are frequently disparaged by adults for undermining their own “professional” self-presentation and even “destroying the language” by speaking in ways that are deemed “uneducated,” “improper,” “illogical,” “sloppy,” “lazy,” “broken,” and “ungrammatical.”...

- Is this true in general?
- In the context where you work?

...Abundant linguistic research has demonstrated, however, that youth, especially those from economically, racially, and/or linguistically marginalized communities, are in fact innovative, flexible, and sophisticated language users, and that language is central to young people’s creation of their identities.

- Agree, disagree, yes but..., not sure

• Why I am here?

• Our goal for today:
  • To introduce a new perspective on language so that we can understand and serve our students better

• Accomplishing this in two steps:
  • What is the conceptual basis of translanguaging?
  • How does translanguaging help us (re-)understand emergent bilinguals?
    • Who are “emergent bilinguals”?
    • Why “emergent bilinguals”?

• Feedback
The Conceptual Basis of Translanguaging (¼):
There are no Languages

- **Named languages** (English, Spanish, Navajo (Diné), etc.)
  - Are real, not imaginary, but have no objective or scientific basis
    - Like the racial category “white”?  
  - Are socially constructed
  - Were invented to serve a group interest
  - Do not coincide with the language of any individual

- **Examples of Language invention**
  - Languages of colonized peoples: Bahasa, Bengali
    - Based on outsider notions of racial and national essence
  - Languages of colonizing peoples: French, Spanish
    - Consolidate in an atmosphere of nationalism and territorial unity
The Conceptual Basis of Translanguaging (2/4): Instead of Languages, languaging

A Language is a (supposed) autonomous, discrete and bounded system, but languaging is a process.

New terms

• **Repertoire** is the collection of language user’s abilities, understood as individual features within a disaggregated system. The elements of a repertoire can be combined in an infinity of novel ways to create whatever meaning is appropriate to the situation at hand.
  - Repertoire stands in contrast to the traditional view of language features as belonging to one language only, with no application outside the boundaries of that specific code.
• **Languaging** is how we draw on the full breadth of our linguistic repertoire to make connections and meaning, using creativity to move fluidly among the linguistic practices and features that are most appropriate in any given situation.

Languages are abstractions, coming from an “outsider” view of language users. What would we see if took an “insider” view of language users?
The Conceptual Basis of Translanguaging (3/4):

**Idiolect**

• Idiolect
  • Is the personalized linguistic system that allows us to speak and communicate
  • Can overlap with many named languages
  • May be quite similar to the idiolect of a friend, family member, or a person from similar circumstances
  • May be mutually unintelligible to someone who speaks the same named language
  • Is constantly shifting, and is shaped by social interaction

• Reactions
The Conceptual Basis of Translanguaging (4/4): How many boxes do we have?

From the **outside** point of view, each Language that we know has its own “box” in our minds:

- **Subtractive bilingualism**: different languages interfere with each other. One must be suppressed for another to emerge.
- **Additive bilingualism**: an individual can acquire a second language but this will remain segregated from the first language.
  - Analogy—a bicycle with two wheels, balanced and separate.

From the point of view of the **person who languages**, there is only one box where all our language features reside:

- **Dynamic bilingualism**: a fluid language practice that allows language users to make meaning and communicate in the many cultural contexts they navigate.
  - Analogy—an all-terrain vehicle that navigates the contested, uneven, and constantly shifting ground of intercommunication.
What is translanguaging?

An idea that emerged from bilingual educators in the 1990s in Wales: students would listen in one language, and answer in the other.

What does “trans” mean?
- Crossing or going beyond
- What are we crossing when we translanguage?
- Language boundaries
- Disciplinary boundaries
- Structural boundaries
- Implicit values

Translanguaging in education is intentionally transformative, such that traditional understandings are uprooted and new voices are allowed to surface. It advances social justice by drawing on critical pedagogy to challenge existing social and cultural structures of language, learning, and education.

If we believe in translanguaging, what does that say about what we believe about children?
- Instruction is based on the practices of the child, not the designation of schooling systems or nation-states
- Value-added/ strengths-based perspective rather than a deficit model
- What does it say about our educational practices?
What does translanguaging show us about how bilinguals think?

- How do we know which “language” to use?
  - Feature selection
  - Feature suppression
- Translanguaging describes the actual practice of multilingual communities, and of multilingual individuals speaking naturally and freely
- Can monolinguals translanguage?
- **Let’s not base our whole approach to language education on feature suppression**
  - It’s unfair to bilinguals
  - It’s unhelpful
- Is translanguaging different from code-switching?
- Reactions

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[C]ode-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.

More information

● Free stuff
  ○ Translanguaging in Practice prezi
    ■ Also available as a two page pdf
  ○ CUNY-NYSIEB
    ■ Ms. Chapman video
      ● Reactions
    ■ Many more videos on the website and the YouTube channel
      ● Why not just skip right to the strategies?

● Not free stuff
  ○ Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism, and Education (2014)
  ○ Translanguaging with Multilingual Students: Learning from Classroom Moments (2016)
  ○ The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning (2016)
● What if we talked about monolingual White children the way we talk about low-income children of color?
● Today’s goal: To introduce a new perspective on language so that we can understand and serve our students better
● Feedback: can you complete a quick Google survey on the presentation?
  ➔ 1-2 takeaways: what did you learn?
  ➔ 1-2 questions: what are you wondering?
  ➔ 1-2 suggestions for me: how could this be improved?
  ➔ 1-2 next steps for you: what now?
  ◆ If you want me to follow up with you personally, put your name on your survey--otherwise you can leave it blank
  ◆ Thank you so much for this opportunity! My email address is tomsnell11@gmail.com--please keep in touch.
REFERENCES


