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Transforming Post-Secondary Classrooms with Translanguaging Pedagogy and Practice: A Critical Essay

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Abstract

In this paper, I reflect on the need to provide equitable learning opportunities for multilingual students in post-secondary education (PS). Educators must adopt a translanguaging pedagogy to successfully promote and implement translanguaging strategies, specifically codemeshing, which allows multilinguals to challenge socially accepted dominant languages, like English, and develop and strengthen their critical literacy skills. I pose two questions that guide my critical reflection on why and how post-secondary institutions (PSIs), educators, and students benefit from translanguaging pedagogies and strategies: (a) What do translanguaging scholars say about the transformative properties of translanguaging pedagogies in PSIs? (b) How can a translanguaging strategy, like codemeshing, better prepare PS students to develop and strengthen critical literacy skills? I critically examine how transformative translanguaging pedagogies can equip multilingual students with the critical literacy skills needed in this ever-evolving 21st-century world.

Keywords: codemeshing, low- and high-stakes writing, translanguaging pedagogy, multilinguals, post-secondary institutions

As I read through the requirements of a final writing project for a Doctoral Trends and Issues in Literacy Pedagogy and Research course focusing on translanguaging, I wondered how I could apply what I had learned throughout the course to what I had experienced as an educator. The task at hand was to critically reflect on translanguaging and education. I immediately jumped to my current teaching reality. I wondered if the adjuncts instructing my high school juniors in dual enrollment courses prescribe to a translanguaging pedagogy, and if so, I questioned if my high school students, who found themselves in rigorous college-level courses, were given opportunities to "travel across linguistic boundaries… [to access] their entire language repertoire in learning," and thus "engag[ed] in creative and critical thinking" (Dong, 2022, pg. 417). Did translanguaging, "the process whereby multilinguals strategically and intentionally use their linguistic repertoire in an integrated form for communication and learning purpose" (Li, 2018, as cited in Charamba, 2022, p. 233) occur in my high school students' college courses?

We live in a world run by global movement and globalization, encouraging, and sometimes (forcefully) propelling institutions to internationalize, especially in political and commercial realms. Though there have been positive cases of translanguaging transformations at the elementary level (i.e., Back et al., 2020; Lemmi & Pérez, 2021; Parra & Proctor, 2021) and even at secondary education levels (i.e., Allman & Guethler, 2021; Kayi-Aydar & Green-Eneix, 2019; Lu & So, 2023; Pacheco & Daniel, 2016), there is still much to be done in post-secondary (PS) classrooms to better prepare students with the critical literacy skills needed for a globally competitive society.

Research is scarce on translanguaging pedagogy and policy and its effects on PS education in a global context (Karabulut & Dollar, 2022; Siziba & Maseko, 2023), with scholars noting that translanguaging in PS is typically through a Western perspective (Yafele, 2021) or in cases where multilinguals might means more than just negotiating between two languages (Hurst & Mona, 2017). As true as this is, there is still room for improvement in PS education in general, even in the Western world. Changes in American demographics shed light on the need for more scholarly attention. According to Zeigler and Camarota (2019), 21.9% of United States citizens spoke a "foreign language at home—more than double the 11 percent in 1980" (p. 1). The National Center for Education Statistics (2023) reported that Hispanic undergraduate enrollment comprised 3.3 million of the overall 15.4 million enrolled in post-secondary institutions (PSIs). Now, that is not to say that all 3.3. million Hispanic PS students are multilingual, but it does paint a picture of the everchanging population gracing PSIs in the United States.

The reported demographics emphasize, however, the need to reflect and evaluate current PS pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices. Parmegiani (2022) urges PS stakeholders to question hegemonic practices created through monolingual instruction because of the disconnect that exists "between the language of learning and teaching (LOLT)" (p.291) and a student's native and primary language. With this in mind, I wonder how transformative an effect will be when PSIs and educators adopt translanguaging pedagogies and practices to serve their students better.

I pose two questions that guide my critical reflection on why PSIs, educators, and students benefit from translanguaging pedagogies and the practice of codemeshing, specifically for developing and strengthening critical literacy skills:

- What do translanguaging scholars say about the transformative properties of translanguaging pedagogies in PSIs?
- How can a translanguaging strategy, like codemeshing, better prepare PS students to develop and strengthen critical literacy skills?

Positionality

I have spent the last 12 of my 17 years teaching high school as a dual enrollment support teacher at a university in a South Texas city bordering Mexico. Most of my students, over the years, have been multilingual and identified as emergent bilingual learners who report their first language (L1) as Spanish and their second language (L2) as English. I have also had students whose L1 was Tagalog and L2 was English. I have witnessed my multilingual students struggle in rigorous college courses. These struggles occurred not because instructors and professors (many of whom shared similar cultural backgrounds) did not empathize but because the courses were not necessarily created with the multilingual student in mind. Most of my students complete the university-required basic courses, but it is not without support from high school and university instructors. As a support teacher, I take time to reteach concepts taught in the dual enrollment courses, sometimes finding it necessary to rephrase what was taught or covered in a way that my multilingual students could understand. However, how are multilingual PS students faring in PSI courses lacking such support and translanguaging opportunities?

Transforming Through Translanguaging Pedagogies

Reading, writing, and analyzing are critical literacy skills multilingual students should have the opportunity to develop and strengthen while seeking higher education. These skills will make all the difference as they learn to navigate a globally competitive society post-graduation. Sairsingh (2017) defines critical literacy as

> the lens through which we examine texts in various forms and modalities, and challenge assumptions and ideas about our society and our world. Ultimately, it involves recognizing the power not only to read and critically analyze ideas, but, where necessary, to present alternative perspectives on issues of national importance; thus, critical literacy can propel students and citizens, more broadly, toward greater participation in national discourse, and ultimately, toward meaningful social transformation. (p. 31)

Unfortunately, these critical life-transforming skills might not develop or strengthen if students lack opportunities to learn because of the disconnect that exists, as earlier stated, between their primary language and the LOLT (Parmegiani, 2022). Because of this, the significance of implementing translanguaging pedagogies becomes imperative.

Research shows that writing, a necessary component of critical literacy, is the most challenging academic requirement in PS learning (Karabulut & Dollar, 2022), and the ability to apply effective writing skills and linguistic repertoires is a mark of a critical writer (Canagarajah, 2011; Dong, 2022; Velasco & García, 2014). Hence, following a TP that values and promotes the use of students' cultural backgrounds and linguistic knowledge in literacy-building activities is a must—a claim that many in the field of translanguaging have contributed over the years (i.e., Adamson & Coulson, 2015; Araujo et al., 2023; Nicolarakis & Mitchell, 2023; Velasco & García, 2014). Reflecting on the literature that exists concerning translanguaging pedagogies in PSI classrooms and how it affects multilinguals' critical literacy skills, three transformative outcomes become apparent: (a) transformation via safe spaces, (b) transformation via self-value and worth, and (c) transformation via academic self-efficacy.

Transformation via Safe Spaces

As an educator at any level, what does it mean to create safe spaces for learning? How does one go about doing that, and in what ways does it impact our students? According to scholars, safe spaces in learning environments are created because translanguaging offers students opportunities to seek support from others who share cultural and linguistic similarities (Canagarajah, 2013a, 2013b; Dovchin, 2021, as cited in Qin & Llosa, 2023). Qin and Llosa (2023) define such translanguaging *safe houses* as "acts that allow students to bypass surveillance to create a safe space for themselves" (p. 719). While in these safe spaces, multilingual students can challenge dominant hegemonic structures, defy classroom protocol and teacher practices, or engage and enjoy themselves as they learn (Qin & Llosa, 2023; Yafele, 2021). In Canagarajah's (2011) research concerning translanguaging strategies in writing practices, the emphasis is placed on the educator's responsibility to provide multilingual students with safe spaces in classrooms where they can translanguage without repercussions.

Further research shows how students in a college teacher preparation program are taught that translanguaging pedagogies challenge socially accepted discrimination of race and language (Araujo et al., 2023). One scholar and PS educator posits that adhering to a TP allowed students to "express emotion, identity, agency and a desire for social justice" (Wahyudi, 2023, pp. 282-283), which only occurred because the students felt safe enough to do so. These outcomes are evident in other PSIs where and when educators provide multilingual students with opportunities to negotiate learning between their primary language and the LOLT. TP, as the literature shows, helps educators create safe learning spaces where students feel comfortable enough to engage in academic activities because their culture is valued (Hotchkins & Smith, 2020). And just how meaningful and affecting is it to find worth in one's culture and validation of one's knowledge?

Transformation via Self Worth

With the consequential outcomes that prevail when PSIs and PS educators choose to follow TP, the proverbial question comes to mind: which came first, the safe space or the self-worth? In reality, does it really matter? If implementing a TP leads to safe learning spaces where one can find self-value and worth, or that following TP helps students find value in their identity which helps form safe spaces in a learning environment leading to the ultimate end game—equitable learning opportunities for multilinguals—than the order need not matter.

Unfortunately, because minority languages are tainted with false narratives about being backward or inferior, which elicits shame in the speaker, TP plays a vital role in dispelling that (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Hurst & Mona, 2017; Nicolarakis & Mitchell, 2023), thus helping multilingual students find the value in the cultural identity. Though Siziba and Maseko (2023) discuss the impact of translanguaging policies, in particular, with the use of English and African languages in a university setting, and Cenoz and Gorter (2017) discuss the linguistic power balances that exist in Welsh education in general, they both agree that linguistic isolation in our global society is detrimental. Notwithstanding, there are PS stakeholders who see the existing light at the end of the academic tunnel if effort and time is given to ensure that multilingual students see just how significant and advantageous their cultural identity can be.

Educators are now encouraging fellow educators and students to include voices and beliefs in their writing assignments, allowing students to use their native and dominant languages (Canagarajah, 2013a) because translanguaging naturally occurs in classrooms with multilingual

students (Canagarajah, 2011; Nicolarakis & Mitchell, 2023). Lee and Handsfield (2018) mirror these claims, positing that following a TP, students are encouraged to use their native linguistic resources as they accomplish assigned literacy assignments, and in doing so, understand the value of their native language and do not need to separate from the non-native language used in the classroom. In Wahyudi's (2023) study, the undergraduate student applied translanguaging practices in her autobiography assignment and thought the assignment was primarily written in English; she used two native languages to "develop a perspective on English that [was] liberating" (p. 279) for her. It is with her use of her native language that the multilingual student exercised agency. Velasco and García (2014) also echo this sentiment, explaining that TP allows student writers to become self-regulated learners, leading to student writers who know how to exercise their voice, and thus their agency. Though Velasco and García's study focuses on elementary students, the concept of encouraging voice and agency in student writers is what writing educators should aspire to do in their classroom, no matter the grade level.

Additionally, Adamson and Coulson's (2015) study on Japanese university students in English-medium instruction (EMI) noted that the goal of post-secondary writing education is to give students the tools and metacognitive skills to evaluate when and how they use their voice and agency in their writing, and this is only possible if students' native languages are nurtured and valued. This separation between native and the dominant academic language is seen in Araujo et al.'s (2023) study as well, when Spanish dominant students in a teacher preparation program refused to *mix* Spanish and English while in their classes. The authors attributed this to "dominant monoglossic ideologies of language separation" (p. 574) that push forward detrimental beliefs that mixing languages is academically wrong. Valuing one's native language(s) gives multilingual students opportunities to exercise agency in their writing to find ways to express their thoughts and beliefs creatively, thus critically responding to written prompts without silencing or hiding their voices.

Transformation via Academic Self-Efficacy

Once again, we arrive back to the significance of PS students developing and strengthening critical literacy skills because it helps them understand roles that might unjustly exist in power dynamics (Sairsingh, 2017) they will undoubtedly encounter in their academic, professional, and personal lives. With that, scholars and PS stakeholders must examine the correlations that persist when a TP is in place and the opportunities to challenge hegemonic and oppressive practices (Nicolarakis & Mitchell; 2023; Siziba & Maseko, 2023) and find self-worth and how that affects multilinguals' academic success. Unfortunately, academic self-doubt and anxiety is a reality for multilinguals whose primary languages are kept checked at the classroom door. According to research, when multilingual students are allowed to negotiate their learning by navigating between primary language and LOLT, it is easy for educators to see and acknowledge the "superior metalinguistic and metacognitive abilities"' (Charamba, 2022, p. 230) multilinguals possess in order to do so. So, we must ask ourselves, if PS educators can see their multilingual students' intelligence and academic abilities in a classroom where TP guides learning, can multilingual students see it too?

Adamson and Coulson (2015) found that creating safe spaces and showing multilingual students their native languages and resources should be valued and used in the classroom decreases self-doubt and anxiety. Thus, multilinguals can then focus on accomplishing assigned tasks to the best of their abilities without the added academic pressure that comes from navigating the LOLT

without their native linguistic repertoire (Adamson & Coulson). When PS educators discourage students from referring to their linguistic repertoire, it creates self-doubt, and students begin to question their academic voice in writing. In one doctoral student's reflection on their academic writing journey, he explains that there were times when he wanted to *sound* more *academic*, and he believed that using his primary and native voice in his writing would detract from that (Dong, 2022). This created a cyclical process of questioning his self-worth, resulting in the doctoral student *muting* himself, believing that their native linguistic background was not *good enough* for graduate-level writing (Dong, 2022). Hurst and Mona (2017) share that some multilingual students with a limited proficiency in the LOLT at their PSIs might "result in lower confidence and participation, and ultimately lower grades and success rates" (p. 127).

However, literature shows that self-efficacy is a leading result when multilinguals attend PSIs where a TP is not only encouraged but required, leading to students feeling as if they matter (Cavazos & Karaman, 2023; Troedson & Dashwood, 2018). Araujo et al.'s (2023) study on translanguaging effects on preservice teachers urged the necessity for PSIs and PS educators to implement a TP that strengthens self-efficacy because multilinguals' linguistic self-confidence is encouraged. In Wahyudi's (2023) study, his PS multilingual student, Rosa, found a way to integrate her primary language in a writing assignment, resulting in her ability to tell her story and meet her PS instructor's academic requirements. Accordingly, one can infer that Rosa's overall self-efficacy was much improved because her instructor's TP opened a safe space for her to navigate between her primary language and the LOLT in that particular classroom; with that, she probably no longer doubted her standing in the academic sense. This sense of academic accomplishment and ability is also seen in Nicolarakis and Mitchell's (2023) participants, where one in particular proudly mentions that, unbeknownst to them, translanguaging strategies they took part of gave them ample opportunities to navigate between American Sign Language (ASL) and English read-alouds. In this study, the researchers examine how translanguaging aspects affect the overall literacy skills of multilingual deaf students, and a part of Nicolarakis and Mitchells' research consisted of students making connections between their learning abilities as adults and childhood learning experiences.

Now armed with a significant amount of knowledge and understanding of the consequential transformations that occur when PSIs and PS educators push for TPs, we can now ask ourselves: how do we move from theory, or in this case pedagogy, to praxis? Which translingual practices can help PS educators better serve multilinguals in developing and strengthening critical literacy skills in the PS classroom?

Codemeshing: A Translanguaging Strategy

Just like TP, very little research exists on the effects translanguaging strategies have on writing proficiency (Canagarajah, 2011). However, one particular translanguaging strategy (TS) that stands out in the literature is that of codemeshing. According to the research, codemeshing is a TS that multilinguals' primary languages mix with that of the LOLT, most specifically written Englishes, with the ultimate goal of leading scholars in the field of translanguaging. Researchers share how a translanguaging strategy, like codemeshing, used in writing, "involves the negotiation of meaning between the author and an imagined reader" and how the author "*meshes* [emphasis added] multiple resources to help the author and reader reach consensus when negotiating meaning in texts" (Canagarajah, 2012, as cited in Pacheco & Smith, 2015, p. 294). The goal behind codemeshing is to "help students build (meta) linguistic awareness and work towards social justice"

(Schreiber & Watson, 2018, p. 95). That being said, the distinction between codeswitching, a term used in bilingual education, and codemeshing, a translanguaging strategy, must be made. Codeswitching occurs when words from a non-primary language are switched out for words from a different language, typically a native or primary one; in other words, multilinguals rely on both their native and non-native language to communicate (Beatty-Martinez et al., 2020). Codeswitching is a strategy that multilinguals rely on when struggling with non-primary word production or speech difficulties (Beatty-Martinez et al., 2020).

The codemeshing strategy, like the TP that makes way for it, gives multilingual students opportunities to not only question the dominant language, but to change it in their reality. One language is no longer *better* than the other because the student relies on both to communicate in a manner that they deem fit to do so. Canagarajah (2011) discusses four codemeshing strategies that PS educators can use to guide their multilingual students into effectively negotiating between languages, thus creating meaning and ownership of their work: (a) recontextualizing strategies, (b) voice strategies, (c) interactional strategies, and (d) textualization strategies. Take, for instance, voice strategies for codemeshing. Canagarajah (2013b) emphasizes that code meshing balances standard linguistic forms and a writer's identity as shown through a multilingual's voice. For instance, in a qualitative study by Zhang-Wu (2022), where students' use of translingual practices, like codemeshing, was analyzed, a student claimed that the practice allowed him to write an *authentic* essay. In other words, the final essay was not a mere product of sitting down, writing, and possibly struggling to get their thoughts on paper. Still, the essay was a product of the students using what they culturally and linguistically know to support the L2 they have acquired.

Codemeshing in Low- and High-Stakes Writing

As socially transformative as codemeshing can be for multilingual students, the adage still holds true—that it is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and educators should not assume that *all* multilinguals are willing to break dominant language norms as easily and readily as others (Canagarajah, 2011). On that note, one way that PS educators can ease students into codemeshing in high-stakes writing assignments is to promote using codemeshing in low-stakes writing assignments, and in doing so, they begin to transform the once monolingual classroom to fit the needs of a multicultural society (Bayti, 2016; Michael-Luna & Canagarajah, 2007). However, educators should remain pragmatic with this approach as well because many students might be reluctant to participate in codemeshing in academic writing, whether low- or high-stakes because they were educated in a monolinguistic environment (Michael-Luna & Canagarajah, 2007). Following a dominant orientation to literacy, students were forced to understand that primary languages, other than English, are inferior because this autonomous literacy creates power relations between their language and English (Canagarajah, 2013b). More opportunities encouraging students to codemesh in low-stakes writing assignments will help students feel less intimidated to do so in high-stakes writing assignments (Bayti, 2016; Luna & Canagarajah, 2007).

Now, once multilingual students feel comfortable enough because of the safe spaces and acceptance of one's linguistic value that occurs in a TP oriented class, it is up to educators to continue facilitating, and thus validating, multilinguals' use of codemeshing in their writing. Though Lee and Handsfield (2018) discuss codemeshing and elementary writing, the one practice they note that can extend into higher education is that of teacher-student writing conferences, where teachers take the time to discuss a student's use of codemeshing. This allows students to clarify their writing intentions and enables educators to understand their writing goals. Instead of

automatically *bleeding* the student's writing with red ink, assuming that the student is incompetent because of poor writing, these writing conferences give educators a chance to praise a probably already timid multilingual writer for using all the resources available (Lee & Handsfield, 2018). Low-stakes writing assignments can range from journal entries to online discussion postings where students have more room for what they deem *informal* writing. After a few weeks of using codemeshing in low-stakes writing activities, students can move forward, with instructor guidance, to using codemeshing in a high-stakes writing activity. Clarification, however, must be made. Codemeshing is more than "going back and forth from language belonging to one grammatical system to another" (Garcia & Li, 2014, p. 2) like that which occurs in codeswitching.

In other words, codemeshing integrates L1 and L2 structures to allow students to write meaningfully as evident with one English teacher's practice as she encouraged her students to write their essays in their dominant language and then rewrite in English, explaining that when students have difficulty making sense of English, their only true available resource is their "mother tongue" because it does so much "to improve academic achievement" (Parmegiani, 2022, p. 294). Educators promote authentic writing, thus strengthening critical literacy skills, by encouraging students to codemesh in their writing assignments. After all, multilinguals can use words with *real* meaning in their primary language instead of superficial or vague words from the LOLT simply because they lack terminology. This issue became apparent in Zhang and Hadijioannou (2021) study, where Chinese students explained how difficult it was to find the words to convey what they wanted to share with the reader because they lacked English vocabulary. Not allowing multilinguals opportunities to navigate between languages only leads to superficial writing and lost learning opportunities. In Adamson and Coulson's (2015) study, university undergraduate students were encouraged by their instructors to use their native language (L1), Japanese, and L2 English differently in their courses. For instance, students were encouraged to code mesh. Adamson and Coulson explained that this practice would better prepare students for the government and political avenues they were set on pursuing and that "strategic code-switching of L1 and L2 in the classroom [is] a mirror of language use in a multicultural society" (p. 27). Their conclusion further supports that translanguaging practices in higher education are necessary for our globally competitive 21st century.

Furthermore, these assignments have readings attached regarding high-stakes writing at the university level. For instance, if a student must write an essay on a particular topic, they will likely have to cite sources from peer-reviewed articles or college textbooks. The pressure of writing an academic essay affects them, as does the anxiety that comes with reading scholarly sources written in the LOLT. Sources meant to support students with their writing are laden with "U.S.-specific jargon in academic… [hindering] their ability to construct meaning" needed to "inform their academic writing" (Zhang & Hadijioannou, 2021, p. 379). Though instructors might not be able to do much about how scholarly sources are written, it forces educators to empathize with students who might already be struggling with the writing portion of a high-stakes assignment. This is not to say that instructors should *water down* writing assignments. On the contrary, no student learns when expectations are lowered; instead, instructors should provide opportunities for students to navigate meaning between their primary language and the LOLT.

Lingering Thoughts and Conclusion

PSI stakeholders must take note of the transformative value that TP has, not only on curriculum and instruction, but on the people that it affects the most: educators and students. Once again, we turn to Canagarajah (2011), a leading scholar in the field of translanguaging, to acknowledge that the benefits of translanguaging theory and praxis outweighs the counterarguments and resistance that arises. Canagarajah reminds us that the development of critical literacy skills and meta-linguistic and -cognitive awareness are pedagogical implications that cannot be ignored. It is when PSIs and educators implement such a socially transformative pedagogy like translanguaging that multilinguals can find the safe learning spaces necessary to understand their cultural and linguistic value, which, in turn, will affect their academic self-efficacy. And in forging opportunities for students to navigate between their primary language and the LOLT, via a codemeshing strategy, that critical literacy skills begin to form and strengthen. Of course, these changes cannot occur without institutional support (Canagarajah, 2011). PS educators need the training and resources to develop and sustain a TP that best suits the needs of their students. The best TPs are developed based on one's multilingual student population and how *they* go about negotiating meaning from the different texts they encounter by relying on their primary language resources and repertoire (Canagarajah, 2011; Yafele, 2021). Thus, in its best form, TP becomes a synergistic entity in the PS classroom, where both educators and students learn from each other.

And at the end of this critical reflective journey on the transformative outcomes of implementing TP and codemeshing in the PS classroom, my thoughts return to my high school multilingual students and the amount of work they go through to navigate between their primary language and the LOLT in the dual enrollment courses. How much of a meaning-making process and of codemeshing strategies do they *silently* employ just to understand the basic assignment requirements, and even more so, the more rigorous tasks they are responsible for each and every semester? What is next for my multilingual students if they choose to pursue PS certificates or degrees after high school graduation? Will the PSI they attend promote a translanguaging framework, encouraging its educators to challenge dominant narratives and languages in academia? Undoubtedly, it falls on all of us—educational researchers, PSIs and PS educators, and multilingual students—to continue advocating and implementing equitable learning opportunities through translanguaging.

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