**Abstract**

This paper reports a comparative case study between two distinct community literacy research sites in the United States. Both sites undertook bilingual reading and writing projects in English and Spanish with children, one in a public library and the other in a community center writing program. Over time, these two unrelated projects took a translanguaging turn, and this paper compares and analyzes how translanguaging operated at each site, especially as researchers attempted to promote Spanish. We documented common affordances such as mirroring community language practices and creating inclusive, participatory environments. The comparison also revealed limitations, such as translanguaging’s limited ability to resist the societal dominance of English and challenges associated with enacting translanguaging in programs facing high staff and participant turnover. The study suggests the potential of translanguaging approaches in community literacy projects while also documenting areas for researchers and educators to approach translanguaging work thoughtfully to ensure it meets their program goals.

**Keywords:** translanguaging, bilingual education, out-of-school literacies, community literacies, heritage language

**Introduction**

As participants in a language mapping workshop sponsored by Autores Fuertes, a bilingual, community-based writing center, eight children were mapping community languages through images, video, and audio. They photographed store signs in English, Vietnamese, and Chinese, and crowded into the corner tortillería, filming a transaction in Spanish. “Dos libras de tortillas, porfa,” the customer said.
A thousand miles away at Bilingual Storytime, a college student stood in front of a group of twelve scowling children and their parents with *La Catrina*, a bilingual book about emotions with Dia de los Muertos-themed art. “Can everybody show me their enojado faces?” One child yelled out that enojado means angry, and the college student excitedly agreed.

Although these projects were in different regions of the US, different contexts, with a different literacy focus (writing and reading), and different ages, they shared a goal of fostering bilingual (Spanish and English) literacies for Latinx children. In both spaces, the researchers, families, and children embraced translanguaging, and this commonality led us to a comparative case study to understand how translanguaging pedagogies worked in these spaces. For this comparative case study, we focused on answering the question “What are the affordances and limitations of translanguaging in these community literacy projects?”

**Translanguaging and Literacies in Community Spaces**

**What Does it Mean to Translanguage?**

Translanguaging is a theory that attempts to account for authentic language practices of multilinguals in their homes and communities (Canagarajah, 2011b). Initially, translanguaging as a term described instructional practices in Welsh classrooms, where teachers strategically used Welsh and English to support students’ developing bilingualism (Lewis et al., 2012). However, in recent US-based scholarship, translanguaging has come to posit both an ideological stance toward language and to account for the blending of languages as a “communicative norm of bilingual communities” (García, 2011, p. 51) as practiced in “communities and everyday communicative contexts” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 2).

More specifically, a translanguaging view of “language, bilingualism, and the education of bilinguals … considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 2). This view emphasizes that people draw from all their languages as “an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011a, p. 401) or “a single expanded linguistic repertoire” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 70), rather than two separate language systems. Thus, we viewed our multilingual participants as always having all their languages “on,” even during what may be perceived as monolingual environments (Mallikarjun et al., 2017).

In turn, translanguaging pedagogies are meant to help teachers recognize and include their students’ full linguistic repertoire (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 14), which can reposition students from lacking language and literacy to having linguistic assets (Menken, 2013). Translanguaging for academic purposes takes many forms, such as incorporating multiple languages during the writing process or a final written product (Machado & Hartman, 2019), reading multilingual texts, or having multilingual discussions (Fu et al., 2019). Moreover, translanguaging pedagogies validate students’ home languages and disrupt the distinction between home and school languages (García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Wei, 2014). Thus, taking a translanguaging approach, in both research and pedagogy, helped us resist monolingual and deficit perspectives in language learning by centering the creative and authentic practices of multilingual communities.

**Translanguaging in Community Literacy Spaces**

Because both cases were located in community educational spaces, we review translanguaging scholarship conducted in similar spaces (beyond schools) that served multilingual children with language or literacy as a learning focus.
Community Spaces and Heritage Language

Bilingual families and children care about maintaining Spanish and recognize their heritage language as a connection to their families, a means of communication within a broader community, and part of their identity (Jean & Geva, 2012; You, 2005). As well, families identify bilingual proficiency as valuable for their children’s future (Lee & Jeong, 2013).

While wonderful exceptions exist, robust bilingual programs across the P–12 grade range are not guaranteed to emergent bilingual students in the US (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Wright, 2007). Where bilingual programs do exist, testing pressures and the societal dominance of English can still make it hard for these programs to center Spanish (Potowski, 2004). Thus, programs beyond the school day, like Bilingual Storytime and Autores Fuertes, have become increasingly necessary to support Spanish learning and maintenance.

Spanish-speaking communities have developed community-based strategies for passing on their language (Carreira & Rodríguez, 2011). Programs as varied as scout groups (Guardado, 2009) and weekend STEM clubs (Kelly et al., 2019) that run in Spanish or bilingually show the “great linguistic agency and resourcefulness on the part of Latino parents” as well as their “clear understanding of the role and critical need that they envision for Spanish” (Carreira & Rodríguez, 2011, p. 156). These community-based programs provide authentic contexts for becoming bilingual and bicultural, providing some resistance to society’s monolingual English norm and legitimizing Spanish for children who may not hear it much outside of the home. Since not seeing one’s home language in prestige positions in society contributes to language loss, these community programs become “sites of validation” (Guardado & Becker, 2014, p. 177).

Finally, community sites offer some freedom not available in schools. In community-based programs, restrictive language policies, standardized testing pressures, and mandated curricula disappear, leaving parents and community members more flexibility to build the programs they want. Both Rodriguez (2019) and Gallo and Link (2015) found libraries better spaces than schools for the critical work they did with bilingual students for these reasons. As Alvarez and Alvarez (2016) showed in their ethnographic study of a bilingual library, the library became a “space for communities to promote and reclaim their home languages distinct from local public schools” (p. 412).

Community Spaces and Translanguaging

Much research has focused on translanguaging in schools as a tool to support students’ biliterate learning and create welcoming, inclusive classrooms (García & Kleyn, 2016). Other research has explored family translanguaging practices (Paulsrud & Straszer, 2018) and translanguaging practices in communities, specifically workplaces and food markets (Blackledge & Creese, 2017). Yet less work has focused on translanguaging in community-based literacy centers and projects.

Existing research suggests that families value translanguaging educational spaces, but that often translanguaging is not “enough” to counter the dominance of English in these programs. For instance, Axelrod and Cole (2018) documented the translanguaging practices of emergent bilinguals in a before-school program designed to value their heritage Spanish. They found that children and families valued the space because the children did not receive formal instruction in Spanish during school. Children in this study had an interest in reading and writing Spanish conventionally (e.g., correct spelling) and used their knowledge of English phonics to do so. Yet the program struggled with English dominance, causing the researchers to ponder “if flexible, natural arrangements of language usage in translanguaging spaces are sufficient to counter these kinds of hegemonic forces” (p. 151).
In another case, Bussert-Webb, Masso, and Lewis (2018) described teacher candidates working in an after-school program to promote translanguaging in writing with elementary-age children. They found the community space counteracted negative perceptions that the children learned in monolingual schools that privileged English. However, the children still brought the expectation from school that they should keep their languages separate, hesitating to enact the translanguaging practices that the adults encouraged. Furthermore, Martínez-Roldán (2015) showed in her study of translanguaging practices in an after-school program in the US Southwest that teachers reinforced English as the primary language, suggesting that flexible language practices in bilingual spaces may reinforce English hegemony. Each of these studies recognized the larger sociopolitical climate, including high-stakes testing narratives, societal English dominance, and the goals of program funders as influencing language practices in each site.

Thus, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how translanguaging pedagogies were practiced in two community-based educational sites.

Methods

We framed our case studies as community-engaged scholarship meant to serve the needs and goals of the communities surrounding Autores Fuertes and Bilingual Storytime. Though researchers designed and led both projects, we welcomed community involvement and responded to community feedback in our program designs. For this project, we engaged in a comparative case study approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Each team initiated participatory methods where we intentionally attempted to change some practices within each of our cases. This comparative case study demonstrates how translanguaging happened in these different contexts, highlighting the collective insights, as well as differences, and facilitating a stronger argument from each case (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016).

Data Analysis

We conducted a horizontal analysis to compare how translanguaging unfolded in our distinct contexts (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Each team reviewed our previously collected data sources (described below) and coded with a priori codes (Saldaña, 2013) for the affordances and limitations of translanguaging at their site. We coded as affordances examples of how translanguaging contributed to student learning or a positive educational environment. As limitations, we coded instances when translanguaging did not contribute to the learning or environment desired. After that, we used pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to categorize the affordances and limitations of translanguaging at our sites, and then wrote summary narratives of these categories. Separately, we generated key assertions (Erickson, 1986) based on a comparison of narrative summaries of coded data. We found each team generated similar assertions (Table 1), so we developed those claims with common wording; we substantiate each of those claims in the findings with representative data samples.
Table 1. Sample Data Summaries from Each Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Sample data summaries of affordances of translanguaging</th>
<th>Sample data summaries of limitations of translanguaging</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autores Fuertes</td>
<td>Children dominant in any language could participate.</td>
<td>Children overwhelmingly wrote in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual writing captured complexity of multilingual experiences.</td>
<td>People come and go, bringing conflicting language ideologies to the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Storytime</td>
<td>Everyone understands what’s happening even if it’s in a language they’re still learning.</td>
<td>The translanguaging approach is difficult to communicate to program volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The “translanguaging read aloud” lets us read more complex books in Spanish than we otherwise could have.</td>
<td>English is dominant in our books, songs, promotional materials, etc.</td>
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Autores Fuertes

Autores Fuertes was one site in a network of community-based writing centers meant to serve Latinx communities of South Philadelphia. While a majority of the community spoke Spanish, many also use indigenous Mesoamerican languages. Most children who attended the center were US citizens of immigrant families, spoke Spanish predominantly at home, and attended English-medium schools. Our research team included two white university researchers who were both bilingual in English and Spanish and lived in the community.

At Autores Fuertes, our initial research question focused on how a translanguaging pedagogy shaped the language and literacy practices of the center (Abraham et al., 2020; Abraham & Kedley, 2021; Abraham et al., 2021). Data collection began with participant observations, specifically related to how language and literacy were framed and practiced. Those observations occurred twice weekly and lasted from one to three hours, for a period of two years.

As the project progressed, and to model a translanguaging pedagogy, Stephanie and Kate (Authors 2 and 3) designed and taught bilingual writing workshops, such as Writing Bilingual Family Stories and Community Language Mapping. These two-hour workshops met Saturdays for approximately eight weeks, open to any child aged six to twelve. Over two years, 50 children participated, with varied attendance. To prompt the children to translanguage in their writing, we used bilingual interview protocols for interviewing family and community members and showed examples of how Latinx authors translanguaged in their texts. During workshops, we collected data through the children’s writing artifacts and audio/video recordings, which were subsequently transcribed.

Bilingual Storytime

Laura, Cinthya (Authors 1 and 4), and a team of college students began Bilingual Storytime as a joint project between Rhodes College and the Memphis Public Libraries to support Spanish-speaking families hoping to raise their children to speak and read Spanish (Kelly & Bolanos, 2020). Storytime occurred monthly on Saturday mornings to accommodate working families. Lasting thirty minutes, Storytime consisted of reading picture books, singing, poems, and games. Although we initially separated activities in English and Spanish, we transitioned to a translanguaging approach in our activities. Storytime drew between 40 and 60 people, including parents. Participants included a mix of
Black, Latinx, and White families who spoke English and/or Spanish; some had immigrated from Spanish-speaking countries; and children ranged from babies to upper elementary school age.

Our research team included a bilingual, but not bicultural, white university researcher with experience working with Spanish-speaking communities in Memphis (Laura), and a changing group of around five college student volunteers. The college student volunteers represented various degrees of bilingualism and bicultural experiences; two of the college volunteer researchers (including Cinthya) grew up in Spanish-speaking Memphis.

Our library admitted that they had no coordinated outreach to Spanish-speaking families at the time that Bilingual Storytime began. Because of our prior work with Spanish speakers in our city, we knew that some families with tenuous immigration status might have concerns about participating in library programs. While libraries do not collaborate with immigration enforcement, people may see libraries as a government entity that does, for example, ask for identification and proof of address to acquire a library card. Thus, we did not ask people to sign forms, give their names, or consent to recording to participate in storytime. Consequently, our data sources include collaboratively written, reflective research journals after each storytime; anonymous exit surveys administered at each storytime asking what participants enjoyed and what suggestions they had; and storytime plans, codeveloped for each storytime. The storytimes reported in this manuscript occurred over a ten-month period.

**Findings**

Our findings fit in two major sections: affordances and limitations of translanguaging. Under each of those headings, we make claims, illustrated with data from each case, then offer a cross-case comparison.

**Affordances of Translanguaging**

We identified two common affordances of a translanguaging pedagogy in these community spaces.

*Translanguaging Mirrored and Engaged with Community Language Practices*

Rather than conforming to monolingual, or one language at a time, discourses of practice, we found in both cases that practicing a translanguaging pedagogy helped us to mirror and embrace the authentic community language practices of the children and families.

**Autores Fuertes.** We collected this data during a six-week Community Language Mapping workshop. During the first session, children created a language map of the places in their lives, such as the playground, neighborhood, or grocery store. They drew their language maps on posters and included words in any language, symbols, or drawings. In this transcript, Stephanie and Luis discussed the words he used at his dad’s house, which he would eventually include on his language map.

*Luis:* Pues, como no hay tanto en su casa. No hay tanto. Veo la tele. Juego con mi perro. Mi perro’s nombre es Scrappy. [Well, there’s not a lot in his house. Not a lot. I watch TV. I play with my dog. My dog’s name is Scrappy.]

*Stephanie:* Scrappy! [laughing] ¡Todo de esto tienes que poner! [You have to put all of that!]

*Luis:* El problema es, no sé cómo escribir Scrappy. [The problem is, I don’t know how to write Scrappy.]

*Stephanie:* No importa. She [pointing to another child] just told me, “I don’t care if I spell it wrong.”
In this example, Luis predominantly responded to Stephanie in Spanish. He mentioned the “tele” and claimed “no hay tanto” at his dad’s house. Yet, he inserted what may be perceived as a common dog’s name in English, Scrappy. This speech reflected his bilingual and bicultural reality, where he used two languages to negotiate his daily life, while also adopting a US English cultural practice of naming his dog Scrappy. Also, he employed a syntactic structure from English within this Spanish-dominant communicative turn. He used the apostrophe followed by the letter s (mi perro’s nombre es) to indicate possession rather than the Spanish structure of the noun followed by the preposition de, or el nombre de mi perro es. If our pedagogical practices were framed monolingually, without a translanguaging lens, this linguistic act may have been deemed incorrect or corrected, narrowing the inclusion of his linguistic repertoire. Yet, by taking a translanguaging stance, we recognized that his linguistic constructions demonstrated his active bilingualism, allowing him to use his authentic language practices, rather than fracturing his linguistic repertoire.

**Bilingual Storytime.** Several storytime facilitators grew up speaking Spanish and English, and they implemented translanguaging practices familiar to them, such as blending Spanish, English, and gestures while they read and provided commentary. For example, in a storytime themed around body parts, Cinthya read a story in English about injured animals. On each page, she showed the pictures, read the English text, and said, “Oh no! He hurt his brazo [arm]!” and led the children in the rhyme, “Sana, sana, colita de rana. Si no sanas hoy, ¡sanarás mañana!” This Spanish rhyme, commonly said when a child has a small injury, was not in the English text, but Cinthya repeated it with the children on each page. Her use of Spanish, which she added to the all-English text, mirrored the practices of bilingual speakers who sometimes substitute familiar nouns across languages (as when she said, “He hurt his brazo!” to help children learn the Spanish word for arm). Furthermore, she reflected authentic community language use by inserting a traditional Spanish-language dicho or proverb into the story.

Additionally, families affirmed the program by writing on exit surveys: “¡Qué continúen este tipo de programas y que sean más frecuentes!” [Keep doing this type of program and do them often!] and mentioned liking “todas las actividades, en especial que fuera español e inglés” [all the activities, especially that they were in Spanish and English]. Based on such responses, we perceived that families felt positive about the blend of languages and that the program represented their language practices.

**Comparative Analysis.** Across these two cases, the researchers and participants used their entire linguistic repertoires when teaching and learning. We used intentional translanguaging when reading a book or guiding a language map activity. As well, all participants enacted translanguaging practices: Luis in his responses to Stephanie, Cinthya in her read-aloud, and families at Bilingual Storytime. In the case of Bilingual Storytime, families expressed their comfort and affirmation of the translanguaging practices, while at Autores Fuertes, the children showed comfort and affirmation through their use of Spanish and English with the workshop leaders. In terms of difference, at Autores Fuertes, all of the children were Latinx, emergent bilinguals, and intentionally translanguaging during the workshops was meant to mirror and include their translanguaging practices at home and in their community. However, at Bilingual Storytime, white, Black, and Latinx families with differing linguistic repertoires attended, and translanguaging may only have mirrored the authentic language practices of some attendees.

**Translanguaging Fostered Participation and Communication across Groups at All Language and Literacy Proficiencies**

Our translanguaging stance made it possible for diverse linguistic, racial, cultural, and age groups to participate in literacy together. It also facilitated full participation even for children and adults who had developing, rather than fluent, proficiency in English or Spanish.
Autores Fuertes. In the spring of 2019, we offered a graphica writing workshop for eight weeks, targeted toward children between 10 and 14 years old. During the first session, Kate brought books for the children to examine, including graphic novels with multilingual writing written or illustrated by Chicano and Latina/Latino individuals. Edwin, an 11-year-old who had attended nearly all of the workshops over the years, as always, was eager to start reading and writing. However, he had in tow his six-year-old sister, Argentina, who was reluctant to join the workshop. In the following transcript, taken from the beginning of the session, Kate and Edwin negotiate with Argentina to join.

Kate: Are you going to join our class? ¿Quieres juntarnos? Come on!
Edwin: Come on, Argentina! You’re gonna like, you’re gonna like… you can learn about all the things...
Kate: Why don’t you join us? Imagine that! Tu hermano quiere que estés aquí…
Edwin: Es una cosa normal, Argentina...
Kate: She’s an artist, wow.
Amalia (Edwin’s Mom): Verdad.

In this short transcript, Kate used both Spanish and English to communicate with Argentina, whose linguistic repertoire contained more Spanish than English. Yet Kate used both English and Spanish with Edwin and although Amalia always spoke Spanish to us, her response of “verdad” indicated that she still understood this communicative event. Then we encouraged Edwin and Argentina to work together on reading and creating graphica, asking Edwin to support Argentina as she thumbed through books and drew on blank paper. The two siblings worked on two “bilingual superhero” graphics (Figure 1) and then dictated a story to another volunteer.

Figure 1. Argentina’s Bilingual Superhero Graphic

Near the end of the session, Edwin reflected, “I am proud of my sister, that she speaks English and Spanish.” Then, they completed the graphic organizer about Argentina’s bilingualism together. We knew that translanguaging disrupts boundaries between languages; however, in this instance, it also disrupted boundaries determined by age. Argentina, who was “technically” too young to participate in the workshop, participated with Edwin’s translanguaging mentorship where he modeled his bilingualism and writing.

Bilingual Storytime. On exit surveys, families explained how the translanguaging approach supported participation regardless of children’s language backgrounds and literacy levels. When asked
what they liked about storytime, one participant responded, “The mix of Spanish and English ... Seeing very young language learners comprehend in both languages.” Another commented that they liked “todo en general, los juegos, la lectura, y la participación de los niños” [everything generally, the games, the reading, the children’s participation]. Translanguaging accentuated the multicultural, multilingual nature of Bilingual Storytime and helped families from a variety of linguistic backgrounds to feel comfortable.

Furthermore, to support participation regardless of language proficiency, we developed a translanguaging read-aloud protocol (Kelly, 2022) in which we read longer Spanish-language picturebooks by selecting key sentences to read, paraphrasing some pages, selectively adding English commentary, and drawing children’s attention to the pictures. This approach made longer and more complex Spanish-language books accessible regardless of children’s level of Spanish literacy. As we increased the translanguaging approaches over successive storytimes, we documented in our research journal increased participation in terms of children focusing on the activities, singing along, and answering questions. This finding contrasted with our initial observations that children who spoke one language best lost interest when we conducted activities like songs or games entirely in the language less familiar to them. Translanguaging allowed us to do harder, longer, or more complex activities in either language because everyone could participate throughout.

**Comparative Analysis.** Data from both settings affirmed that the translanguaging stance created an inclusive space across generations. Families with diverse language backgrounds could participate because each site welcomed participation in English, Spanish, or both; children did not have to already have a high level of proficiency in both languages to write at Autores Fuertes or read and sing at Bilingual Storytime. Their parents could support their participation at both sites in whatever language they preferred.

Data from both sites indicated that participants benefited from multimodal literacy in conjunction with translanguaging. Specifically, the multimodal nature of graphic novels and comics as well as picturebooks, songs with movement, and illustrated poems allowed children to draw on other semiotic repertoires as they composed, read, and embodied literacy. Just as translanguaging disrupts notions of discrete languages, recent scholarship on multimodal literacy disrupts traditional notions of text and reading. This multimodal approach supported the children’s language comprehension as translanguaging allowed them to make connections across languages, and multimodality facilitated comprehension and communication, increasing accessibility across language proficiency, age, and other differences.

Importantly, we noted several differences between the two sites. First, Autores Fuertes was more child-driven in contrast to Bilingual Storytime, where children participated in a planned sequence of adult-selected activities. Thus, the ways that translanguaging supported the children differed. As the interaction between Edwin and Argentina showed, at Autores Fuertes, the children mediated translanguaging for each other. At Bilingual Storytime, the more structured environment, the instructional strategies and input provided the linguistic support of translanguaging.

Secondly, at Autores Fuertes, language was a focus of inquiry, highlighting the children’s metalinguistic awareness of their translanguaging practices. In contrast, at Bilingual Storytime, language was a vehicle rather than a focus. Participants used two languages to explore common early childhood themes (colors, music, body parts, etc.), but they did not explicitly discuss their language practices.
Limitations of Translanguaging

*Translanguaging Did Not Provide Equal Status to Both Languages*

Both research teams conceptualized our work as supporting Spanish language and literacy development and resisting the societal dominance of English. Yet we documented the constant pull towards English and our efforts to resist that pressure, or how we sometimes succumbed to it.

**Autores Fuertes.** In fall 2017, we offered a workshop on Writing Bilingual Family Stories. During the first session, we gave the children a bilingual family story interview protocol to guide them in interviewing family about family histories. In the next session, we talked through their notes and family’s responses, using both English and Spanish, to guide them in choosing one story to develop. While the notes on the interview protocol were in both English and Spanish, we noticed children drafted their family stories all in English. To address this monolingualism, as we moved to the revising stage, we shared books that modeled translanguaging (e.g., *The Princess and the Warrior* by Duncan Tonatiuh).

After this activity, we held writing conferences with each child, asking them to read their drafted family stories. We prompted them to incorporate Spanish in their stories by mirroring how the authors had translanguage in picturebooks. By the end of the workshop, each child used a mix of Spanish and English in their published family stories. The following excerpts are from two stories that demonstrate translanguaging:

**Marco:** I was crying because I didn’t want to leave El Salvador I missed my papa mi familia mi companeros mi tias, hermanos, Primos, tios, abuelo and the food pupusas y el clima es caliente in the airplane we ate popyes.

**Luis:** My mama was done eating and she ask her abuela if she could go outside “Ok” she said “pero tienes cuidado” she said, but mama didn’t heard her.

Sharing published books with translanguaging helped both Marco and Luis to appropriate translanguaging strategies. For instance, both children used family identifiers, such as abuela, tías, and hermanos, as well as capturing cultural precision through food names that cannot be easily translated, such as pupusas and Popeye’s, and used dialogue to capture authentic linguistic practices of a character, such as Luis’s abuela speaking Spanish. In turn, several children described not knowing how to spell a word in Spanish as the reason for not writing in Spanish; thus, they defaulted to English, in which they felt more comfortable spelling.

**Bilingual Storytime.** We perceived pressure to use English because some storytimes drew more families that felt most comfortable in English. For example, on some exit surveys, parents requested “maybe more time to learn/practice the words in Spanish” or “for parents/kids who don’t yet speak Spanish, translate songs before singing.” In contrast, no Spanish-speaking parents ever requested more support for understanding English activities. These surveys illustrated that English-speaking families felt entitled to always understand what was happening in a way that primarily Spanish-speaking families did not express. Because we wanted to create a well-attended program, we wrestled with how much to attend to the voices of these English-speaking families.

Once, a college student facilitator suggested that children did not pay attention to a book we read because it was in Spanish, suggesting we should have read it in English first. This prompted Laura to record in the research journal: “How can we have a bilingual storytime that promotes and celebrates Spanish and is still engaging to monolingual English-speaking children? (Should we care about that?) … I want to avoid dumbing down Spanish for the benefit of English speakers.” A review of several of our storytime plans illustrated this perceived need to respond to English-dominant families. For
example, the transcript for the planned read-aloud of *Little Chancas* showed that when we selected English and Spanish sentences to tell the story through both languages, we still ended up planning 60% of the talk in English. We faced a constant challenge of selecting and centering Spanish without centering the desires of English-dominant participants. After our second year, our team determined that to decenter the desires of English-speaking families, it would be helpful to start Bilingual Storytime programs at library branches more accessible to predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.

**Comparative Analysis.** Both sites faced real and imagined pulls towards English. While white, English-speaking families and college volunteers drove this pull towards English at Bilingual Storytime, the same phenomenon occurred at Autores Fuertes where Latinx children from Spanish-speaking families defaulted to English even when provided with Spanish or bilingual materials to scaffold their writing. Despite our intentional translanguaging approach, participants at both sites raced Stephanie and Kate at Autores Fuertes and Laura and several of the college students at Bilingual Storytime as white and therefore English-prefering speakers. While we are all bilingual, we know that this racialized reading of their audience affected the participants’ language choices.

We noted that in both sites, extensive use of Spanish occurred due to planning, rather than naturally emerging. At Autores Fuertes, Stephanie and Kate brought in textual models to support children during the revising phase to incorporate Spanish into their stories, because a welcoming translanguaging stance was not enough for children to do so on their own. At Bilingual Storytime, decentering English required specific planning about which language to use for which purpose and checking the plans to ensure they achieved a balance of languages. Even with this planning, all researchers documented persistent use of English among participants in both sites, and some children were not employing all their linguistic resources.

**High Staff/Volunteer Turnover Challenged Efforts at Translanguaging**

In both community spaces, we noted the high rate of turnover of paid staff and volunteers and irregular attendance of staff and children. At times, this inconsistency undermined our efforts at translanguaging pedagogies and ideologies.

**Autores Fuertes.** When we began our work at Autores Fuertes, the site director was a white woman who spoke English as her first language and learned Spanish in college. At times, she voiced and practiced standardized language ideologies that privileged prescribed, “correct” Spanish. For instance, she stated that the site’s radio station remained inactive because there was no adult native Spanish-speaker on staff to correct the children’s “mistakes” in Spanish. This site director believed that because the site assessed the children’s writing each semester, the children should write only in English. Volunteers came at different times and were not always familiar with the topic, children, or norms of the center. However, as the project progressed, a new project director, Natalia, a bilingual immigrant from Honduras, was hired. Immediate changes in language practices at the center were evident. For instance, Natalia formed a circle with the children during snack time, asking each child how their school day had been and chatting informally, all in Spanish. Although this recent change has facilitated more translanguaging, we note that we cannot ensure that new directors and teachers will take up such a translanguaging approach.

**Bilingual Storytime.** While some storytime facilitators worked with Bilingual Storytime consistently during their college experience, Laura faced the constant challenge of a rotation of volunteers. While Cinthya received a small research stipend, all other students were volunteers and participated less consistently. Preparing for each storytime program involved introducing the facilitators to the theme, materials, and plan for that storytime. None of the volunteers had previous
coursework that introduced them to the theory and practice of translanguageg. Laura struggled with orienting them to the translanguageg approach, especially in the limited time afforded by the short planning meetings with each storytime team before the next event. While she did not want to script how students should lead each activity, she ended up providing specific guidance for using both languages, especially for students who had less confidence with Spanish. Furthermore, she usually took on the translanguageg read-aloud herself. Laura documented in the research journal that without adequate professional development to orient volunteers to the translanguageg approach, some English-dominant volunteers were underprepared to use Spanish and/or defaulted to English when they facilitated activities or informally talked to children.

These challenges illustrate how relying on inconsistent volunteers made it challenging to enact translanguageg. First, some volunteers had less familiarity with translanguageg in their own language practices, so they could not employ it as naturally as more experienced bilingual volunteers. Secondly, even when volunteers felt comfortable translanguageg, without a strong theoretical foundation and a language ideology supportive of translanguageg, they did not know whether, when, or how best to employ it while facilitating literacy activities.

**Comparative Analysis.** The turnover of staff and volunteers at both sites presented challenges related to translanguageg and establishing routines for the activities. At Autores Fuertes, both administrative staff and volunteers experienced frequent turnover, and with each change in personnel, there was a period of orientation and a new establishment of norms and programming. In terms of volunteers, there were frequently college students, parents, and other community members who came to volunteer, but few were permanently connected to one particular workshop. At Bilingual Storytime, the amount of time spent orienting new volunteers and introducing them to translanguageg norms was also significant and frequently disrupted the intent of the project.

The most obvious challenge the turnover caused was the inability to grow together with other volunteers, students, and administrators, as we learned about how translanguageg worked in the spaces. The turnover resulted in a preference for monolingual and monoglossic language ideologies centered on English. It was difficult to maintain a translanguageg norm among adults when the adults had variable attendance, and we did not have sustained contact with them. However, this did force us to remind ourselves that for the children, translanguageg is a constant reality, not just for the few hours we were with them. The turnover among adults in these two projects shows the imperative to ensure the translanguageg efforts are not uniquely attached to us as researchers but are instead continually drawn from the community itself, regardless of who reads and writes with them.

**Discussion**

In this study, we compared two community literacy projects that took a translanguageg approach. This approach allowed us to document and interpret shared affordances and limitations of translanguageg across two diverse and distant sites.

**Translanguageg and Community Spaces**

In several ways, our findings align with prior research. First, we experienced community spaces as more flexible and open to translanguageg approaches (Alvarez & Alvarez, 2016; Rodriguez, 2019) when contrasted with our experiences as teachers and researchers in schools, including bilingual schools. We did not face testing or curriculum pressures, and we could design our programs to celebrate diverse bilingual literature or inquire into and write about children’s language use.
Secondly, as in the research discussed in our literature review, we battled the constant creep of English despite our intentional translanguaging stance. English took precedence due to the language preferences and proficiencies of children and staff/volunteers. We suggest that this tension may have arisen as a result of who is translanguaging and why we translanguaged. The context of translanguaging matters greatly, and issues such as the flexibility and structure of the programs, as well as the extent to which they resemble school in the minds of the children, impact the potential of translanguaging.

Translanguaging, Structure, and Flexibility

Descriptions of translanguaging often include terms like “dynamic” (Flores & García, 2013, p. 255), “flexible” (Guzula et al., 2016, p. 8), “natural and free” (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. xi), and “natural flow” or “corriente” (García et al., 2017, p. xi), referencing the free-flowing, unrestricted use of language. Thus, a translanguaging stance aligns with flexible educational approaches and language philosophies. However, the comparison of these projects showed that translanguaging occurred in both more and less structured environments and that in some cases, the structure was vital to persisting with translanguaging (as opposed to defaulting to all English). For example, translanguaging occurred in less structured moments at Autores Fuertes as children, their families, and researchers talked. But it also occurred in highly planned activities at Bilingual Storytime like the translanguaging read-aloud (Kelly, 2022).

In many cases, structure and planning supported, rather than constrained, translanguaging. Both projects included some participants who felt more comfortable using English and/or had no prior experience in an educational context that encouraged them to use two languages together. In both projects, we intended translanguaging to push back against monolingual language ideologies by celebrating Spanish. But to accomplish that goal, we needed participants to use Spanish. We could not simply welcome their home language practices, if those were primarily English, or accept their initial writing if they imported beliefs from school that their final products needed to be all in English. Thus, we had to explicitly plan for both languages. Laura explicitly planned translanguaging read-alouds by underlining key Spanish sentences in the book and adding post-it notes with English clarifications (Kelly, 2022). Stephanie explicitly supported students to increase Spanish in their writing through modeling with children’s literature and explicitly asking them during writing conferences what words or phrases might make more sense in Spanish.

This level of planning seemed necessary for children learning one of the languages to prevent them from defaulting to their most comfortable language. It may also be necessary for children who comfortably use both languages, but who believe they should keep their languages separate or that all their languages are not equally valuable in an educational context. Our experiences with planning and translanguaging align with the recommendations of García and Kleyn (2016), who advocated for educators to intentionally plan how, when, and why they blend languages.

Translanguaging, Resistance, and Language Dominance

Translanguaging is grounded in resistant, heteroglossic language practices of communities and homes. Those practices eschew conformity to standardized, authoritative language policies, as enforced in schools or by a nation-state. Yet we saw that promoting flexible language use allowed, at times, for a default to English. But is this always a problem? Many children and families at both sites were bilingual. English is one of their languages. Perhaps the hegemony of English is disrupted just by allowing the choice of which language to use.

We found that the translanguaging approach did not always decenter English to the extent we had hoped, similar to what other researchers have found in out-of-school translanguaging spaces (Gast
et al., 2017; Pastor, 2007). Guerrero (2021) has argued that the failure to protect space and status for the minoritized or less socially dominant language is a pedagogical weakness of the translanguaging approach. It may be unrealistic to expect “equal” status in language use or children’s language ideologies without a more explicit intervention beyond a translanguaging stance.

Also, translanguaging stances problematize notions of proficiency, yet at Autores Fuertes, we noted criticism of the children’s Spanish. For example, the children often claimed that they could not write in Spanish, the director claimed that the children could not host a radio station because she could not correct their Spanish mistakes, and the assistant director described children as not being fluent in either language or their languagelessness (Rosa, 2016). In turn, at times, Bilingual Storytime volunteers’ Spanish was evaluated as not fluent. As theory, practice, and pedagogy, translanguaging illuminates the complex and rich language practices of people, specifically racialized, multilingual children and adults. Yet we have noted that the ability for translanguaging pedagogies to challenge and change the ideological stances of educators and other actors, who may be observing the translanguaging practices of racialized children, seems limited.

**Translanguaging and Multimodality**

As affirmed in previous literacy research, multimodal literacies welcome bilingual and immigrant students to express and interpret complex experiences beyond the bounds of print language (Campano & Low, 2011). A current movement in translanguaging research and theory is to account for modes of communication outside of spoken or written language (García & Kleifgen, 2020; Kusters et al., 2017; Lin, 2019). For instance, across both sites, communication beyond words was prevalent and vital for meaning-making. To expand the concept of linguistic repertoire, an essential concept underpinning translanguaging theory, scholars have proposed terms such as spatialized and semiotic repertoire (Canagarajah, 2017; Kusters et al., 2017) to account for this complexity of communication. Others write about multiliteracies to describe how children enact literacy beyond a range of print-based skills (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). Given the multiple semiotic processes we observed in both cases among facilitators and children, we echo calls for increased attention to multimodality in language teaching and research (Early et al., 2015).

**Researcher and Educator Positionality in Translanguaging**

Given the xenophobic and racist culture of the United States, particularly the marginalization of Latinx immigrants and Spanish-speaking communities, it is imperative to examine the positionality of the translanguagers. In our projects, they were children, researchers, and volunteers. Recent work in raciolinguistics (Rosa, 2019) showed the intersection of racialized positions and language performance. By looking at our translanguaging work with children, we hoped that children whose languages and cultures were marginalized and minoritized could more freely share their entire language repertoire. Furthermore, we intended that they would freely learn to critique larger ideological structures that contribute to this marginalization. However, this did not always come naturally from our lessons or activities.

Three coauthors of this article and lead researchers of our projects identify as white. All four are bilingual speakers of English and Spanish; however, the three white authors learned English as children in the United States and Spanish as adults. Thus, we occupy, both racially and linguistically, a space in US society where we have been offered a lifetime of unearned benefits stemming from how our races and our languages have been perceived. For example, white people who are multilingual are often considered to possess a talent or a skill that is desired and valuable; people of color and immigrants who are multilingual are often considered linguistically deficient in schools and communities (Flores & García, 2017). In our data, conversations frequently arose with the children as
a result of this dynamic: a reluctance to speak or write in Spanish on the part of the children or a celebration of our bilingualism as white adults by other adults at the research sites. Moving forward, we intend to engage these conversations to undermine the dominant and dangerous ideologies of language, race, and even citizenship status, recommending that all translanguaging researchers do the same.

**Significance and Needs for Future Research**

The strength of our study lies in the comparison of two distinct research sites; we documented the affordances and limitations we analyze in this paper at different sites, with different participants, and in separately designed research projects. The comparison of these projects points to promising lines of future inquiry. Future researchers might explore how the purpose of and participants in translanguaging affect the experience of it. For example, how is translanguaging different for children in bilingual homes who commonly translanguage and for children in monolingual homes who use translanguaging to support their learning of a new language? Additional research could explore translanguaging as resistance and how children (and others) develop language ideologies in the context of translanguaging educational spaces. Finally, we argue for more attention to the promising intersection of translanguaging and multimodality and the development of pedagogical approaches that blend the two approaches.

**References**


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