
Recently, translanguaging has gained much attention in multilingual education scholarship from scholars who question the strict division of languages. Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014) maintain that translanguaging is a creative meaning-making process that allows multilingual speakers to actively participate in linguistically diverse social contexts. Subsequently, a growing amount of research has extended the notion of translanguaging from its theoretical framework to include pedagogical implications. Missing from this body of literature is an attempt to apply translanguaging from an Asian perspective, particularly in terms of its practices in multilingual classrooms. In response to this need, Viniti Vaish’s recently published book, Translanguaging in Multilingual English Classrooms: An Asian Perspective and Contexts, offers ways translanguaging can be implemented to support students who are struggling to read in English. This review provides a summary of the book and its key points, followed by an evaluation and implications for how teachers and teacher educators could use it.

Summary

The purpose of the book is threefold: (a) to instruct on the implementation of translanguaging pedagogy that can help students to improve specific grammatical and comprehension skills; (b) to provide an enriched methodology for analyzing translanguaging practices by explaining the coding process of bilingual transcripts; and (c) to expand the discussion of translanguaging to include a pedagogic approach in superdiverse and multilingual educational settings. Throughout the book, Vaish makes the argument that translanguaging pedagogy leverages young bilingual learners’ language practices in ways that foster general academic achievements.

This book is organized into nine chapters. The first chapter (“Introduction: Translanguaging and Translanguaging Pedagogies”) is written by Angel M. Y. Lin, who gives historical accounts of the term translanguaging by highlighting its functional and integrative nature in multilingual pedagogy. Lin discusses how translanguaging is different from codeswitching/codemixing and code alternation because it counters the “code” model of language, which shares the traditional view that language systems are bounded. Additionally, Lin sorts translanguaging pedagogies into two strands: spontaneous translanguaging and planned translanguaging. According to Lin, the former indicates natural and spontaneous translingual communication mostly led by multilingual teachers, while the latter consists of preemptively designed pedagogies intended to scaffold multilingual development. More importantly, Lin notes that translanguaging pedagogies meet different meaning-making needs. As such, she concludes the introduction by highlighting the adaptation of translanguaging pedagogies to suit various educational contexts and settings.

Reviewed by Suok Kwon, Indiana University, USA
E-mail: suokkwon@iu.edu
© 2022 IJLCE and Suok Kwon
In the second chapter (“The Linguistic Ecology of Singapore”), Vaish describes the landscape of languages in Singapore, the research site of her book. Since her study is focused on English education, the author gives an overview of the varieties of English in Singapore from two aspects: language in society and in education. Vaish explains that Singlish, the colloquial variety of English, has its own validated “grammatical and cultural properties” and is used widely by multilingual children. In addition, the author notes the bilingual educational policies in Singapore, which pair English with Malay, Tamil, or Chinese. This chapter concludes with a conceptualization of translanguaging in Singapore that shapes the main arguments of the book and is explored through an analysis of translanguaging pedagogy and its practices in English classes.

The third chapter (“Methodology 1: Translanguaging and the Classroom”) is dedicated to introducing contexts for two major projects within the text. The first project is a baseline study that investigated pedagogy in Singapore’s Language Support Program (LSP), and the second one is a Proof of Concept that is titled “Raise the Bilingual Approach to Reading.” Specifically, in the baseline study of pedagogy, Vaish observed monolingual classes in the LSPs in five primary schools. In the second project, Proof of Concept, the author elaborated translanguaging as an “organic, collaborative, and bottom-up” intervention and investigated its effects by observing three other primary schools that used translanguaging in their LSPs (p. 35). While presenting the purpose of her two research contexts, Vaish specifies that the LSPs of both projects are captured as “multilingual English classrooms,” as the programs were designed to teach content in English to students with diverse linguistic backgrounds (p. 32). This chapter concludes with a description of translanguaging pedagogy and literacy activities implemented in LSPs.

While chapter three deals with the general background of the study, chapter four (“Methodology 2: Coding Bilingual Transcripts”) provides coding procedures developed to analyze the collected video data. First, the observed data were transcribed to find the quantity and quality of talk. In terms of the quantity of talk, Vaish counted the number of English, Malay, and Chinese words and calculated the children’s mean length of translanguaged utterances. Quality of talk was coded in terms of motivations and contexts for translanguaging, questioning patterns, and interactional patterns. Lastly, Vaish describes the analysis of the eight children’s retelling stories.

In chapter five (“Comparing Monolingual and Bilingual Classrooms”), Vaish discusses the findings of her empirical study, particularly comparing the pedagogies implemented in monolingual and bilingual classes. According to the author, both monolingual and bilingual classes were introduced to translanguaging pedagogy, but its practices were identified differently in terms of the questioning patterns and the nature of interactions. As for the patterns of questions, both monolingual and bilingual classes did not differ in the quantity of questions, but compared to monolingual classes, lower-rank questions are more frequently observed in bilingual classes that require lower levels of cognitive competencies, such as procedural and factual questions. More contrasting changes made through translanguaging practices were the interactional patterns observed in the bilingual classes. Although students mostly engaged in responding to display questions, students’ interactions with teachers showed their “student critical turns” (p. 60) where students make extended oral utterances while applying target words and grammar in them.

Chapters six (“Interactional Patterns in the Malay Group”) and seven (“Interactional Patterns in the Chinese Group”) present the nature of interaction in translanguaging pedagogy in bilingual classes—one with English and Malay and the other with English and Chinese—by providing both quantitative and qualitative results. Specifically, Vaish analyzed the mean length of utterances by calculating the amounts the students spoke and coded the student and teacher interactions to understand the quality of the translanguaging classroom discourses. Contrary to the author's
expectation, the quantitative results indicate that translanguage pedagogy did not increase the amount that students spoke in English. However, qualitative results show that translanguage could facilitate students’ comprehension despite their limited proficiencies in English vocabulary and grammar. In addition, the patterns of interaction were found to be different among bilingual groups, such as Malay–English or Chinese–English. While translanguage in Malay–English classes helped students interpret stories better and comprehend the different connotations of vocabulary, teachers in Chinese–English classes used translanguage to facilitate students’ metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic transfer of grammar knowledge. Vaish concludes chapter seven with the pitfalls of the unidirectionality of cross-linguistic transfer from mother tongue to target languages and calls for translanguage design to solve the problem.

In the eighth chapter (“The Storytellers: Oral Retelling of Bilingual Children Struggling to Read in English”), Vaish shares bilingual students’ oral retellings of stories they read in English. The students’ narratives in English were analyzed qualitatively for the amount they spoke, the number of content words, and the episodic structure. The author analyzed multiple stories narrated by eight students individually, as the students’ learning contexts were highly variable. By doing so, Vaish advocates for the case-based approach to understanding each student’s improvement of narrative skills. From this analytic framework, Vaish presents a case of a student’s oral retellings that benefited from translanguage pedagogy. Lastly, in chapter nine (“Conclusion and Implications”), Vaish reiterates the findings of implementing translanguage as pedagogy in the metro- and multilingual landscape of Singapore and interprets them in terms of expanding translanguage as practice and theory. As for the implications of her study, Vaish proposes multidirectional transfer of linguistic repertoires of bilingual learners, the development of quantitative tools to assess translanguage pedagogy, and the design of translanguage pedagogic strategies for teachers.

Evaluation

Vaish achieves her purposes by illustrating how translanguage pedagogies can look in multilingual classrooms. Like previous studies that define translanguage as an effective approach to bilingual education (García & Wei, 2014; Martínez et al., 2015; Paulsrud et al., 2017; Tobin et al., 2013), Vaish upholds the benefits of translanguage by demonstrating that emergent bilinguals engage in interaction replete with plurilingual resources and develop linguistic repertoires. Particularly in chapters six through eight, the descriptions of students’ classroom interactions and story-retelling performances indicate their positioning as active meaning-makers in cross-linguistic transfer. Likewise, Canagarajah (2011), and García and Wei (2014) argue that translanguage promotes creativity and criticality, leading to learners’ new identity construction as multilinguals. Considering that multilingual practices are becoming the norm due to economic globalization (Pennycook, 2007), Vaish successfully shows that translanguage classes become a transformative space where students transgress monolingual hegemony, respect cultural diversity, and engender self-reflexivity as competent bilinguals (Lau et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2020).

Another strength of this volume is the careful design of its research methodology—Vaish’s research is empirically sound and has extensive data sets. As stated above, not only did the author compare monolingual and bilingual pedagogy throughout the baseline study, but she also developed an additional study, Proof of Concept, through which she identified the effects of translanguage pedagogy. With such a research design, the book offers a plethora of examples and excerpts from the observed classrooms to illustrate how translanguage serves in communication between teachers and students. In addition, readers benefit from a detailed description of the translanguage training workshop that was given to the participating teachers. Chapter three demonstrates specific literacy
activities and translanguaging strategies along with key vocabulary words and the lists of books taught at the participating schools. Most of all, readers will appreciate the coding categories described in chapter four since the process of data analysis contributes to the scholastic measure of translanguaging practices. As García and Wei (2014) advocate for developing “standardized assessment … in translanguage ways” (p. 134), Vaish delineates the procedure of coding multilingual utterances, as well as some challenges to fully understanding emergent bilinguals' proficiency.

Nonetheless, questions remain to consolidate translanguaging as a transformative pedagogy. Chapters six and seven elucidate the contrasting findings from the Malay–English groups and Chinese–English groups, implying that different bilingual groups show different interactional patterns. However, Vaish limits her discussion, indicating only the contexts of translanguaging pedagogy in Asia that are fundamentally different from those in the West (p. 127). In this regard, Cham (2019) argues that translanguaging can minimize “the cultural gap between the East and the West” (p. 36) in her study of English-mediated Chinese classes in Hong Kong. It is worth studying how translanguaging not only transforms students’ linguistic repertoires, but also functions as cultural scaffolding. Moreover, Vaish does not explicitly mention the dynamic process of practicing translanguaging from the teachers’ perspectives. Despite her elaboration of translanguaging as planned pedagogy, teachers’ beliefs and cognition about translanguaging strategies should be further studied because they are critical factors in determining the quality of classes, especially when teachers were taught using conventional bilingual models (Rabbidge, 2019). It might be insightful to see how teachers reconceptualize their course designs from bilingual, biliteracy, and second language acquisition to translanguaging platforms.

Conclusion

Overall, this book presents the pedagogic implications of translanguaging and the growing need for such pedagogy in Singapore due to the country’s multilingual landscapes, including English, Chinese, and Malay. The book emphasizes the processes and effects of implementing translanguaging in Asian countries, which transforms traditional hierarchical classroom cultures (Rabbidge, 2019). It also offers various translanguaging practices that teachers can adopt when designing student-oriented classes to scaffold learners’ comprehension and performance. Considering the niches that Vaish fills, the book will attract practitioners—especially English language teachers, English training course instructors, policymakers, and school administrators. This volume is also ideal for academics who are engaging with emergent bilingual learners, designing a solid methodology for multilingual classroom research, and interested in the benefits of bi/multilingualism and translingual pedagogies.

References


