



Language Arts Lessons

Translanguaging in Every Classroom

Mikel W. Cole

This column provides an overview of a variety of translanguaging strategies that teachers can use in both English-only and multilingual classrooms.

As pairs of students sit scattered around tables in the school library, the English teacher stands in front of the class beside the interactive whiteboard giving a brief review on future tense syntax. A closer look at the chart of first-, second-, and third-person conjugations reveals a clue that this is not a typical English 1 classroom. In a column beside the English conjugations is a column of the Spanish equivalents (e.g., Yo voy a ser . . . , I will be . . .). As students take careful notes in school-issued laptops, the Spanish 1 teacher moves from table to table answering students' questions. Most students ask questions in Spanish, though some naturally use English, and the Spanish teacher fluidly moves between both languages as she explains that future tense in Spanish and English "Son los mismos. They're exactly the same."

The students in this classroom are working on a personal narrative essay. The first section is about their childhood and is written in past tense; the second section is written in present tense and is about their current lives; the future tense they're working on today will help them write the final section about who they hope to be in their futures. Although the final draft has to be written in English in order to meet a specific objective for their grade level, nearly all of the peer-peer conversations occur in Spanish, which is the home language of the students. Moreover, the initial drafts students

are composing often contain individual words and whole sentences in Spanish as students are encouraged to draft as fluidly as possible and to let the editing stages be opportunities to draw additional connections between their home language and the language of school.

This classroom scenario is a rich example of what researchers increasingly call **translanguaging pedagogies** (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017), a term that refers to a wide variety of instructional approaches that encourage students to fluidly utilize their full collection of linguistic resources in ways that reflect how bilingual people naturally use language. Traditionally, theorists have conceptualized bilinguals as two monolinguals in one person, and many bilingual education programs continue to implement a "strict separation of languages" approach that reiterates the view of languages as separate systems that should be kept distinct. **Translanguaging**, on the other hand, emphasizes the reality that languages work together in the minds of bilinguals and that, in practice, bilingual individuals typically utilize all of their linguistic resources in fluid and dynamic ways.

The example above comes from a classroom where the Spanish teacher and English teacher, with the active support of their principal, co-plan and co-teach for an hour daily. The class is composed entirely of Latinx students for whom the traditional

Spanish class failed to acknowledge their fluent oral proficiency in Spanish and for whom the traditional English curriculum failed to utilize their multilingual knowledge as an instructional strength. Similar use of translanguaging is absolutely possible and equally important in middle school and elementary classrooms. As researchers have agreed for some time, it is collaboration, high-quality instruction, and a school-wide commitment to the success of emergent bilinguals that is ultimately more important to their success than structural constraints like program model or language of instruction policy (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 2001).

Schools in the United States have grown increasingly diverse, and the fastest-growing population of students in US classrooms is English Language Learners, or emergent bilinguals (García, 2009). Although nearly two-thirds of these students are born in the United States, they come from racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse homes, and collectively, they speak over 400 different languages (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). It is not uncommon for a single urban district to have well over 100 languages represented throughout their student body.

We now have decades of research consistently demonstrating that students supported to use their home language outperform those limited to monolingual, English-only approaches. Moreover, the longer and more intensively students' first languages (L1s) are used, the faster emergent bilinguals acquire English and reach grade-level parity with non-ELLs in academic content areas (e.g., Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey, & Pasta, 1991; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Many teachers, however, report feeling unprepared to provide the kinds of rich, culturally relevant instruction that is most effective for these students. Perhaps you remember what it was like to study a foreign language in high school or college. Can you imagine how difficult it would have been to make sense of the new vocabulary without connecting the terms to concepts and words you already knew in your first language? How much more difficult would it have been to learn all of your academic

content in that language? Now imagine you had to learn that content without opportunities to converse with your classmates in your home language or to explore new topics in depth in ways that would have been impossible using only your emerging second language proficiency?

Below, I provide examples of how teachers can use translanguaging approaches in bilingual and English-only classrooms. Recognizing that teacher preparation programs vary considerably in their focus on teaching emergent bilinguals, and knowing that language policy environments are different from state to state and district to district, I describe ways that translanguaging can be used in classrooms across grade levels.

Translanguaging in Monolingual Classrooms

In many cases, teachers will not know all of the languages of their students, and in some cases, they will be prohibited from delivering content in languages other than English; however, even in English-only contexts, it is possible to pursue a translanguaging pedagogy.

Cognate Word Study Lessons in Content Area Classrooms

Academic English draws heavily on Latin roots; consequently, employing *Cognate Word Study Lessons* is a highly effective strategy that can be used across content areas and grade levels. Cognates are words from multiple languages that share the same root, like “educación” in Spanish and “education” in English. For instance, Spanish and English share over 20,000 cognates (Montelongo, Hernández, Herter, & Cuello, 2011), and because roughly 75% of ELLs in US schools speak Spanish as a home language, this is a very effective way to establish meaningful connections between unfamiliar academic terms and students' home languages. Of course, other Romance languages (e.g., French, Italian, and Portuguese) and Germanic languages also provide rich opportunities for cognate instruction, and a quick Internet search makes it easy to find cognate lists for many of these languages.

Table 1. *Second-grade science cognate list*

English	Spanish	French
carnivore	carnívoro	carnivore
herbivore	herbívoros	herbivore
omnivore	omnívoros	omnivore
predator	depredador	prédateur
prey	presa	proie
producer	productor	producteur

Imagine a science unit in a second-grade classroom. Many districts across the country provide vocabulary lists that students will need to know, and a large proportion of the key vocabulary is based on Latin cognates (see Table 1). Not only can teachers provide the district-mandated vocabulary list in multiple languages to facilitate student comprehension and parental engagement, teachers can actively help students draw connections across languages in ways that will support long-term vocabulary learning, as well as the kinds of metalinguistic knowledge that is often valued on assessments that hold high stakes for students, such as the SAT. Additionally, if charts of key vocabulary in the home languages of the students in the classroom are placed on the walls of the classroom or incorporated into existing word walls, emergent bilinguals and English-monolingual students can learn to use both sets of vocabulary as they talk with each other in their home languages during small-group discussions.

Collaborative Translation in Upper Elementary English/Language Arts Classrooms

Collaborative translation is an approach to translanguaging in the upper elementary and middle school English/language arts classroom that has been developed by Robert Jiménez and colleagues at Vanderbilt University, and it has been used effectively by both bilingual and monolingual teachers in upper elementary and middle school classrooms (e.g., Jiménez et al., 2015). Based on the realization that emergent bilingual students often serve as informal translators for their parents in

parent-teacher conferences, at doctors' offices, and other formal situations, this instructional approach has students work together in small groups to translate strategically targeted passages of English texts in their home languages. Passages are chosen that not only contribute meaningfully to plot or character development, but also have rich, metaphorical language that can lead to misunderstandings. Students build deeper understandings of the text as they work together to create meaningful translations that are more complex than the simple direct translations that online translators like Google Translate would provide. After each group has constructed a translation, groups compare their translations, discussing differences in word choices that provide insights into student thinking. Finally, the teacher facilitates discussions of the text utilizing students' new, translation-informed understandings.

Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms

For those situations where teachers know the languages of at least some of their students, where bilingual models of instruction are present, or even where bilingual paraprofessionals or parents are present, many additional translanguaging approaches are available. English-only policies restrict the language of instruction but not the languages students may use themselves; thus, even English-only classrooms can be conceived of as multilingual spaces where students and parent volunteers are free to use their entire linguistic repertoires for learning.

Preview-View-Review in Lower Elementary Content Area Classrooms

One widely researched pedagogy is *Preview-View-Review* (e.g., Freeman & Freeman, 2000; Ulanoff & Pucci, 1999). This technique is quick but highly effective, and it maximizes both content knowledge and English acquisition. First, the teacher builds background knowledge before beginning the lesson or unit by engaging students in a conversation using students' L1. Because students are able to use their strong L1 oral language and lived experiences, they

are able to activate complex schema before information is taught in English during whole-class instruction. Furthermore, the L1 preview maximizes comprehension during English instruction by making key ideas apparent and helping students focus on the important ideas in the L2 input to follow.

During the lesson, the teacher utilizes the target language, but importantly, ample use of comprehensible input is provided in the form of gesture, visuals, realia, and so on. Moreover, collaborative activity during instruction provides the opportunity for children to use multiple language resources and skills. After the lesson, the teacher then reviews the material in students' L1 again. This allows the bilingual teacher to clarify misunderstandings and provides formative assessment for subsequent instruction.

Cultural Modeling in Upper Elementary English/Language Arts Classrooms

The rich linguistic knowledge that emergent bilinguals display in the classroom is rooted in the lived experiences of culturally informed practices outside of the classroom, and effective approaches to translanguaging strategically employ students' multilingual practices in ways that are culturally sustaining (Orellana & Reynolds, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017). For instance, Orellana and Reynolds (2008) document the ways that 18 Latinx fifth, sixth, and seventh graders routinely “para-phrase,” or language broker, for their families. This is a rich, widespread cultural practice in which families pool their linguistic resources and experiential knowledge to make sense of language and literacy events in English.

They give the example of Estela, who is 10 years old and the oldest of three siblings, as she translates an official letter from the Illinois State Department that includes a legal form that the family must sign and return. Estela uses her knowledge of English to first read a chunk of the text aloud in English; she then pauses to consider the meaning before offering a Spanish translation to her parents. Her English decoding is not always accurate, but the meaning is clearly conveyed despite small inaccuracies. Similarly, her Spanish translations

are rarely word-for-word, but they include enough detail to convey the importance of the document. At one point, Estela struggles with unfamiliar legal syntax, but her mother uses her own experience with legal forms to help Estela craft a successful translation. Elsewhere, Orellana and colleagues (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003) discuss ways that teachers can better align school-based literacy practices like paraphrasing to capitalize on these kinds of home literacy practices.

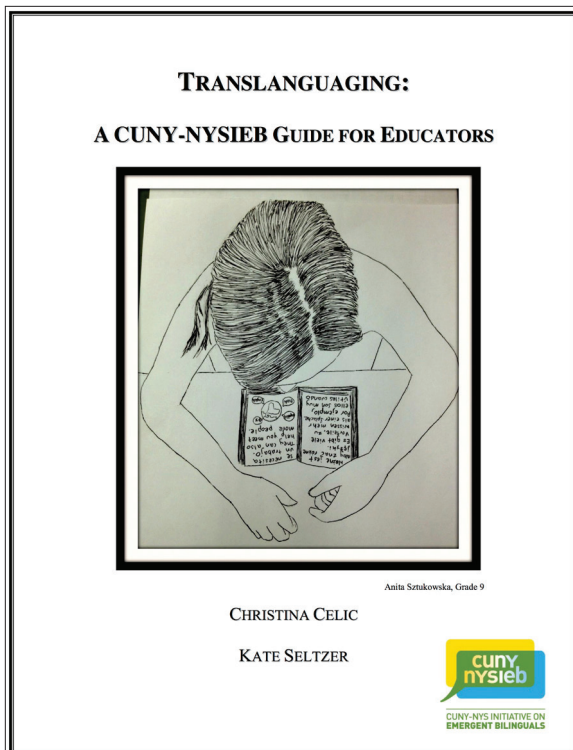
Recently, a colleague and I reported on a humorous application of a similar cultural modeling application of translanguaging pedagogies (Axelrod & Cole, 2018). A group of upper elementary students were working together to translate an article in the school newspaper about an upcoming pumpkin sale as an extension of broader interpreting practices in the school (e.g., real-time translating for parents during PTA meetings). The headline in the school paper said, “The pumpkins are coming.” Initially, the group of students settled on a direct translation of “Vienen las calabazas” before working through the bulk of the announcement. About 10 minutes into the activity, one of the older fifth graders approached as the group was focused on the activity. She leaned forward and saw the headline, then immediately stood up and made a puzzled expression, asking, “‘Vienen las calabazas’? That sounds strange.” When the other children looked up at her, she made a **spooky facial expression** and curled her hands menacingly and said, “Vienen las calabazas.” Immediately, everyone laughed as they realized how culturally unfamiliar and strange that translation would sound to a community unfamiliar with the practice of putting pumpkins out on the school lawn to raise money. Ultimately, the students settled on “La Venta de Calabazas” (The Pumpkin Sale), a loose translation that conveyed the important information in a way that would be more culturally familiar to their families.

Conclusion

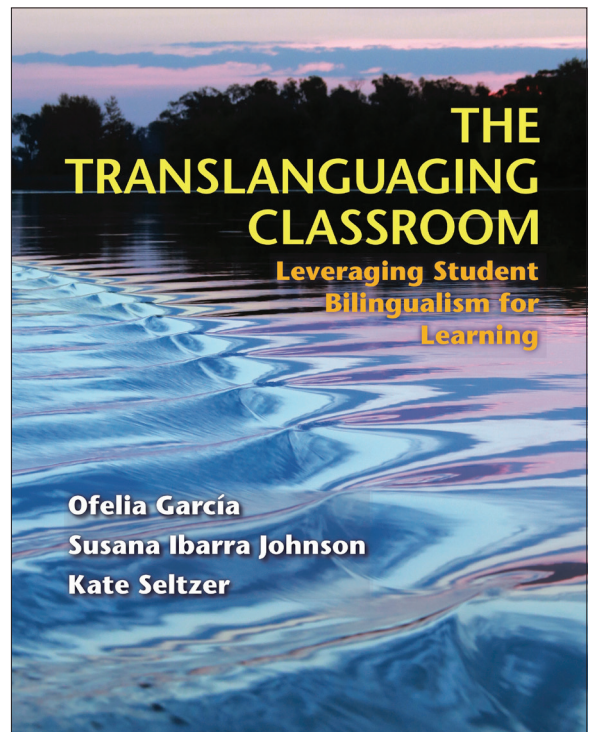
There are a wide variety of instructional approaches teachers can use to strengthen the instruction they are already giving to support emergent bilingual students,

and these examples barely begin to scratch the surface of translanguage possibilities. Even when teachers may be programmatically or legally prohibited from providing instruction directly in students' L1, teachers can still allow students to work together to build deeper understandings using their full linguistic repertoires or provide bilingual resources like dictionaries and other texts. For those interested in learning more about the wide ranges of translanguage approaches available, we recommend two resources with more detail about the approaches discussed here and dozens of others, as well:

1. Celic, C., & Seltzer, K. (2011). *Translanguage: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators*. New York, NY: CUNY-NYSIEB. This is a freely available guide written by teachers for teachers that uses several specific translanguage pedagogies to demonstrate the wide variety of ways that an orientation to multilingualism can infuse the schoolwide curriculum. With a helpful Q/A section and Introduction by Ofelia García, each section contains step-by-step instructions for using several pedagogies at a variety of grade levels.



2. García, O., Johnson, S. I., Seltzer, K., & Valdés, G. (2017). *The Translanguage Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon. This textbook is written with classroom teachers in mind and is, consequently, a rich combination of theory and practice. Not only do the authors provide plenty of classroom examples, they also include guidance on reorienting classroom assessment to honor the dynamic bilingualism of students.



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Candidates Announced for Section Elections; Watch for Your Ballot

The Elementary Section Nominating Committee has named the following candidates for Section offices in the NCTE spring elections:

For Members of the Elementary Section Nominating Committee (three to be elected; terms to expire in 2020): **Jesse Gainer**, Texas State University, San Marcos; **Janelle Henderson**, Louisville, KY; **Bobbie Kabuto**, Queens College, NY; **Peggy McNamara**, Bank Street College of Education, New York, NY; **Bilal Polson**, Northern Parkway School Uniondale, New York; **Allison Volz**, Highland Elementary School, Ohio State University, and Ohio Wesleyan University, Columbus, Ohio.

Members of the 2018–19 Elementary Section Nominating Committee are Ting Yuan (chair), College of Staten Island, NY; Crystal Polite Glover, Winthrop University, SC; and Dinah Volk, Cleveland State University, OH.

Lists of candidates for all of the ballots can be found on the NCTE website at <http://www2.ncte.org/get-involved/volunteer/elections/>.

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