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The Canadian Modern Language Review / La revue canadienne des
langues vivantes, Volume 72, Number 4, November / novembre 2016,
pp. 389-404 (Article)



Published by University of Toronto Press

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Introduction: Showcasing the Translingual SL/FL Classroom: Strategies, Practices, and Beliefs

Shelley K. Taylor and Cecelia Cutler

In an article published in this journal 15 years ago, [Vivian Cook \(2001\)](#) argued that it was time to question the time-honoured view that the native language (NL) should be avoided in the classroom by teachers and students. The justifications for this perspective hinged on a questionable compartmentalization of the two languages in the mind. The conventional wisdom has been that the NL has no place in the second language (SL) or foreign language (FL) classroom and that teachers should focus on getting students to think and interact exclusively in the target language (TL). In *Linguistic Imperialism*, [Phillipson \(1992\)](#) debunks five fallacies that are foundational in the field of applied linguistics, among them, the monolingual fallacy or the idea that a second or foreign language is best taught *monolingually*. Questioning monolingual pedagogies is at the heart of the investigations assembled in this Special Issue.

Such monolingual (and potentially subtractive) pedagogies treat learners' minds as if the NL were irrelevant for learning a SL/FL. Interest in additive pedagogies that embrace and build on rather than negate the NL are gaining ground, and this is reflected in a range of new paradigms such as the concept of "translanguaging" defined by [Otheguy, García, and Reid \(2015, p. 281\)](#) as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named . . . languages." Adopting a *translanguaging* perspective demands a different set of research questions centred on how best to capitalize on learners' existing linguistic repertoires, which is the motivation for this Special Issue: *Showcasing the Translingual SL/FL Classroom: Strategies, Practices, and Beliefs*.

The reasons that many SL/FL teachers are taught to avoid the NL stem from the "monolingual principle," or the idea that use of the NL should be minimized or even banned, so as to replicate NL acquisition and maximize SL/FL input ([Howatt, 1984](#)). Yet, as [Cummins \(2007\)](#) points out, there is little empirical support for these assumptions. Indeed, several research studies have shown that language learning

occurs more quickly and effectively *with* NL support, while others have pointed to the connection between NL proficiency, particularly literacy and the transfer of these skills to the SL/FL classroom (Cook, 1995; Cummins, 2000, *in press*; Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Greene, 1998; Hall & Cook, 2012; Krashen, 1992; Rossell & Baker, 1996; Soto Huerta, 2012). Furthermore, several research studies concur on the importance of bilingual children's NL for overall personal and educational development (Baker 2000; Cummins 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Since Cook wrote his piece in 2001, there has been increasing recognition that monolingual second language teaching methods need to be challenged (Piccardo, 2013) and experts in the field of SL and FL teaching and learning are increasingly questioning the monolingual ideology of SL/FL teaching (Cenoz & Gorter, 2014; Conte & Meier, 2014; Cummins, 2007, 2009; García, 2009; García & Sylvan, 2011; Phillipson, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009, Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013). Translanguaging and translingual pedagogies have been proposed as an alternative to prevailing monolingual methods. We adopt Baker (2011)'s definition of translingual teaching as "making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two [or more] languages" (p. 288). This leads us to the question of what the state of the field is regarding translingual methods and approaches to teaching SLs/FLs, which we outline in the following section.

State of the field

The question of whether the NL has a place in the SL/FL classroom has been the subject of a great deal of theorizing and some empirical scholarship over the past two decades (Piccardo 2013). Much of this work has focused on cultural and identity issues facing language minority students in transitional bilingual/assimilationist settings that may or may not recognize NL rights (Auerbach, 1993; Cummins, 2000, 2007, 2009; García, 2009; Greene, 1998; Lotherington, 2013; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2016; Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Mohanty, & Panda, 2010; Taylor, 2014). There has also been an interest in exploring the utility of using the NL among majority language speakers in SL/FL additive bilingual settings (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2014; Cummins, 2014; Dagenais, 2013; Duff & Polio, 1990; Lyster, Collins, & Ballinger, 2009; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2010).

Despite a long history of empirical work on bilingual and SL teaching and research, it has only been very recently that researchers have

begun to investigate NL use in the SL/FL or heritage language classroom (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Canagarajah 2011, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2010, 2015; Flóres & García, 2013; García & Wei 2014; Hélot, 2014; Velasco & García 2014). It must be acknowledged that translingual pedagogy is still in its infancy (e.g., in secondary and higher-education settings). Despite growing recognition of plurilingual realities among applied linguists (Taylor & Snoddon, 2013), many researchers, educators, SL/FL learners, and others continue to view bilinguals as two (inadequate) monolinguals without recognizing the dynamic interactions that go on between the languages in their linguistic repertoires (Grosjean, 2010; Heller, 2007; Moore & Gajo, 2009), or how complex, idiosyncratic, and multifaceted even (so-called) monolinguals' idiolects are (Otheguy et al., 2015). Nor has the adoption of translanguaging produced, according to Otheguy et al. (2015, p. 282), "a sufficiently strong challenge to prevailing understandings of language and linguistic behavior in speakers generally, and especially in bilinguals." Therefore, despite a growing interest in translanguaging and similar paradigms such as plurilingualism (Marshall & Moore, 2016), to date there is still no consensus about the role of the NL or how best to incorporate translingual methods.

Building on a burgeoning interest in this area (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Canagarajah 2011, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2010, 2015; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; García 2009, 2014; García & Sylvan, 2011; García & Wei 2014; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Schwarzer & Fuchs, 2014; Silver & Bokhorst-Heng, 2016; Wei, 2016), the papers in this Special Issue provide further discussion of translingual approaches in SL/FL teaching and learning. The following section provides an overview of the papers assembled in the Special Issue in terms of the types of programs they are housed in and the classrooms they describe, the age of the students, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the students' NLs, the methodologies used by the authors, and the findings of the studies.

Overview

This Special Issue presents six empirical studies on "translingual" teaching practices, techniques, and outcomes as well as on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the importance of the NL. It features studies done in a wide variety of programs and settings, as is outlined below, and as are featured in the "Articles" and "Focus on the classroom/ Pleins feux sur la classe" sections that follow.

Miao Sun's paper, "Peer Collaboration in an English/Chinese Bilingual Program in Western Canada," involves the in- and out-of-school language and literacy practices of children enrolled in an elementary-

level bilingual program. The program functions both as a maintenance bilingual program for one third of the children who are heritage language speakers of Mandarin, and as a two-way immersion program for the other two thirds of the student population (i.e., children whose NL may be other Chinese languages such as Cantonese, other Asian heritage languages such as Vietnamese, and a variety of English speakers, including Canadian-born ethnic Chinese children whose home language is English). The study outlines influences on these children's translanguaging practices and identity construction.

Sophie Babault and Michael Markey's paper, "Articulation langue 1-langue 2 dans le répertoire langagier des élèves inscrits en programme immersif: quelles ressources lexicales pour les cours de sciences?," investigates content-area teaching for two groups of elementary-level francophone students in Belgium: one group enrolled in an enrichment bilingual education program – namely, Dutch immersion – and another enrolled in French-medium mainstream schooling. The researchers contrasted the two groups of French-speaking students' lexical and content learning in similar Grade 5 science courses, taught either in Dutch (to the immersion students) or in French (to the control group). The findings suggest further investigation into the use of translanguaging pedagogical methods to promote students' lexical development and conceptual understanding in content teaching is needed.

Saskia Van Viegen Stille, Robin Bethke, Jackie Bradley-Brown, Janet Giberson, and Gillian Hall's inquiry, "Broadening Educational Practice to Include Translanguaging: An Outcome of Educator Inquiry into Multilingual Students' Learning Needs," involved over 300 educators (ESL teachers, consultants, education officers, and resource teachers) from 16 school boards in Ontario and the Ministry of Education, as well as refugee and immigrant children and Canadian-born children of immigrant parents. All three groups of children involved were enrolled in English-medium mainstream programs at the K–12 level. They included: (a) the children of Low German-speaking migrants from Mexico living in rural parts of the province, (b) children from primarily Pennsylvania Dutch NL backgrounds who recently settled in a rural area with limited experience receiving English learners, and (c) children from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a highly diverse urban setting. In the latter case, these children constituted over one third of the school population and came from over 50 different NL backgrounds. The studies investigate possibilities for educators' professional learning with regard to translanguaging pedagogies.

Caroline Dault and Laura Collins's paper, "L'utilisation des langues connues des apprenants en classe de français langue seconde," involves

French instruction education for adult immigrants and refugees in Quebec. Newcomer adults are eligible to learn French as a second language (FSL) in government-sponsored French-as-subject programs (“la francisation”). The 87 newcomers who participated in the study were beginner-level French learners who were also speakers of (one or more of) a range of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian languages, Spanish or English. The FSL teachers were mainly bilingual francophones from Quebec, though one was a North African trilingual. They found it easier to draw on the learners’ NLs if it was a language the teachers had learned (e.g., Spanish). Overall, materials to support pre-planned translingual activities were limited, but they were open to learning about and trying out translingual teaching approaches.

There are also two pedagogical papers for the “Focus on the Classroom” section. The paper by Mercè Pujol-Ferran, Jacqueline M. Di-Santo, Nelson Núñez Rodríguez, and Angel Morales, “Exploring Plurilingual Pedagogies across the College Curriculum,” is written by four bilingual professors who teach in the same English-medium institution in the United States and share the NL of 60% of their students (i.e., Spanish). Their paper outlines how and why they draw on that shared linguistic connection in their pedagogy through their use of translingual strategies. Over half the students in the college are Latinos, and 80% are linguistic minorities experiencing linguistic and academic challenges. The professors adopted translingual strategies to deliver the curriculum to curb an otherwise high attrition rate in programs that emphasize remedial skill development in both academic English and content-area courses.

The focus of Julie Vaudrin-Charette and Carole Fleuret’s paper, “Quelles avenues vers une pédagogie postcoloniale et multimodale en contexte plurilingue ?,” is on two groups of elementary level students in Quebec: First Nations children enrolled in a transitional bilingual education program first offered in an Aboriginal language (their NL), and then in French; and immigrant children from highly diverse linguistic backgrounds enrolled in a French-medium mainstream program. It also focuses on how educators’ diverse responses to the children’s backgrounds, and the provision (or lack thereof) of translingual pedagogy affects student engagement and academic achievement.

In addition to these four articles and two pedagogical papers, we include reviews of three recent books whose themes intersect in significant ways: Robert Phillipson’s review of [Fiona Copland, Sue Garton, and Steve Mann’s \(2016\)](#) edited collection, *LETs and NESTs: Voices, views and vignettes*; Nancy Dubetz’s review of [Marjorie F. Orellana’s \(2016\)](#) *Immigrant Children in Transcultural Spaces: Language, Learning*

and *Love*; and Katherine E. Entigar's review of [Ofelia García and Tatyana Kleyn's \(2016\)](#) book, *Translanguaging with Multilingual Students: Learning from Classroom Moments*.

While we recognize that these are all very different populations and settings where the role and purpose of translingual use and teaching practices may differ greatly, the intention is to get a "read" on the state of the field and showcase current research and practice in this area. We are especially keen to acknowledge the complexity regarding translingual practices in the French-speaking Canadian context, where concerns about the vitality of French and ensuring the development of French competence among immigrant and refugee youths and adults are paramount. We also recognize the inherent contradictions that arise in First Nations language enrichment and ancestral language settings where the NL (English) is a dominant language in society already.

Given the increasingly multilingual and ethnically diverse population of industrialized nations like Canada, many countries in Europe, and the United States, these findings have direct relevance to the teaching and learning of SLs, FLs, heritage, and indigenous languages where concerns about the personal and cultural needs of students and their relationship to the TL are quite different. They are also of relevance in countries (e.g., Nepal and India) with high rates of societal multilingualism and complex patterns of individual multilingualism – societies in which instruction through the medium of tribal/indigenous NLs has been neglected but is being revisited to address low literacy and high attrition rates ([Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012](#); [Taylor, 2014](#)). The topic responds to the expanding need for empirical research on the effectiveness of various translingual teaching strategies that can guide pedagogical practices. The submissions explore language learning among students from a range of age groups who are learning dominant or minority languages in linguistically homogeneous and heterogeneous classrooms, and they employ different research methods. Yet the findings overlap to a large degree in showing that when teachers seek to capitalize on their students' full linguistic repertoires, there are material benefits.

Summary of student age groups and the linguistic composition of students and educators

Overall, more research on plurilingual practices exists on elementary-level (K–8) learners' SL/FL and ancestral or heritage language teaching/learning than on secondary-level students, though some research involves adults. For instance, three articles examine fifth graders: Sun analyzes a Chinese–English dual language program in Western

Canada; Babault and Markey discuss fifth-grade francophones in Belgium learning Dutch; and Vaudrin-Charette and Fleuret provide a retrospective examination of fifth-grade classes learning through the medium of an ancestral language or FSL. Orellana (book review) also covers children in K–5. Stille’s study describes older children in the elementary panel (i.e., Grades 7 and 8) from various language backgrounds learning English in Ontario. García and Kleyn’s (book review) volume explores a larger range of learners (i.e., from Grades 2 to 12). The two remaining articles examine immigrant and refugee newcomer adults learning FSL in Quebec (Dault & Collins), and community college students in New York City who are primarily linguistic minorities who struggle with academic English (Pujol-Ferran et al.), while Copland et al.’s (book review) collection focuses on educators – namely, Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Local English Teachers (LETs).

The classrooms described in the articles contrast in terms of the homogeneity of the students’ native/home language. Some classrooms contain students who share a NL (Babault & Markey; Garcia & Kleyn; Pujol-Ferran et al.; Vaudrin-Charette & Fleuret; Orellana); in others, some but not all students and educators share a NL (Babault & Markey; Pujol-Ferran et al.; Dault & Collins; Sun), especially in linguistically heterogeneous settings (Dault & Collins; Stille), but also in settings with newcomer teachers or LETs (Copland et al.).

Methods

There is some overlap in terms of methods, and we see a strong representation of qualitative approaches overall: Stille, Sun, Pujol-Ferran et al., and Garcia and Kleyn adopt a case-study approach in their analyses of primary and middle-school students: Orellana, Dault and Collins, and Vaudrin-Charette and Fleuret employ ethnographic and/or retrospective classroom observations as well as interviews with instructors in their analyses. Babault and Markey draw on a mixed-methods, experimental approach in a comparison of a dual language immersion classroom and a traditional classroom of francophones learning Dutch, and the individual submissions in Copland et al.’s edited volume involve a variety of approaches.

Findings

Where we see the most intersection across the studies and the book reviews is in the observations, findings, and implications for teacher education and practice. Although teachers rarely receive any instruction on how to engage students’ full linguistic repertoires (Dault & Collins), many appear to be highly receptive to shifting their attitudes

and beliefs about the importance of the NL (Dault & Collins; Garcia & Kleyn; Orellana; Pujol-Ferran et al.; Stille; Sun; Vaudrin-Charette & Fleuret).

Many teachers do make efforts to use students' NLs for lexical translations and phonetic comparisons, and to inject humour into the classroom (Dault & Collins; Pujol-Ferran et al.; Stille; Copland et al.). Consequently, some authors call for a complete paradigm shift in how teachers and educational policies frame language learners or "emergent bilinguals." Even though researchers and educators are beginning to embrace translanguaging methods, there is still a long way to go. In his review of Copland et al.'s collection, Phillipson notes the gap between the institutional commitment to multilingual and multicultural teaching approaches (e.g., on the part of the British Council) and actual practice. As he points out, this is particularly true in Asia where most of the newcomer NESTs are monolinguals with little understanding of their students' languages and cultures.

The finding that translanguaging/plurilingual pedagogies enable students to discover their linguistic strengths and utilize them to complete their work unifies the studies and books reviewed in the Special Issue. Among these, Babault and Markey's experimental work comparing francophone fifth-graders in French-Dutch immersion and non-immersion classes demonstrates empirically that the former had greater lexical variety and flexibility in their ability to define scientific terms in their NL (French) and wider variation in terms of their meta-discursive and discursive behaviour than the non-immersion control group. These results are certainly promising, but they also point to the need for additional empirical work. The next and last section of this introduction lays out several key directions in which future research efforts need to be directed.

New directions

As noted above, there have been significant paradigm shifts in recent times, resulting in some movement away from the prevailing monolingual ideology that, while roundly critiqued by many researchers (e.g., Bunce, Phillipson, Rapatahana & Tupas, 2016; Canagarajah, 2013; Cook & Singleton, 2014; Cummins, 2007, 2014; Phillipson, 1992), held great sway with SL/FL pedagogical material developers and practitioners. Elements of this monolingual ideology included instruction only through the medium of the TL; no place for students' NLs or for their full linguistic repertoires; no translation between NL, SL or other languages in their linguistic repertoires; keeping languages separate; and little acknowledgement of other cultural perspectives.

Each one of these tenets of the monolingual ideology could serve as inspiration for further empirical research. The effectiveness of using the NL as well as the TL in the classroom, acknowledging and building on students' full linguistic repertoires and cultural knowledge, and exploring methods in which both languages are brought into contact in intimate ways in the classroom could be explored in future research comparing monolingual versus translingual methods.

Much further research is also needed in the area of "(re)naming" not only languages (e.g., as linguistic repertoires) but also linguistic phenomena (code-switching or translanguaging?), and recognizing the role that power relations play in accepted orthodoxies. To illustrate, [García \(2016\)](#) highlights epistemological differences between the use of the term "translanguaging" (translingualism, etc.) and terms commonly used in contact linguistics (e.g., calques, borrowing, code-switching, and "interference"), stressing that individual educators may or may not recognize translanguaging as "legitimate" language, that is, language through which even emergent bilinguals can demonstrate content knowledge. Educator choice in the matter of accepting or challenging orthodoxies reflects the power dynamics at play in the language of schooling. It also highlights the value of renaming language practices to valorize students' linguistic practices, repertoires, and identities. In their article in this issue, Vaudrin-Charette and Fleuret also discuss (disabling) power dynamics and call for translingual practices such as plurilingual, multimodal pedagogy to counter postcolonial orthodoxies that stifle minority voice.

[Schwarzer \(2006\)](#) and [Otheguy et al. \(2015\)](#) stress that plurilinguals are "unified selves" who draw on the unique linguistic repertoires in their minds. While "naming" is also of interest to psycholinguists who see the mind as a "marvellous device" capable of controlling multiple languages (repertoires) linked to cognition ([Schwieter, 2016](#)) and try to view how the device works, [Cummins \(2000, in press\)](#) views interdependent cognitive/linguistic functions from the viewpoint of their psychoeducational affordances and, like [García \(2016\)](#), in terms of their psychological/social outcomes. In other words, they see TL learners as being able to draw on their linguistic repertoires to support and heighten their learning, investment, and identity negotiation (see [Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, & Sastri, 2005](#); [Yaman Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins, 2014](#)). [Schwarzer, Petró, and Luke \(2011, p. 207\)](#) view the benefits of translingual practices as so potentially powerful that they urge educators to "see language education as a practice of translingual activism."

Relatedly, the “social turn” in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and sociolinguistics has produced a body of research on the role of identity in language learning (Cutler, 2014; Kramsch, 2007; Norton, 1997, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Peirce, 1995), yet little research to date has explored how identity is involved in translanguaging or how it could be drawn into translanguing practices. A focus on identity could potentially show the translanguing approaches in terms of the social-psychological experience of individuals learning a new language.

While there has been some debate over which terms to use in the renaming process (Marshall & Moore, 2006; Taylor & Snodden, 2013), a useful new direction of research would be to transcend the subtle differences between terms used (plurilingual, translanguing, etc.) and to develop theory, research, and practice that support the fluidity of drawing on learners’ full linguistic repertoires to support their socio-academic and identity development in SL/FL classrooms.

A particularly fruitful direction for new research is in the area of using machine translation technologies in the SL/FL classroom, particularly when teachers are not proficient in the language(s) of their students (Case, 2015; Groves & Mundt, 2015; Wenz, 2014). As noted by Vogel and Ascenzi-Moreno (2016), teachers are using these tools with greater frequency, yet there is a gap in the scholarly literature about how such tools are being used in the context of translanguaging pedagogy. More work on machine translation as a translanguing pedagogical approach and its effectiveness in the classroom is sorely needed.

Lastly, we need more research on how best to provide professional development to enable educators to see learners’ full range of linguistic knowledge and practices as beneficial, to gain the pedagogical repertoires needed to incorporate translanguing practices into their everyday teaching, and to answer their critics and self-doubts. They may face resistance from colleagues and administrators who hold onto the monolingual principle; they may also worry that if they draw on some students’ NLs in linguistically heterogeneous classrooms, students whose NLs they do not know will be disadvantaged. Professional development will also enable educators to understand the usefulness of developing students’ metalinguistic awareness and gain procedural knowledge on how to pre-plan and implement translanguing pedagogies in linguistically homogeneous and heterogeneous instructional settings. It may also just lead to that important “first step” in teachers doubting monolingual orthodoxies, orchestrating translanguing practices, or becoming a translanguing activist (Cutler, 2012).

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Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of the following reviewers: Nathalie Auger, Laura Baecher, Clint Bruce, Julie Byrd Clark, Fiona Copland, Colette Despagne, Zohreh Eslami, Cecilia Espinosa, Nelson Flores, Hans-Jürgen Krumm, Patricia Lamarre, Steve Marshall, Enrica Piccardo, Mela Sarkar, David Schwarzer, and Kristen Snoddon. David Schwarzer deserves credit for pushing the editors to put this Special Issue together. We would also like to express our thanks to Syelle Graves for assistance with copy editing, and to Pascal Munyankesha for French language assistance.

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