



# TRANSLANGUAGING IN EDUCATION

A Transdisciplinary Perspective

## Abstract

Drawing on scholarship from Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), writing studies, and bilingual education, this resource offers a transdisciplinary perspective on translanguaging as a tool for teaching and learning.

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## Introduction

Drawing on scholarship from Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Writing Studies, and Bilingual Education, we offer a transdisciplinary perspective on translanguaging as a tool for teaching and learning. As teachers and scholars, our lived linguistic histories and realities, diverse disciplinary researched inquiries on translanguaging, and pedagogical practices are central to how we approach translanguaging in education through a transdisciplinary viewpoint. For this reason, we would like to begin by sharing a short overview of our linguistic history and disciplinary background.

Alyssa G. Cavazos is originally from Hacienda El Barranquito, a ranchito near Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico and immigrated to San Martin, California with her parents when she was eight years old. As a second language learner, like many children, she struggled learning a new language and did not always have teachers who believed in her writing potential. Her parents' support and encouragement from her fifth-grade teacher who once told her that "knowing Spanish is an asset" were foundational in her exploration of language diversity practices in writing instruction. As a college writing instructor, she enacts translanguaging teaching strategies to create purposeful writing spaces where students draw on their linguistically diverse abilities to write for different audiences and purposes. And, as a mother, she encourages her six-year-old daughter, Alyxia, to use her knowledge of English and Spanish to write, read, and create magical stories, such as "Exploring la puerta magica."

Suzanne Garcia-Mateus identifies as a second-generation immigrant from Mexico who grew up translanguaging in the borderlands of California and Texas. She taught in various elementary bilingual education models in Texas, Missouri, and Michigan. As a teacher educator, she encourages students to examine the ways in which state standards (mis)align with a translanguaging pedagogy and how multicultural children's books complement discussions about social justice issues. As a mother, Suzanne centers her love for translanguaging by raising her children to draw from their linguistic repertoire as they see fit.

Zhongfeng Tian identifies as a first-generation immigrant originally from China. He has worked as an ESL/EFL teacher with students of different age groups and cultural and linguistic backgrounds in China, Cambodia, and the U.S. His passion for translanguaging emerged from its close connection to his personal life as a multilingual speaker of Mandarin, English, and Cantonese. Studying this notion was a self-affirming and -empowerment process for him because "language-mixing" behavior is no longer associated with social stigma but creative and critical language use. Informed by this, he as a language educator and researcher strives to create translanguaging spaces in TESOL classrooms for all language learners in which their full language repertoires and funds of knowledge are seen as valuable resources to be leveraged in academic tasks.

As three scholars in three distinct fields of study, we each bring our respective expertise to this transdisciplinary conversation on translanguaging in education. Translanguaging practices in education can empower bilingual and multilingual students as they draw on their diverse, nuanced, and rhetorically adept language practices as tools for learning, meaning-making, writing, and communication across a variety of academic and community contexts. This brief is organized into four different sections. We

define translanguaging/translingual approaches broadly and explore tensions and misconceptions across the three fields. We also provide starting points on translanguaging approaches for teachers and offer implications for the field and professional development opportunities.

### Defining Translanguaging/Translingual Approaches

Informed by TESOL, Bilingual Education, and Writing Studies, we offer a brief overview of how each field defines translanguaging and/or translingual approaches in teaching and learning. For the purposes of this brief, we use translanguaging and translingual as synonyms.

Since the “multilingual turn” (May, 2014) in the field of language education, *translanguaging* (García, 2009) has emerged as a critical and liberating frame: translanguaging recognizes language learners as resourceful agents with a unitary linguistic repertoire which includes named languages (i.e., Mandarin, Spanish) and abilities, and poses a challenge to the monolingual orthodoxy and native-speakerism which dominates the TESOL field. Theoretically, translanguaging legitimizes and values all English varieties and their users and promotes teaching English as “a heterogeneous language with multiple grammars, vocabulary, accents, and pragmatic discourse conventions” (Marlina, 2014, p. 7). Pedagogically, it employs the inclusion of multilingual learners’ full linguistic repertoires and builds upon their diverse cultural and linguistic needs in English teaching and learning (García, 2014). Overall, a translanguaging lens represents a paradigm shift from the teaching of English language to employing emergent bilinguals’ fluid language practices in support of their English learning, thereby giving them more agency and transforming the role of English teachers and students (García, 2014). Additionally, a translanguaging lens further challenges the hegemony of English and teaches emergent bilinguals in more socially just and meaningful ways.

In the field of Writing Studies, the hegemony of the English language dominates scholarly conversations on language controversies and writing “correctness” through monolingual ideologies. The pursuit for linguistic justice in writing instruction has existed since the position statement on Students’ Rights to Their Own Languages was published in the 1974 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, the field’s flagship journal. Writing Studies has been riddled with tacit language policies that privilege English-only and monolingual writing ideologies in writing instruction that assume linguistic homogeneity and that see language difference as a problem to manage or correct (Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Matsuda, 2012). Translingual approaches challenge English-only and linguistic homogeneity as the norm in the teaching of writing and honor language difference in writing, particularly linguistically diverse writers’ ability to draw on and negotiate their language resources and choices for specific purposes, audiences, and contexts (Bou Ayash, 2020; Horner et al., 2011). Additionally, translingual approaches in writing instruction explore and question power dynamics and privilege within diverse languages and identities to engage in linguistic equity and challenge overt or tacit linguistic racism in writing instruction (Inoue, 2017). Ultimately, translingual approaches recognize that writers are a part of multiple communities of belonging where the language practices and expectations vary according to audience, purpose, and genres and these communities of belonging exist at the intersection of language and identity. Translingual approaches in writing studies advocate for students’ linguistic agency in their writing by leveraging their linguistically diverse abilities across contexts to grow and develop as rhetorically adept writers and

communicators who shift language expectations and choices with purpose and ease (Canagarajah 2013; Cavazos, 2015; Guerra, 2016).

Through a similar writers' or learners' linguistic agency approach, in the field of Bilingual Education, the act of *translanguaging* is defined as individuals drawing from their full linguistic repertoire, which can include named languages such as Spanish, English, and other minoritized languages to communicate and co-construct meaning. Language(s) are seen as *living organisms* that evolve and grow according to the interlocutors and context in which they are used. Furthermore, a *translanguaging pedagogy* is more than just using language in dynamic and flexible ways, it centers the experiences, interests, and knowledge of students from marginalized backgrounds. Doing so, encourages teachers to create and implement a transformative social justice curriculum that promotes the development of critical consciousness and critical listening for all students (Cervantes-Soon, et al, 2017). Critical consciousness is an awareness of the structural and social inequities, such as undocumented immigration and police brutality, which affect people of color on a daily basis. Part of developing consciousness about social and political inequalities involves critically listening. The act of *critical listening* to others experiences means securing safe and risking-taking spaces in the classroom where students of color have multiple opportunities to voice their experiences about social injustices, while students from the dominant group or privileged backgrounds *critically listen* (Heiman & Yanes, 2018). When *all* students reach a level of understanding, it is then that they are able to *take action* to work towards dismantling structural racism.

Collectively, TESOL, Writing Studies, and Bilingual Education approach teaching and learning practices through linguistically inclusive perspectives that not only validate linguistically diverse students' full language repertoire but also create opportunities to raise critical consciousness. As García and Kleifgen (2018) argue, "a translanguaging pedagogy is not simply a series of strategies and scaffolds, but also a philosophy of language and education that is centered on a bilingual minoritized community" (p. 80). Most importantly, a translanguaging pedagogy empowers all students' abilities to challenge monolingual ideologies as they draw on their full linguistic repertoire with purpose and intention across a variety of contexts.

### Tensions Within and Across Our Fields

From a transdisciplinary perspective, one of the central tensions within and across our fields related to *translanguaging* includes the concept of language separation versus translanguaging across the curriculum (Palmer, Martinez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014). Traditionally, in language learning programs the language of instruction is determined by the content area. For example, in some dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs math is taught in English and language arts in a student's dominant or preferred language. TESOL programs emphasize the sole use of English with the rationale that using minoritized languages during classroom instruction can be a hindrance if the goal is for students to acquire the target language. In the field of writing and composition, the language of power, English, tends to dominate how students are expected to express themselves in and through writing. Below, we describe the tension within our individual fields and offer a counter view from a translanguaging perspective.

## English-only or using L1 as a resource?

Traditionally, the field of TESOL has been dominated by English-only approaches (such as the Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching), which ideologically align with “a linguistic paradigm that stresses maximizing input and output in second-language learning and minimizing the use of the native language while teaching the target language” (de Jong, 2016, p. 11). However, the privileging of these approaches has rendered the use of home languages as harmful to L2 development and reinforced a monolingual, fragmented view of bilingualism as “two solitudes” (Cummins, 2007) and a monoglossic ideology (del Valle, 2000). It is incongruent with the current understanding of how emergent bilingual students actually practice or perform their language practices.

Embracing a holistic, dynamic perspective of bilingualism (Grosjean, 2010) and an asset-based view which sees “language-as-resource” (Ruíz, 1984), translanguaging affords counter-narratives to the conventional approaches to English language education. It places students’ emergent bilingualism at the center and strategically creates heterogeneous educational spaces for all learners to draw upon their entire cultural and linguistic repertoires as resources in meaning making and performing academic tasks (García, 2009; García & Li, 2014).

## How can challenging writing misconceptions create spaces for translanguaging?

Some of the tensions in Writing Studies related to translanguaging or translingual writing are often associated with a series of misconceptions:

- “good” writing is grammatically correct and standard
- all writing contexts require or necessitate English-only communicative means
- audiences are always English-only speaking
- the “real world” requires professional writing that is monolingual and English-only.

These misconceptions about writing are discriminatory, discouraging, and detrimental to the communicative success of all students. Most importantly, these misconceptions reiterate monolingual ideologies responsible for creating systemic inequities in the education system. In other words, we continue to feed a cycle of oppression that tells our students, parents, and administrators that success is English-only and that their identities, languages, and cultural diversity is a hindrance to success. Instead, we should equip our students with the tools, language, and rhetorically informed linguistic choices they can make for their own purposes and end-goals. Through these linguistic tools, they can challenge and break systemic inequities in education.

## Who are we serving in bilingual school contexts? Translanguaging or Language Separation?

In the field of bilingual education, the argument to secure a space in the classroom to ensure “input or output” of a target language makes sense if all of the students are *not* bi/multilingual and the minoritized language is *not* a part of their cultural background. Even so, emerging research indicates that translanguaging benefits *all* students despite a heritage connection to the language (Tian, Aghai, Sayer, &

Schissel, 2020). Language separation in bilingual schools does not reflect the way a heritage language is used in culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the U.S and around the world. It has been documented in scholarly literature that children from minoritized backgrounds draw from their linguistic repertoire to co-construct meaning with others in both the classroom and with their community (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Martínez, 2010; Martínez-Roldan & Sayer, 2012; Nuñez, 2019; Zentella, 1997). Bilingual education was intended to meet the linguistic, social, and cultural interests and needs of the children the programs were initially meant to serve. In other words, a translanguaging pedagogy and perspective strongly aligns with the urgency to implement a curriculum that allows children to translanguage along with deconstructing social inequities such as undocumented immigration, police brutality, gender expectations and more (García & Li, 2014). Translanguaging is an emancipatory approach to language learning that is central to honoring the language practices, families, and multicultural identities of *all* students.

### Shifting Towards a More Fluid Understanding of Language in the Classroom

Language purists argue that in order to learn a named language well, students must use a standardized and academic variety of language in school. The reality is that students *will* and *do* draw from their linguistic repertoire to communicate in the classroom even during English sanctioned instruction. Proponents of translanguaging argue that students will develop named languages according to the context in which they develop, but *must* include the language practices of students from marginalized communities. In other words, all varieties of a named language should be validated in and through the development of school sanctioned language practices. This must also include raising awareness about the silencing of Indigenous languages across the U.S. and internationally. A translanguaging pedagogy allows teachers to leverage students' multilingualism for learning in ways that are both equitable and socially just. It is time we honor students' cultural and linguistic identities and create spaces that foster what students do with language socially and in the classroom.

### Starting Points: Translanguaging Approaches for Teachers

In this section, we provide teachers and educators with starting points to consider when implementing translanguaging approaches in different classroom contexts—TESOL, writing studies, and bilingual education.

#### TESOL

In the field of TESOL, many extant studies have demonstrated the potential of utilizing translanguaging approaches in different specific ways to contribute to English teaching and learning (see more in Tian et al., 2021). For example, in an English reading class, teachers can group students based on their home languages but heterogeneously by English language ability, which allows students to use their full linguistic repertoire to share opinions and co-construct understandings of English texts in group discussions. Students in this case could serve as linguistic resources to one another, helping to build off their ideas and language (García & Li, 2014). Moreover, teachers can also intentionally integrate culturally relevant texts or multilingual texts incorporating translanguaging as a literary device in their curriculum to create an inclusive class environment. This strategy could potentially facilitate students' active



participation and comprehension while affirming their positive identity and promoting socioemotional development (García & Kleyn, 2016). Additionally, teachers in English writing classes can open up space during drafting phase without mandating students' linguistic choices, which may create more opportunities not only for students to express their full thoughts, but also for teachers themselves to gauge and support students' language use and needs more specifically (Fu, Hadjioannou, & Zhou, 2019). These ways of teaching are good starting points for TESOL educators to experiment with translanguaging approaches, regarding L1 as a resource instead of a problem.

## Writing/Composition

Writing instruction, through a rhetorically situated approach, provides writing instructors with many opportunities to not only draw on writers' linguistically diverse resources but also design writing assignments that center a multilingual audience rather than an English-only speaking audience. Writing assignments traditionally privilege monolingual, English-only writing instruction, particularly within the context of standardized tests. However, the reality is that multilingual writers engage writing practices for different audiences and purposes and through linguistically diverse means—our students are already translanguaging in rhetorically sophisticated ways. We must adapt our writing assignments to align with, foster, and enhance the linguistic richness and awareness of the students in our classrooms.

Translanguaging or translingual writing offers many opportunities for writing instructors to teach writing through a rhetorically situated approach. First, we can ask our students to self-reflect and examine the varied ways they use different languages and variations for communicative purposes, in different contexts and the impact that these language choices have on their intended audience and themselves. Second, we can ask our students to conduct linguistic ethnographies where they observe, record, and analyze language practices and how these language choices shift and change in a specific community or day-to-day settings. Third, we can design assignments that are authentic and address real issues or topics of interest in our schools and communities. And finally, we can invite our students to rhetorically analyze the linguistic expectations in a variety of settings—academic and community-based—where they can take note of what languages are expected and why, who is the intended audience, what is the purpose, and what are the language resources and choices available, who is left out, what are the power dynamics at play in how we choose to use language, and what might be the opportunities and/or consequences if we choose to resist, question, and explore language choices in ways that may not align with the perceived expectations of the context.

We can design writing assignments that ask our students to write for authentic audiences and for specific purposes by drawing on their full linguistic repertoire. For example, if the city where they live is facing a recycling issue they wish to address, there are many different stakeholders they need to reach who are impacted by the issue in different ways, such as city council members, politicians, fellow community members, school administrators, and even their parents. The genres and language choices we choose to use to reach different audiences are intentional and varied. So, we can ask our students to think about their language and genre choices in reaching a variety of audiences, for different purposes in addressing a single issue.

## Bilingual Education

In the field of bilingual education, by critically examining the concept of translanguaging alongside students, teachers are not only fostering metalinguistic awareness (Palmer, Martinez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014), they are positioning students as language architects (Flores, 2019) who draw from their full linguistic repertoire to co-construct meaning. For example, teachers can use multicultural and multilingual children's literature to honor and validate the diverse language practices young bilingual students use to deconstruct the social inequities marginalized communities experience in their day-to-day lives (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). Multicultural children's literature facilitates discussion about social justice issues such as undocumented immigration (García-Mateus, 2020) and gender inequities (Caldas, 2018). One way teachers can do this is by asking students to role-play from the perspective of a character in the book. By speaking from the perspective of a character, teachers can create safe and risk-taking spaces for young students to deconstruct stereotypes. Young children learn to engage in conversations about social inequities and empathize with the experiences of their classmates. In and through classroom conversations and the use of multilingual and multicultural children's literature, children will develop critical awareness about how to also be an ally (Caldas, 2018; García-Mateus, 2020).

School communities can center the experiences of minoritized communities in the larger bilingual school context in the U.S. by *historicizing* the language practices of communities of color. For many of us, including the authors of this brief, translanguaging is a way of being and is part of our past, present, and future. In other words, if the minoritized language is not a heritage language for you or your child(ren), then the concept of being a "guest" of the community in which they are learning a minoritized language, such as Spanish or Mandarin, should also be considered as part of *historicizing* why becoming bilingual is important in different communities. Doing so, will encourage teachers, students, parents, and administrators to grapple with different perspectives including why students from the dominant group get praised for speaking a minoritized language, while students from marginalized communities are expected to acquire and speak (standardized varieties of) English (Flores, 2016).

In summary, translanguaging is not a one-size-fits-all approach and it may take different shapes in various contexts. What is at its core is that teachers strategically and purposefully create heteroglossic spaces that leverage students' bi/multilingualism and bi/multilingual ways of knowing to expand students' linguistic repertoire to include new "academic" features while cultivating their positive bilingual identities and critical consciousness (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). We hope the strategies presented above provide starting ideas for educators to experiment with translanguaging approaches in their classrooms to ensure that all students are educated lovingly, deeply, and justly. For more resources, we recommend the website (<https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/>) developed by the CUNY-NYSIEB (CUNY-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals) team, where a wealth of materials, tools, and a video series can be found to support emergent bilingual learners, such as [Translanguaging Resources](#), [Teaching Bilinguals \(Even if You're Not One\): A CUNY-NYSIEB Webseries](#), and [Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators](#).

## Conclusion and Implications for the Field

In this brief we take a transdisciplinary perspective (TESOL, writing/composition, and bilingual education) to examine the definitions of translanguaging, the tensions within and across our three fields, and provide starting points to help teachers and practitioners with translanguaging implementation in different classroom contexts. We see translanguaging as offering pockets of hope to transform our fields toward embracing multilingualism and multiculturalism and ultimately to advance social justice in schools and society. To further promote translanguaging, we believe that sustained professional development opportunities on translanguaging teaching practices are needed so that educators will have ample opportunities to reflect on and self-assess language ideologies and identify specific projects or assignments they can revise through a linguistically inclusive perspective.

We present one framework (see Table 1) that can be used to facilitate a series of professional development workshops on translanguaging—the Translingual-Community Engaged Pedagogies framework (TCEP; Cavazos & Musanti, 2021). The TCEP framework consists of six principles used to facilitate conversations around translanguaging *stance*, *design*, and *shifts* (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). Educators can draw on the six principles through a self-reflective lens as they explore their own translanguaging stance or language ideologies. For instance, educators can ask themselves: to what extent is my instruction centered on an openness to language difference as dynamic, evolving, and changing? Or how do I foster activities that elicit awareness of language use and learning processes? These self-reflective questions can inspire educators to identify areas for growth, reflection, and exploration throughout the professional development experience, particularly as represented within their own disciplinary and school context. Once we reflect on these TCEP principles, reflect on activities for growth, and commit to pedagogical changes that will inspire an openness to language difference for learning, we can then explore the critical perspective of translanguaging. The critical perspective centers on deconstructing the structural and systemic inequities and developing a critical consciousness so that we can determine what actions we can take to create a more equitable space for teaching and learning with our students. Through these TCEP principles, we can challenge and break systemic inequities in education alongside our students.

Table 1. Translingual-Community Engaged Pedagogies Framework

Openness to language difference in learning	Language as a right and a resource	Metacognitive and metalinguistic Awareness	Learner-centered approach	Collaborative and community Centered Instruction	Fair and engaged assessment Practices
Instruction centered on an openness to seeing language difference in learning as dynamic, evolving, and changing (García, 2017)	Acknowledge students' and communities' language rights and linguistic repertoires as language resources (Ruíz, 1984).	Foster activities that elicit awareness of language use and learning processes (Matsuda, 2012).	Learner-centered pedagogies focused on students' linguistic and learning agency (Shapiro et al., 2016)	Pedagogies centered on reciprocal learning across linguistic differences (Canagarajah, 2013).	Fair assessment practices that involve students in the evaluation process by negotiating language choices and meaning (Inoue, 2017)

(Cavazos & Musanti, 2021)

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