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CALL FOR PAPERS
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL “PALIMPSEST”

МЕТОДИКА
НА НАСТАВАТА



TEACHING
METHODOLOGY

Rea Lujic

TRANSLANGUAGING OR TRANSGRESSING LANGUAGE BORDERS TO COMMUNICATE AND TO LEARN IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Abstract: This paper provides an insight into multilingual international school students' translanguaging practices and their attitudes towards translanguaging and teacher directed translanguaging. In the introduction two main concepts are presented: translanguaging and teacher directed translanguaging (TDT). By translanguaging we mean both a discursive norm in multilingual communities in which multilinguals engage by using their holistic linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively and by TDT all planned and structured teaching activities which recognize, accept and encourage students' entire communicative repertoire. The second part of the paper present the research that has been carried out among 78 multilingual students in two international schools in Croatia. Our results show that even though both schools' curricula is mediated through only one language – English, students' communicative practices cannot be completely framed by imposed policy. As our results also indicate that the students show willingness to accept TDT, it seems that teachers in international schools should consider making use of TDT in order to take advantage of students' repertoires.

Keywords: *international school, multilingualism, multilingual education, translanguaging.*

Introduction

Translanguaging, a notion that has been (re)introduced¹ in the field of multilingualism by García (2009), has become increasingly popular in the past few years. From the sociolinguistic viewpoint, this notion refers broadly to how multilingual students communicate and make meaning by engaging in the myriad multimodal ways of using their holistic linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively. Due to the opacity of the term, it is sometimes understood as just another label for code-switching. However, as García and Wei point out, translanguaging “refers not simply to shift or shuttle between two languages, but to use the speakers' construction and the use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language, but that make up the speakers' complete language repertoire” (2014, p. 22). Another language issue is that a term translanguaging refers not only to the

¹ The term originates from the Welsh word *trawsieithu* which has been introduced in Welsh bilingual education in mid 80s by Cen Williams and then replaced by *translanguaging* in mid 90s (see Lewis, Bryn & Baker, 2012).

way of languaging², but to the way of learning and teaching too. Translanguaging as a pedagogical concept involves all planned and structured teaching activities which recognize, accept and encourage students' entire communicative repertoire. In its original use (see Williams, 1996) it referred to a pedagogical practice in Wales where students were asked to alternate between English and Welsh for the purposes of reception and production (Baker, 2001). To distinguish the pedagogical concept from the sociolinguistic one, García and Wei (2014) have coined the term 'official translanguaging' and Lewis, Bryn and Baker (2012) 'teacher-directed translanguaging' (TDT). The importance of TDT is based on the assumption that refusing to acknowledge the language resources of students and their families in linguistically and culturally diverse school populations limits the possibilities for their educational growth (Hornberger & Link, 2012). According to Lewis et al. (2012) TDT may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter, it may help the development of the weaker language, it may facilitate homeschool links and cooperation, and it may help the integration of speakers with different levels of language proficiency. However, these are only assumptions yet to be verified. Results of the research verifying usefulness of TDT show improvements in terms of motivation and classroom atmosphere (Corcoll-Lopez, 2013), "facilitated access to existing semantic representations for items acquired in the translanguaging learning context, as opposed to the monolingual one"³ (Beres, 2014) and a positive effect on the development of students' metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness (Velasco & García, 2014). However, despite empirically proven validity of TDT, students and teachers show signs of moral disapproval and guilt of "mixing" languages (Creese & Blackledge, 2008) what make these practices "rarely pedagogically underpinned" (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 105).

The study

This research study sets out to examine if students' in two international schools in Croatia are translanguaging and what their attitudes towards translanguaging and TDT are.

We tried to answer the following research questions:

1. How, with whom, and why are international students translanguaging?
2. What are their attitudes towards TDT?

Context of the research and participants

The research has been carried out in two international schools in Croatia; elementary and grammar school both schools making part of the International Baccalaureate Organization®, a foundation introduced in 1968 with the original

² The term *languaging* is frequently used by the authors theorizing language from the heteroglossic viewpoint because it implies that a language is a process and not a bounded object. The authors do not agree on one definition. For instance, Jørgensen defines languaging as using "whatever linguistic features are at their disposal with the intention of achieving their communicative aims" (2008, p.169), and Swain and Lapkin as "the activity of mediating cognitively complex ideas using language" (2011, p. 105).

³ <http://www.eposters.net/poster/examining-the-pillars-of-translanguaging-the-importance-of-language-alternation-and-comprehension> (retrieved January 18 2017) .

purpose of facilitating international mobility of students. While the elementary International School offers Middle Years Program for upper primary grades, grade 5 to grade 8, the grammar school offers Middle Years Program for grades 9 and 10 and the Diploma Program for grades 11 and 12. The uniqueness of both schools is visible in the students' great diversity: high and constant fluctuation of students coming from all over the world and a range of life stories and language biographies. This uniqueness is also reflected in each schools' freedom to create its language policy. As it is stated in elementary schools' language policy, English is the language of instruction, but all the students are also required to attend the Croatian Language and Literature classes either as Croatian Language and Literature for natives or Croatian Language Acquisition classes, for non-natives. Students are also obliged to choose one of the offered language courses: German, French, Italian and Chinese. The school supports mother tongue learning through offering space, resources and schedule flexibility for families and foreign embassies willing to bring in extra mother tongue tutors for the students and by organizing various events that support mother tongue learning and intercultural understanding. Although the elementary school does not always provide lessons in the students' mother tongue due to the students' linguistic diversity, the awareness of the importance of mother tongue maintenance is clearly stated in their school policy⁴ and multilingualism in the school is nurtured by adding new languages into the students' language repertoire. On the other hand, grammar school does not offer public insight into their language policy. According to the information collected through our personal contacts, apart from English, which is the language of instruction, all the students are obliged to attend Croatian classes, and to choose one language class, either German or French. From the García's (2009) viewpoint, both schools correspond to the additive type of bilingual education, where all students who are not native English speakers will learn two more languages (i.e. English and one more foreign language) according to the monolingual norms.

There were 78 participants in this study attending the two schools. The sample consisted of 27 boys and 51 girls. Thirty-two percent were elementary school students aged between 10 and 14 and 68% grammar school students aged between 15 and 18. Regarding their experience of living abroad, 37.2% of the students had experienced living abroad, while the other 62.8% were born and had lived only in Croatia. They were all multilingual: 50% used three languages, 33.3% four languages, while 16.7% reported speaking five languages. These 62.8% of the students born and living in Croatia are consecutive additive bilinguals having Croatian as their mother tongue, English as their second language and one or more foreign language as their third language. The rest of the students' population (37.2%) are so called global nomads and 'dynamic bilinguals' which means their bilingualism is developing not in a linear but in a dynamic way (García, 2009).

⁴ http://www.os-mgubec.hr/documents_db/MG%20LANGUAGE%20POLICY.pdf (Accessed on 24th May 2016).

Instruments and procedure

For data collection purposes, we used a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire elicited students' demographic and linguistic data. In the second part of the questionnaire the participants were asked to state whether they are translanguaging or not, in what particular way, who they are translanguaging with and why. The possible answers were offered and the students had to tick yes or no in most cases. They were asked why they are translanguaging with the opportunity to elaborate on their answer. To see their attitudes towards TDT they were given six statements in which they could opt for yes, no or undecided. The statements were compiled based on the previous findings on potential benefits of TDT. Finally, they were asked whether they liked this pedagogical approach and they had the opportunity to elaborate on their answer. Taking into consideration their language biographies, the questionnaires were given to all the participants, either in English or Croatian. The questionnaires were piloted on a group of participants representative of the sample to make sure that possible mistakes, or ambiguities are avoided. Students have filled in their questionnaires in the course of the first semester in 2015.

The data analysis presented here has been done using JASP – open-source program for statistical analysis. The qualitative data was categorized by identifying and grouping similar answers under the same categories.

Results and discussion

Firstly, the descriptive statistics was carried out in order to obtain information on the participants' languaging practices and to answer the first research question. Since translanguaging assumes different ways of languaging, we were interested in three types of translanguaging: mixing languages and language varieties, mixing words and gestures, and creating hybrid words. In order to explain translanguaging to our participants, a simple definition of the concept, *specific language behavior typical for bilinguals*, followed by several examples has been provided in the questionnaire. Some of the examples were:

- *What do we have for lunch today? Some varivo?*⁵
- *It is sunny outside! Možemo li ići vani?*⁶ *Teacher please...*
- *I am grander*⁷ *than you are!*

Our results show that, almost all the students, 98.7%, are translanguaging. These results confirm García's and Wei's main thesis that translanguaging is a "discursive norm in bilingual families and communities" (2014, p.23). These results also demonstrate that, in international schools, students' linguistic practices encompass boundaries of the official one-language policy. Students mix languages and language varieties – 91%, mix words and gestures – 82.1%, and create new hybrid words – 80.8%. Almost all of them are translanguaging with their friends (96.2%) and a big majority reported to be translanguaging with their family

⁵ Croatian word for a *stew*.

⁶ In Croatian it stands for: *Can we go outside?*

⁷ A hybrid word – *grand* in French stands for *big* and a suffix *-er* in English is used to make a comparative form.

members (79.2%). However, a smaller percentage, but still a majority, (61.5%), communicate this way with their teachers. According to t-test results, as it can be seen in Table 1, girls are more likely than boys to translanguage with teachers ($M=1.593$, $p=.006$). This could be due to the gender paradox according to which women conform more closely than men to sociolinguistic norms that are overtly prescribed, but conform less than men when they are not (see Labov, 2001). T-test results also showed the existence of significant differences between elementary and grammar school students: elementary school students are translanguageing more with their teachers than the grammar school students ($M=1.160$, $p=.005$). This could be the case for several reasons, one of them being the possible differences in personal attitudes towards translanguageing among elementary and grammar school teachers. The way teachers feel about translanguageing certainly influences the way they interact with their students. In other words, teachers who consider translanguageing as a negative language practice will be more likely to avoid it, or even forbid it. As one student reported: “I generally only translanguage with people I am comfortable with, who often translanguage themselves”. Another possible reason is the elementary school students’ English proficiency – if they are not fluent, the teacher might be more likely to allow them to translanguage.

Table 1 - Differences in translanguageing among students

Item	Students	N	M	SD	t	p
I am translanguageing with teachers.	Male	27	1.593	0.501	2.853	.006**
	Female	51	1.275	0.451		
	Elementary school	25	1.160	0.374	-2.915	.005**
	Grammar school	53	1.491	0.505		
	Lived abroad	19	1.556	0.511	-1.868	.072*
	Not lived abroad	49	1.875	0.363		

* indicates the result is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

** indicates the result is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

As it can be seen in Table 1 a statistically significant difference was also found among students with experience of living abroad in comparison to students who have never lived abroad ($M=1.875$, $p=.072$). These results might be related to the fact that the students who have never lived abroad are consecutive additive bilinguals speaking their mother tongue at home. On the other hand, students who did live abroad are very often simultaneous bilinguals who grew up in a bilingual family. Although these results seem interesting, as the sample size is not quite large enough to be a representative one, especially when broken into subsamples, the results may not accurately reflect the views of the general population.

A qualitative analysis of their comments allowed us to allocate the comments into two categories: translanguaging as the way the multilinguals are languaging, and translanguaging as a communicational strategy.

This is how the students conceptualizing translanguaging as the way multilinguals are languaging commented on their translanguaging practices:

- 'it comes naturally'
- 'it feels *right*'
- 'I do it unconsciously'
- 'I rarely do it on purpose'
- 'I just end up speaking that way'
- 'I grew up with 4 languages, so it's natural for me'

Again, these comments confirm the idea that, for bilinguals, translanguaging comes naturally (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014).

A great majority of our participants see translanguaging as a communicational strategy which allows them to express themselves better and/or easier. Some of the students' comments imply that translanguaging isn't but a tool helping them to overcome language barriers in their second language:

- 'it's necessary when you cannot remember the word'
- 'I cannot remember a word on one language so I use a different language'
- 'for filling gaps'
- 'sometimes I don't know some expression in Croatian'

From that viewpoint translanguaging is only a phase in language learning through which students are passing on their way to the native-likeness and translanguaging is another name for code-switching.

For others, translanguaging is also a communicational tool, not in a sense of 'filling gaps' but more in a sense of having the entire linguistic repertoire at their disposal in order to achieve their communication aims as best they can.

- 'it allows to express ideas more accurately'
- 'I use the word that come to my mind fastest, regardless of the language'
- 'it is sometimes easier to explain something using multiple languages'

Some students have emphasized the influence of the context and their interlocutors on their decision to translanguaging:

- 'I speak three languages with people who speak different languages'
- 'I am translanguaging because I live in an international environment'
- 'As a bilingual, if in a context where others (good friends or family) know both Italian and English, I sometimes find more effective ways to express myself using both languages.'

Obviously, for them translanguaging is a way of communicating with other multilinguals. In this sense translanguaging could be an indicator of students' symbolic competence which refers to "the ability to position oneself as multilingual subject" (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). In other words, these students understand that translanguaging is not always socially acceptable.

The rest of the comments imply that translanguaging is a way of playing with languages that one has at their disposal:

- 'it is fun'
- 'it sounds better'

- 'it's trend'

To be presented next is answer to the second research question: What are students' attitudes towards TDT? In order to clarify the concept, the following examples have been given in the questionnaire:

- *teacher asks you to read a text in one language and to discuss it in another language*

- *teacher encourages you to speak in your mother tongue if you cannot express yourself in English*

Overall students' attitudes towards this pedagogical tool are positive – 51.3% of the students find this approach positive, 15.4% negative, while 33.3% remain indecisive. However, despite the students' general positive attitudes it seems they are not so certain whether they would like it or not to be regularly exposed to this teaching approach – while 44.9% claimed yes and 12.8% no, 42.3% remained indecisive. Again, a t-test was carried out to investigate the relationship among different subgroups of students (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Differences in attitudes towards TDT among students

Item	Students	N	M	SD	t	p
My general attitudes towards TDT	Elementary school	25	1.480	0.872	-2.340	.022*
	Grammar school	53	1.981	0.888		
I would like if the teachers would regularly use TDT	Elementary school	25	1.680	0.945	-1.934	.057*
	Grammar school	53	2.113	0.913		

* indicates the result is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

** indicates the result is statistically significant at the 0.01 level

According to the results, elementary school students have more positive attitudes towards TDT (M=1.480, p=.022*) and they are accordingly more interested in TDT (M=1.680, p=.057*) than grammar school students. These findings are in agreement with the results cited above, according to which younger students are more likely to be translanguaging. Among students' comments there were 34 positive ones, all of them explaining possible benefits of TDT, especially in terms of improving classroom atmosphere – 'it would make us students more relaxed and confident and we could express our ideas more easily'. Others often report on usefulness of TDT for learning process – 'In my school there is a lot of multilingual people and translanguaging helps them understand and learn'. Some of them commented that TDT would be a good teaching approach but only in language classes. Furthermore, one student commented that teachers would appear friendlier if they would use TDT which indicates that translanguaging is not perceived as schools' official discourse. There was a total of 16 comments explaining the indecisive point of view. Some students expressed the need for some science

evidence proving the benefits of TDT. Others pointed to both, negative and positive aspects of TDT – ‘I think at times it can be helpful and then at times not’. Some indecisive students have highlighted possible practical problems – ‘how could teachers understand Chinese or Persian?’ In total, there were 14 negative comments. These comments can be divided into three categories – TDT would create confusion, TDT would hinder progress in either language and TDT shouldn’t be allowed because English is an official schools’ language. There was one nicely elaborated comment, which presents one of the real challenges of TDT in multilingual contexts: “Since this is an international school, not all of the kids’ mother tongue language is the same, so if we were to talk in my mother tongue my friends would not understand it, so I think it would be the best for all of us to speak in English”.

To what extent students agree with the questionnaire statements related to the possible benefits of TDT is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 – TDT benefits – students’ perspective

Item	Yes	No	Indecisive
TDT could allow you to better express yourself.	73.1%	9%	17%
TDT could support your multilingual identity.	73.1%	6.4%	20.5%
TDT could help you understand new topics easier.	71.8%	14.1%	14.1%
TDT could allow you improve your skills in all the languages you speak.	61.5%	12.8%	25.6%
TDT could help you memorize new topics.	52.6%	25.6%	21.8%
TDT could encourage to invest more in classroom activities.	28.2%	35.9%	35.9%

As it can be seen, the students believe that TDT could help them to express themselves better (73.1%), support their multilingual identity (73.1%), help them understand new topics (71.8%), allow them to improve their language skills in all the languages they speak (61.5%) and help them memorize new topics (52.6%). On the other hand, while the increase in motivation, the reduction of anxiety and the overall better classroom atmosphere were outlined as benefits in Corcoll-Lopez (2013), our students were not convinced that TDT would encourage them to invest more in classroom activities (28.2%).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that monolingual bias may have shaped curricula and school language policy in these schools, our results show that communicative practices and classroom settings cannot be completely framed by imposed policy: multilinguals in these two international schools are naturally and unconsciously transgressing

language structures in order to communicate and learn. Our results also show that the students show willingness to accept teacher directed translanguaging. However, as we strongly believe that for introduction of each pedagogic innovation a consensus among all the concerned participants should be reached, a next step would be to apprehend teachers' and parents' attitudes towards translanguaging and TDT. As TDT has just recently started to attract researchers, further studies in different contexts should be conducted to see how students react to TDT, to check on possible impacts of TDT in different school subjects and to see how this teaching approach challenges teachers. It is equally important to identify TDT teaching strategies which could help teachers in international schools to take advantage of students' mother tongues in linguistically highly diverse classrooms. Since multilingual schools are so varied, teacher action research would be especially valued in this field of research. It is also important to make this scientific evidence visible within a wider public scope – especially among those who work in multilingual settings. Leaving behind traditional concepts and boundaries, as well as implementing innovative didactic approaches, presents a major challenge for teachers. That means we need to continue educating all teachers, especially language teachers, to be experts in multilingual education of the 21st century.

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