

A Review of Translanguaging as a New Way of Redefining Bi/Multilingualism in South African Classrooms

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Article history: received July 20, 2023; revised July 29, 2023; accepted September 30, 2023

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Abstract. South Africa is a multilingual and multicultural country, and the Language in Education Policy (1997) permits any of the 12 official languages to be used as the language of teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to examine secondary data about the use of translanguaging in South African multilingual classrooms for a better understanding of course content. Translanguaging is simply a pedagogical term used to describe the natural ways bilingual/multilingual individuals use their languages in their everyday lives. This paper is discussed qualitatively using a systematic literature review examining several studies that are relevant to the topic. Both international and national articles and books relating to the topic were identified and analysed. The result from this review shows that translanguaging goes beyond theory to critical pedagogical practice. Also, it shows that the language in education policy (additive bilingualism) has not been able to cater for multilingualism in South African classrooms. Therefore, there is a need to employ translanguaging strategy in the classroom to center the marginalised languages in South African classroom space. The implication of this review is that it offers a blueprint for teachers, education actors, and policymakers to re-imagine South Africa's bi/multilingualism classrooms through the lens of translanguaging.

Keywords: South Africa; translanguaging; bi/multilingualism; systematic literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing consensus among multilingual buffs about the need for teachers to engage language diversity in translingual and equitable manner. Therefore, with South African classrooms consisting of black, white, and immigrant learners with different linguistic repertoires, teachers need to see this super-diversity in the classroom as a resource. This will enable them to build on this multilingualism through translanguaging.

Though multilingualism is old, its high visibility in recent times is because of globalisation or the migration of various populations. The discrepancy between multilingualism in the past and the recent global phenomenon was summed up by Aromin & Singleton, (2008) when they explained that multilingualism in the past was limited to geographically close languages, or specific border areas or trade routes. While in recent times, it is a more global phenomenon spread over different parts of the world. Translanguaging has become the dominant discourse in the enterprise of multilingualism over the years. Although there has been the study of multilingualism in education, there is an emerging paradigm that takes into consideration a new vision of languages, the speaker, and the repertoire that the speaker possesses. This has made translanguaging a key concept in the study of multilingualism in the field of education (Cenoz, 2017). This emerging paradigm is because of the "multilingual turn". Yafela & Motlhaka (2021) explained this turn as a new approach to multilingualism which began to recognize the synchronic use of more than one language for content teaching and learning, which led to a paradigm shift from the language as a problem to the language as a resource orientation.

In a language as a problem orientation, there is a monolingual-focused education that pushes for the pedagogy of language separation, in which other languages are seen as causing interference with learning (Cenoz, 2017). This means that during teaching and learning other languages are isolated to maximize exposure to the target language and avoid any form of interference with the target language. Also, with the language as a problem orientation, Donley (2022) asserts that most systems promote English hegemony which sees multilingual practices as undesirable and inappropriate. Thus, these notions try to devalue the creative practice of language and cultural diversity.

In support of this argument for multilingualism as a tool for economic and social progress, Schwarzył & Vetter (2019) posit that in an interconnected and transnational world, it is multilingualism rather than monolingualism that becomes a tool for economic development, access, and social cohesion. Hence, languages should be seen as

socially constructed, that can foster inclusivity, and build social and economic development, but not something that can pollute each other. Thus, when the language as a resource orientation is applied in education practice, acknowledging multilingualism becomes a translanguaging practice in teaching and learning.

The concept of translanguaging was first used in the context of bilingual education in Wales, it was known as bilingual teaching and learning that assumes alternating the language used for input and output in a systematic way (Cenoz, 2017). Changing the language output and input allows students to critically reflect on their idea in the language they are convenient with at their disposal. This is because they get input in one language and offer output in another language (Yafela & Motlhaka, 2021, p.2). This concept developed by Cem William through research in bilingual education, entails the design and use of two languages concurrently (Donley, 2022). Therefore, the idea was later developed by Garcia (2009) who critiqued the ways linguistic diversity was approached in the US. She argued that monolingual assumptions are spread across schools that have advantaged white students that use English to the detriment of black and colour multilingual learners.

Various terms like flexible bilingualism, trans-lingual practices, Polylingualism, Metro-lingualism, code-switching, code meshing, and language brokering have been used to refer to translanguaging. Translanguaging is seen as a space where discursive practices are used to negotiate meaning in the language user's tongue (Rodriquez, 2022). This negotiation of meaning in the language user's tongues leads to a meaningful and coordinated performance by the language user because it transforms the language user's personal history, experience, beliefs, and cognitive ability (Wei, 2011). Consequently, Translanguaging creates an enabling environment for multilingual learners through which they can be able to develop their multilingual identity and skills (Song et al., 2022; Howard & Aries, 2022).

Translanguaging entails closing and making invisible the boundaries between languages. This results in blurring the boundaries into a single linguistic repertoire where there is no L1 OR L2 but only a language of learning (Zhang & Jocuns, 2022). From the definitions given by different scholars on the concept of translanguaging it is evident that translanguaging as a concept in multilingualism is about de-centering dominant languages and centering marginalised languages in the classroom.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This paper uses a systematic literature review that focuses on how translanguaging can be used in South African multilingual classrooms for a better understanding of course content. The current paper qualitatively reviews scholarly works which focus on translanguaging as a new way of redefining bi/multilingualism in South African classrooms. The main data collection technique used is by identifying and analyzing systematically, the literature found around the current topic. This paper used literature from both international and national articles and books. These works were then critically analysed to understand how translanguaging is a new way of redefining bi/multilingualism in South African classrooms.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beyond the debate of translanguaging as everyday practice some scholars (Song, et al.,2022; Donley, 2022; Schwarzyl & Vetter, 2019; Cummins, 2019; Hurst & Mona, 2017) have tried to argue for translanguaging as a valid classroom practice that is deeply rooted in critical pedagogy. Though translanguaging can either be pedagogical or spontaneous, pedagogical translanguaging consists of the task set during lessons, which are planned or organised by teachers. Spontaneous translanguaging is defined as a fluid discursive practice that naturally occurs outside the classroom when learners interact with one another. The concern of most scholars is pedagogical translanguaging which entails the linguistic exchange between learners and teachers in a classroom space.

Translanguaging pedagogy relates to a shift in the power relation regarding multilingual learners in the classroom with more attention being paid to the speakers in the classroom than the specific or standardized language varieties that make up the curriculum (Schissel et al., 2018). Also, translanguaging in the classroom specifically call attention to the agency of teachers and learners. This allows them to liberate their voices and break down language hierarchies in the classroom and the inequality that they also produce (Poza, 2017). Translanguaging in a classroom space rattles the configurations by which bi/multilingual learners and their communicative practices in the classroom are marginalized through ideological orientations that act as constraints on what entails correct language use in the classroom (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Orellana & García (2014) described translanguaging pedagogy as “a liberating approach for teachers, allowing them to turn their focus away from standardized language practices toward opening classroom spaces for students to fully translanguage in their learning experiences” (as cited in Donley, 2022, p.4). Doing so would generate opportunities for students to fully embrace and express their histories, trajectories, and

identities and encourage positive attitudes toward multilingual identities (Prada & Nikula, 2018). Also, doing this in the classroom will enable them to experience their plurilingual competence as a useful resource of which they can be proud.

This means that teachers are mostly in a position of agency to create critical translanguaging spaces. Donley (2022) expatiates on this argument when he posits that the major role of the teacher in a translanguaging classroom is to create a critical translanguaging space, where students can negotiate and reconstruct academic meaning-making when gaining from all their linguistic resources. Fu et al. (2019) are in support of this argument when they contend that teachers' application of translanguaging pedagogy must be social justice oriented which helps multilingual learners to contest dominant beliefs about languages and the hierarchies that they create in the classroom. Consequently, the way a teacher can achieve this is by going beyond the borders of pedagogy in the classroom. As a result, this creates room for what Giroux (1998) referred to as border pedagogy which is deeply rooted within the discourse of critical pedagogical practice in the classroom; it tries to unravel the power and hierarchy in the classroom. This includes how dominant languages are selected and find their way into the curriculum and classroom. In addition, border pedagogy entails crossing the traditional linguistic boundary in the classroom. These boundaries range from boundaries among dominant and minority languages, boundaries among language modes, and the social space where certain monolingual practices are seen as bona fide (Giroux, 1998; Schwarzył & Vetter, 2019). Also, crossing these boundaries includes unravelling and dismantling the power and hierarchy in the classroom. This includes not only institutional power and hierarchy but when teachers are willing to cede their power and hierarchy which will enable learners to be in control of their language development in the classroom.

Scholars have investigated the extent to which this construct is efficacious in changing the status quo of monolingual practices in the classroom which will in return lead to positive teaching and learning outcomes. Zhang & Jocuns (2022) posit that translanguaging in the classroom helps develop and increase learners' confidence. This will help learners to orient themselves on how to keep the pedagogic task moving. Cummings (2019) did a study on the extent translanguaging can serve as a pedagogical initiative in the US during the 1990 to 2000 academic year. The learners in this study were able to learn English which is the target language with the help of their home language. Garcia (2009) took further this investigation of translanguaging and pedagogy to expand the scope of this concept. His findings reflected teachers frowning upon the orientation of giving access to one linguistic repertoire in the classroom. Creese & Blackedge (2010) also did an investigation on the construct. Their findings were that in a multilingual space, English and minority languages need to be used synchronously to teach content in the classroom. Schwarzył & Vetter (2019) did a study on translanguaging pedagogy in an Austrian classroom space. They found out that translanguaging practices in the Austrian classroom serve five purposes to the learner. Firstly, translanguaging in the classroom is a powerful tool and resource that assist and motivate learners to broaden their horizon and understanding. Secondly, it raises cross-linguistic awareness. Thirdly, it strengthens language identities. Fourth, it contributes to better interaction and communication in the classroom. Lastly, translanguaging leads to learner empowerment. Blackedge (2010) did a study in a British school on the effectiveness of using the translanguaging technique. The study revealed some benefits such as the ability of learners to engage with audiences, the establishment of identity positions and the simultaneous development of literacies.

Nevertheless, translanguaging practice and inquiry face significant challenges across classroom contexts in that its orientation provokes questions that are counterintuitive to the dominant approaches to language learning and instruction that structure so many schools (Donley, 2022). This opens translanguaging concepts and assumptions to the risk of failing to transform the hegemonic language orientation that translanguaging seeks to disrupt (Jasper, 2018). Failing to change the hegemonic notion of dominant languages is because translanguaging is rarely institutionally endorsed at the school, district, or university level (Otheguy et al., 2015). This may be due in part to a general lack of concretely defined criteria, planned pedagogical practices, and meaningful assessment methods (Block, 2018).

South African classroom space provides a different context for the concept of multilingualism. Learners in South Africa's classrooms carry the English language and other linguistic repertoire to the classroom. Therefore, the classroom space is multilingual as learners understand and speak the English language and other local South African languages. However, there has been a recent shift in the multilingual nature of South African classrooms. This shift in multilingualism is because of the migration of some displaced Africans because of war, hunger, and unemployment in their various countries. As a result, South African learners and migrant learners are multilingual speakers for whom English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish is one of the languages in their linguistic repertoire, but not necessarily their first language.

Consequently, there was a swift reaction from the South African government to create an enabling environment for multilingualism to survive and thrive in South African classrooms. This reactionary measure

culminated in the language in education policy (additive bilingualism) in 1997 (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014). Additive bilingualism in South Africa is the addition of other languages but with the maintenance of the English language (Pluddemann, 2015). The genesis of this language in education policy began with the South African constitution recognizing the eleven languages in the country and giving them equal esteem, all the languages can be used in school and media, but English will remain the language in the world of work, the south African school's act gave the provincial government to make policies relating to the language of instruction in the province. Also, it gave school governing bodies the right to determine the language to be used in school. The Schools Act gave parents the right to choose which school they want their children to enroll in, which will allow them to choose a preferred language of instruction of their choice. The language in education policy stipulates that the mother tongue will become the language of learning and teaching in the early years of education that will starting from grade 1 to grade 3, after this phase there will be a switch from the home language to English language as the language of learning and teaching which will be used in the junior and higher secondary school, university and the world of work (Alexander, 2005).

Nevertheless, this South African Language in Education policy is worth questioning, as it does not truly tackle the monolingual orientation and multilingualism as a problem orientation. It still fosters monolingual dominance in South African classroom space. Donley (2022) is aware of the need for critical questioning of additive bilingualism when he probed that in South Africa, even the additive bilingualism policy that integrates two or more local languages into the school curriculum might not be able to change the ideological orientation of monolingualism. This is because learners later use only the English language and study their home language as an additional language from grade four until they finish grade 12. Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe (2018) support this probe when they assert that the South African version of additive bilingualism that separates language (that is using the local language in grades 1 to 3 and using the English language from grade 4) does not disrupt the monolingual view of language. Also, the policy implements multilingualism as semi-monolingualism. Hurst & Mona (2017) probed further when they posit that South Africa is a multilingual country with 11 official languages and other languages spoken as first or home languages. These 11 official languages are learned during the early years of schooling. After grade 3, the English language is dominant in schools. This is the result of South Africa's apartheid history and the language in education policy. Zhou & Landa (2019) gave a detailed summary of the problem emanating from South Africa's language in education policy when they note:

The South African classroom is characterized by divergent African indigenous languages. In one South African classroom, students can be familiar with Isixhosa, IsiZulu, Sepedi, Igbo, Yoruba, Lingala, IsiNdebele, Ndebele, Shona, and SeSotho. Since the language in education policy gave the right for schools to determine the language of instruction, the school language policy might recognise only one or two of these indigenous languages and the English language. This results in allocating languages according to regional ethnic strata which excludes other learner's linguistic repertoire (P.5).

The above probing is because of the great discrepancy between translanguaging and additive bilingualism which is highly embedded in the language in education policy. There is an important caveat in the epistemological and practical differences between additive bilingualism and translanguaging. Additive bilingualism mostly employs code-switching methods during teaching and learning. Code-switching uses two or more separate languages and shifts from one code to another (Makalela, 2015). This often carries the language-centred connotation of language interference. The worrying outcome of this practice is that learners who use minority languages try to adjust their language and grammatical structures so that they can fit into the dominant language (Cooks-Campbell, 2022).

Nevertheless, translanguaging does not know any boundaries between different languages. Its focus is on the learner's linguistic repertoire and what they can do with it. This allows learners to assemble their language use in ways that fit their communicative needs (Makalela, 2015). Hornberger & Link (2012) is in support of this claim when they note that "translanguaging shift lens from cross-linguistic influence on how multilingual intermingle linguistic features"(p.12).

With the above probing of the language in education policy, there is a need for a pedagogy that includes all the learners' linguistic repertoire. This involves teaching learners in the language that they are more familiar with. Therefore, there is evidence from all kinds of literature that translanguaging can be a panacea for language and cultural diversity in South Africa's classrooms. Carsten (2016) investigated translanguaging as a vehicle for L2 acquisition and L1 development. Her findings were that translanguaging in the classroom helped students to understand concepts at hand; they were able to get the bigger picture of concepts that were introduced in the classroom. Also, they were able to simplify complex concepts with the help of translanguaging. Makalela (2015) did a study on the importance of Ubuntu translanguaging in a South African grade 4-6 and University classrooms space. One of his findings was

that translanguaging gives learners a complex way of making sense of the world. Also, the multifarious nature of translanguaging favours and enhances epistemic access to culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Zhou & Landa (2019) did a study on translanguaging as a theory of foundational pedagogy. Firstly, their findings during their experiment were that translanguaging presented learners with an unprecedented experience, it gives them the freedom to interact with peers, content, and their instructor. Secondly, the monolingual curricula that made learners tense were completely erased by a more comfortable and communal atmosphere that was aided by translanguaging. Lastly, critical thinking and versatility were the abilities that were built in the classroom through translanguaging.

IV. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made to review various pieces of literature emanating from the discourse of translanguaging both nationally and internationally. It is clear from the kinds of literature reviewed that translanguaging is a theory that has developed with time because of diversity in the classroom. The review also revealed that translanguaging goes beyond theory to critical pedagogical practice. Also, it centers marginalised languages in South African multilingual classroom environments which the language in education policy has failed to achieve. Therefore, there is a need for teachers, education actors, and policymakers to see translanguaging as a new way of redefining bi/multilingualism in South African classroom space.

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