

# Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy

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## *Abstract*

*This article attempts to synthesize the scholarship on translanguaging conducted in different academic disciplines and social domains, and raises critical questions on theory, research and pedagogy to take the orientation forward. The literature review highlights the overly cognitive and individualistic focus on translanguaging competence, the need to explore this communicative practice in domains other than conversation, and the failure to develop teachable strategies of translanguaging. Findings from a classroom ethnography of a writing course are marshaled to develop teaching strategies for the co-construction of meaning and orientations for assessing effective translanguaging practices.*

## **1. Introduction**

Advances in our understanding of multilingual communication have solidified academic interest around the term *translanguaging* (see Canagarajah forthcoming; Creese and Blackledge 2010; Garcia 2009). A neologism, it has come to stand for assumptions such as the following: that, for multilinguals, languages are part of a repertoire that is accessed for their communicative purposes; languages are not discrete and separated, but form an integrated system for them; multilingual competence emerges out of local practices where multiple languages are negotiated for communication; competence doesn't consist of separate competencies for each language, but a multicompetence that functions symbiotically for the different languages in one's repertoire; and, for these reasons, proficiency for multilinguals is focused on repertoire building – i.e., developing abilities in the different functions served by different languages – rather than total mastery of each and every language.

As the notion receives increasing attention, scholars are documenting translinguaging in diverse social and educational contexts. The theorization of this practice is going on in different disciplines under different labels. The following are some of the terms used for translinguaging in different fields (identified according to the scholars who use them):

Composition: codemeshing (Canagarajah 2006; Young 2004); transcultural literacy (Lu 2009); translingual writing (Horner et al. forthcoming)  
New literacy studies: multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis 2000), continua of biliteracy (Hornberger 2003), pluriliteracy (Garcia 2009),  
Applied linguistics: plurilingualism (Council of Europe 2000), third spaces (Gutierrez 2008); metrolingualism (Pennycook 2010).  
Sociolinguistics: fluid lects (Auer 1999); hetero-graphy (Blommaert 2008); poly-lingual languaging (Jorgenson 2008).

The contexts of translinguaging range from academic reading and writing (Lu 2009), internet communication (Williams 2009), youth performative conversational interactions (Rampton 2008), hip hop (Pennycook 2007), children's interactions (Jorgenson 2008), street signage (Gorter 2006), and indigenous literacy (Hornberger 2003), to mention a few.

While the body of scholarship on social manifestations and classroom occurrences of translinguaging is increasing, teachers are also interested in the pedagogical implications of this practice. However, proactive teaching of translinguaging raises a difficult set of theoretical and practical questions that have not received adequate discussion so far. The purpose of this article is to adopt a critical orientation to the theorization and research of translinguaging in an effort to translate the findings more effectively for classroom purposes. After outlining the issues for further research, I report some findings from a classroom ethnography I conducted to illustrate how we might address the emerging questions in the field.

## **2. Towards a balanced theoretical orientation**

In the context of a linguistics that theorizes competence and communication in terms of monolingual norms, it is appropriate that translinguaging is now being given a lot of attention in the academy. This is a matter of affirmative action. Many previous constructs arise from pitting one language against another, treating multilinguals as non-native and, therefore, lacking ownership in some languages. Multilinguals users' linguistic variations are treated as marking their

nonstandard or deficient usage, resulting from “interference” from the other languages in their repertoire, and conditioned by their first language or culture not to accommodate a second language effectively. All these terms (i.e., non-native, interference, conditioning, first/second language and culture) are indications of what Vivian Cook (1999) calls a “comparative fallacy.” The tendency to adopt binary and hierarchical orientations to language has distorted the integrated nature of multilingual competence and communication. Translanguaging helps us adopt orientations specific to multilinguals and appreciate their competence in their own terms.

However, any valorization of a suppressed communicative practice undergoes what feminist scholars Kirsch and Royster (2010: 647) have recently called “the three Rs – rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription”. This preoccupation with salvage and affirmative representation leads to an uncritical orientation to marginalized rhetorical traditions. They can thus lead to a fourth R – romanticization. It is not surprising that scholarship on translanguaging makes multilingual communication appear more diverse, dynamic and democratic than “monolingual” competence. We have to critique this new binary – multilingual and monolingual – and adopt a critical attitude towards the resources/limitations and prospects/challenges of translanguaging.

As we address some critical questions on translanguaging, we have to examine certain misconceptions engendered by the four R’s. In many quarters, translanguaging is valorized as an urban and postmodern practice. For example, Rampton (1999: 425) considers *crossing* (i.e., a performative practice of translanguaging, in which one adopts the language of a community he/she is not typically associated with, for identification purposes) reflective of life in late modernity when “aestheticized multi-modal texts recruit people into ‘life-style’ communities, into ‘neo-tribes without socialisation’ where centres of authority are hard to find and where entry is a matter of the consumer’s desire, personal taste, shopping skills and purchasing power” (see also Rampton 2008). Such practices are also associated with urban life. Pennycook (2010) has recently coined the term *metrolinguistics* (to capture the fluid and hybrid language practices of youth in the city). In both cases, the suggestion that translanguaging practices are postmodern and urban can give a misleading impression, and hide their vibrancy in other places and times.

We do have evidence that translanguaging has been practiced in pre-colonial communities and in rural contexts. In South Asia, Africa and South America, rural life has featured considerable heterogeneity and multilingualism. Neighboring villages with different languages and tribal groups adopt translanguaging in contact situations. While villages in the West are homogeneous, villages in the southern hemisphere have always featured diversity. Khubchandani (1997)

provides a book length treatment of the strategies adopted by villagers in South Asia to communicate to each other. Pollock (2009) has discussed how Sanskrit as a lingua franca in pre-colonial times cohabitated with local languages and communities, when Latin and English were imposed from above. The limitation in the scholarship on translanguaging in pre-colonial times is that it is not based on empirical observations. It is based on archival research. Even this archival documentation is thin as practices that deviated from the ideologies of modernity were suppressed or unrecorded in modern scholarship. Khubchandani has to painstakingly recover available evidence from present day life to theorize the translanguaging practices of pre-colonial times. As we get more evidence, we need to compare rural and urban, pre-colonial and postmodern practices in translanguaging to develop a more focused understanding of this mode of communication.

Another overgeneralization is the broad constructs “multilingual” and “monolingual”. It appears as if the notion of multilingual competence borders on essentializing diverse communicative practices and attributing them as invariable essences of non-western communities. Furthermore, it is not clear whether being monolingual is an ontological reality. All of us have multilingual competence and adopt multilingual practices in our competence. Even the so-called “monolinguals” shuttle between codes, registers and discourses. Therefore, multilingual competence involves a massive generalization of practices in many regions, times and communities. Perhaps we can justify this construct as a case of strategic essentialism (see Spivak 1993). The construct is a useful heuristic to demystify the dominant construct of monolingual competence, articulate the features of alternate competences and demystify the language ideologies that motivate unitary models of language and competence. Perhaps we can adopt more diversified and localized constructs once the dominant paradigms have been deconstructed, and develop a more complex orientation to translanguaging.

The theorization of translanguaging in terms of cognitive competence and individual proficiency (see Franceschini 2010; Garcia 2009) has also led to some oversight. The overriding concern of translanguaging scholars has been with rectifying the Chomskyan orientation, which represents language competence as innate, monolingual and arising from a homogeneous environment. Scholars of translanguaging have invoked Vivian Cook’s (1999) notion of multicompetence to combat the Chomskyan dominance. They rightly point out that multilingual competence is qualitatively different from the Chomskyan notion of monolingual competence, and that multilinguals parallel process the diverse languages in their repertoire even when they function in a relatively homogeneous language. However, what they overlook is that translanguaging is a social accomplishment. Translanguaging not only involves a person drawing from all

the languages in his/her repertoire to communicate, it also involves shuttling between the languages brought by the other to co-construct meaning. Furthermore, translanguaging is performative. As Khubchandani (1997) demonstrates, translanguaging is not a case of applying a linguistic predisposition. It is a creative improvisation according to the needs of the context and local situation. It is an interactive achievement that depends on aligning one's language resources to the features of the ecology to construct meaning. We have to give greater importance to translanguaging as a form of social practice along the lines Pennycook (2010) has theorized language interactions recently.

### **3. Issues in current research**

While there are theoretical exaggerations of the sort reviewed above, there are also some limitations in the research carried out on translanguaging practices. In much of the research on crossing and related performative practices, scholars have focused on the production of difference, and not on the negotiation of difference. For example, instances of youth adopting the codes of out-group members is represented without considering how out-group members respond to these features or display uptake (see Rampton 2008). Pennycook (2010) also presents the ways in which his subjects mix codes in hip-hop to demonstrate new subjectivities and performances. We don't know how participants, other than the researcher, interpret and respond to these translanguaging displays. As Jane Hill (1999) observed some time ago, other communities may have mixed feelings about their codes being appropriated. For this reason, Blommaert (2005: 205–206) advises that we should consider the dialogical and, I might add, interactional dimension of translanguaging activity: “Meaning – including the attribution of identity categories – is a dialogical practice in which the uptake of one's semiotic acts may be as consequential as the structure of the semiotic acts themselves. In other words, in order for an identity to be established, it has to be *recognised* by others. . . . people are not entirely free in semiotic work.” If we keep this caution in mind, we will also note that translanguagers adopt certain calculated strategies to gain uptake. We have to go beyond studying the strategies of translanguaging production to studying strategies of negotiation.

Studies on translanguaging have also been conducted in a product-oriented manner, leaving processes out of consideration. Blommaert's (2008) own *Grassroots Literacy* illustrates this approach. In studying the historical/biographical texts of two Congolese subjects, Blommaert interprets their writing to understand their choices. He gives complexity to their multilingual and multimodal writing, labeling it hetero-graphy. However, since he studies only the product

and has no way of interviewing the writers themselves (who are deceased), he ends up with a deficient view of translanguaging. His analysis suggests that the Congolese subjects adopt translanguaging as they don't have access to elite literacy. Blommaert also assumes that the authors are not adopting any proactive strategies to communicate to their intended recipients, failing to gain uptake and being silenced. To overcome such deficient reading, we have to go beyond merely documenting instances of translanguaging and analyzing their linguistic and textual realizations. We have to ask further questions of process, such as: What strategies do translanguagers adopt to help readers/listeners interpret their language choices? What choices did they face in codes and conventions in their production? What considerations help them resolve their choices? What composing or cognitive stages characterize the production of translanguaging? These questions will enable us to gain an insider perspective on the processes that accompany translanguaging and help us teach it better to students.

Current research has also limited translanguaging to multilingual interlocutors. In some instances, as in the corpus study of multilingual negotiations in English, the researchers have decided to leave out native English speaker (NES)<sup>1</sup> subjects in order to preserve the validity of their data. Jenkins (2006: 160) notes, "ELF [English as a Lingua Franca] researchers specifically exclude mother tongue speakers from their data collection. Indeed, in its purest form, ELF is defined as a contact language used only among non-mother tongue speakers." However, this restriction leads to an artificial communicative context. Contact situations sometimes include native and nonnative, monolingual and multilingual participants. In fact, classroom situations often involve NES or monolingual teachers. Furthermore, the exclusion of native speakers prevents us from understanding the agency of multilingual speakers. Multilinguals adopt creative strategies to negotiate meaning with NES and co-construct meaning. We have to study translanguaging in contexts where there is a mix of speakers in order to understand the strategies of communication of translanguagers.

Furthermore, while a majority of existing studies on translanguaging are on face to face oral interactions, we haven't studied how translanguaging works in other genres and modalities of communication. For example, youth mesh codes in computer-mediated discussions. They have been discussed as instances of hybridity rather than translanguaging (Lam 2004). However, we can compare such interactions with face to face interactions to understand if the translanguaging strategies are different. Similarly, we don't have enough studies on translanguaging in writing. In fact, there is a strong opinion among some scholars that translanguaging is not permitted in writing. Even those who accommodate diverse codes in speaking feel that such mixing are not appropriate for writing.

Barbour (2002), for example, argues that since the rich paralinguistic cues of speaking are not available for interpreting writing, multilingual authors have to get the help of editors and translators to eliminate the localisms in their English. For him, the lack of gestures, tone and contextual details reduces the possibilities for guessing meaning. These assumptions lead him to argue that writing has to always adopt the standard language expected for that context. In the same vein, Peter Elbow (2002: 128) argues, “Literacy as a culture or institution almost always implies just one dialect as the only proper one for writing: the ‘grapholect.’” He argues that the accommodation of codes that deviate from standard language should be postponed for a time when those codes become the norms in writing. The prohibition of translanguaging in writing also results from the dominance of “autonomous literacy” (Street 1984). According to this ideology, texts are static products that contain self-evident meaning that can be extricated through detached reading. For this reason, while interlocutors negotiate meanings interactively in face to face conversations, they assume that such negotiations are not necessary for writing. This attitude leads to censoring translanguaging, and promoting standardized and discrete codes for literacy. To make matters further complicated, writing in educational contexts is a high stakes activity. While teachers permit translanguaging in face to face interactions for classroom interactions (i.e., group work, teacher/student conversations), they don’t permit it in writing, which they consider a more formal activity where students’ performance is assessed.

These assumptions can be easily challenged. Though writing lacks some of the communicative resources in speaking, it has other resources that can favour translanguaging. For example, writing has a materiality to it. One can use the successive drafts to prepare readers for interpreting translanguaging. Writing also has a visual dimension. One can use the visual resources to embed additional codes and modalities for meaning-making. Furthermore, the notion that writing can take only one code at a time and the assumptions of autonomous literacy are very recent European orientations to writing. Literacy in non-western communities has always been multilingual and multimodal (see Canagarajah 2006; de Souza 2002). For example, the well known *manipralava* writing in South Asia combined Tamil and Sanskrit (Viswanathan 1989). Such texts were actively negotiated for meaning by readers and writers. We are beginning to see scholarship that shows that even writing in the West favoured dynamic interactions for meaning-making before Enlightenment (see Ratcliffe 1999; Stark 2008;). Such literacies and textualities are making a comeback in the context of digital communication. Texts are multilingual and multimodal on the Web, and readers and writers are negotiating their hybrid codes more actively for meaning (Nicotra 2009; Williams 2009). Therefore, we have to be open to the possibil-

ity that translanguaging will be actively practiced in literacy in the future. It is important for researchers to study translanguaging in writing.

#### 4. Issues in pedagogical practice

A further set of questions relate to the possibility of teaching translanguaging in classrooms. The pedagogical side is underdeveloped in general. While we have studied the practice of translanguaging in social life – i.e., in urban youth encounters, linguistic landscapes, and the Internet – we haven't figured out how to develop such proficiency among students in classrooms. In a recent study on translanguaging practices in bilingual classrooms, Creese and Blackledge (2010: 113) emphasize “the need for further research to explore what ‘teachable’ pedagogic resources are available in flexible, concurrent approaches to learning and teaching languages bilingually”. In making this call, they echo what other scholars like Lin and Martin (2005) have also considered important in order to move multilingual language acquisition forward.

The studies we do have on school contexts show translanguaging to be a naturally occurring phenomenon. In a majority of these studies, acts of translanguaging are not elicited by teachers through conscious pedagogical strategies. They are produced unbidden. In fact, in many of these cases, translanguaging occurs surreptitiously behind the backs of the teachers in classes which proscribe language mixing (see the studies from diverse communities in Lin and Martin 2005; Heller and Martin-Jones 2001). In the more proactive situations, teachers have provided safe spaces for students to adopt their multilingual repertoire for learning purposes, and teachers have themselves collaborated with students in using the repertoire as a resource, as in the study by Creese and Blackledge. Pedagogical approaches such as the *biliteracy workshop* (Garcia 2009) and *continua of biliteracy* model (Hornberger 2003) theorize how students may shuttle between languages and modalities in their learning. However, we still have a long way to go in developing teaching strategies out of these broadly conceived models.

What current classroom studies show is that translanguaging is a naturally occurring phenomenon for multilingual students. Translanguaging cannot be completely restrained by monolingual educational policies. It can occur with minimal pedagogical effort from teachers. However, such studies might give the impression that translanguaging doesn't have to be taught. If it occurs naturally in the most unbidden contexts, it might be argued, translanguaging is so fully developed among multilingual students in their home and community contexts that there is nothing further for the school to add, other than provide

a context for it to be practiced. Such studies are bolstered by cognitive orientations to competence that posit that translanguaging is “natural” to multilinguals (Bhatia & Ritchie 2004: 794; see also Franceschini 2010). This line of thinking leads to the tendency to see translanguaging as an intuitive capacity for which multilinguals are naturally endowed. Such an assumption makes one wonder if translanguage needs to be taught at all. Treating translanguaging as a practice (not natural competence), I demonstrate from a course I taught that making opportunities for critical analysis will help students develop their translanguaging proficiency further.

As we develop teachable strategies of translanguaging, we have to consider some serious issues for assessing the effectiveness of this practice. An important consideration is if there is a place for error or mistake in translanguaging. If there is none, we don’t have a concept of developmental translanguaging. We might go away with the assumption that translanguagers never err. Also, this might mean that translanguaged talk and texts are always perfect. The difficulty in identifying errors is that translanguaging doesn’t accommodate the notion of interference from other languages. Mutual influences from the languages in one’s repertoire are treated as creative and enabling, not hindering, communication. Also, we don’t know if there is a concept of normative translanguaging against which errors can be judged. We have to explore if we can move away from a norm-based or form-based notion of error and adopt a practiced based orientation to developmental stages in translanguaging.

In the same vein, we also need to adopt rhetorical considerations in assessing the effectiveness of translanguaging. In most studies on translanguaging, whether inside or outside the classroom, researchers have focused mostly on the information transfer, pragmatic meanings and implications for cognitive competence. They haven’t asked if the translanguaging is appropriate for that context in rhetorical terms. Could better choices have been adopted for more effective communication? To address such questions of rhetoric, we have to move from grammar to discourse, meaning transfer to aesthetic considerations.

There are also questions related to the ways students negotiate power in the classroom when they translanguage. Since classrooms are often dominated by NES or monolingualist assumptions and autonomous literacy, how do students negotiate such constraints for successful communication? We have to also consider the implications of translanguaging proficiency for social and educational success for multilingual students. Would this competence help or hinder them in their educational and professional prospects.

The attitudes to translanguaging should also be studied in order to understand the possibilities for pedagogical success. How do students relate to translanguaging? Some minority communities have recently voiced concerns about this

practice and its implications for community empowerment. Scott Lyons, a native American scholar, argues that this form of hybridity is a threat to heritage languages. He feels that translanguaging would make native American students complacent about language maintenance, and dilute the integrity of native American languages. He states that translanguaging “is hybridity and violates the elders’ rule of mutually assured separatism” (Lyons 2009: 102). To address his charge we have to find out how translanguagers perceive their relationship to the codes they mix in their utterance. Or, do they treat translanguaging as free of values? – as Peter Auer (1999) suggests in his theorization of fluid lects, treating them as a new code in their own right.

I address these questions in a writing course I recently taught for graduate students at my university, using my findings for the further development of translanguaging for classroom purposes.

## 5. A case study

The data in this study came from a graduate-level course on the teaching of second language writing. I conducted a classroom ethnography on the development of teacher identities and literacy awareness. The class consisted of roughly half Anglo-American students, and half international students (from China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, UAE and Saudi Arabia). A major assignment in the course was the writing of a literacy autobiography to critically reflect on students’ own writing development and translate their insights into pedagogical practices. I interpret the translanguaging in this writing in the context of the activities and assignments produced throughout the course. The data sources are the following: successive drafts of essays (abbreviated as D1, D2, etc.); a weekly journal of students’ responses on readings and writings (J); assignments and activities (A); a peer commentary (PC); and surveys and interviews on writing development (I). In selected cases, I also conducted a stimulated recall procedure (SR) to query students on their rhetorical and linguistic choices. In this article, I report on the writing of a single student, Buthainah from Saudi Arabia. In her case, I gave her an early draft of my essay interpreting her translanguaging strategies for her response, as a form of member check procedure (MC).

I adopted a dialogical pedagogy in this course. Students observed writing classes of other instructors or their own, and critically reflected on their observations in relations to the readings, to develop more constructive pedagogies and professional identities. Also, the writing was collaborative. Peers and the instructor critiqued each draft for subsequent revisions. This activity of negotiating meaning with the writers helped me in many ways. In posing questions

on their writing choices in my feedback, I helped students develop a critical awareness without having to impose my values on them. Often students challenged the assumptions behind my questions and helped me identify traces of dominant ideologies. Furthermore, this dialogical pedagogy helped me address an important methodological challenge in this kind of research. In their seminal article developing a social orientation to language acquisition, Firth and Wagner (1997: 285) argue that “SLA research requires a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use, an increased ‘emic’ (i.e., participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts.” If meaning is co-constructed by multilinguals in contact situations, researchers who stand outside the negotiation of meaning in the interaction cannot make valid observations on the communication. However, those who are part of the interaction may be considered as not having sufficient detachment to be analytical. My position as a teacher/researcher helped me resolve this dilemma to some extent. Though I had relative detachment as a teacher to adopting an analytical perspective, my dialogical teaching helped me actively negotiate meanings with the students and adopt an insider orientation to their writing process.

I must acknowledge that I did give students samples of translanguaged writing (e.g., Smitherman 2003) and readings that complicate autonomous literacy (Canagarajah 2002) as part of the course syllabus. The students were also aware of examples of my own critical and translanguaged writing (e.g., Canagarajah 2006). Such a direct introduction to translanguaged writing may make critics to wonder if writing samples derived from such a course are shaped by my instructional approach. In other words, is my pedagogy biased towards producing such translanguaged texts? However, I don’t think of any pedagogical context as value-free or neutral. All teaching contexts and teachers bring their own positions on literacy and multilingual communication. Furthermore, all teachers have to negotiate the dominant policies and ideologies of language and writing in their pedagogical context. As my questions in SR will reveal, I was often influenced by the dominant expectations on writing in a university course. Therefore, the course was not totally shaped by a single ideology. Students too had to navigate through competing ideologies as they negotiated their footing toward the writing and the course. Even in courses where there is no explicit policy that favours translanguaging, those students who want to practice such writing find affordances in their context. Thus the classroom is a site of competing ideologies, and students and teachers always have to negotiate their footing. For students to discern the features that are friendly to their interests and negotiate features that are unfavourable is part of their learning experience.

## 5.1. Buthainah's negotiation strategies

Buthainah opened her essay as follows:

ومن يتهيّب صعود الجبال ~~~ يعيش ابد الدّهر بين الحفر

“I doon’t want to!” was my response to my parents request of enrolling me in a nearby preschool. I did not like school. I feared it. I feared the aspect of departing my comfort zone, my home, to an unknown and unpredictable zone. My parents desired to enroll me in a private preschool. Due to my fear, I refused. My parent’s face discolored and the sense of disapproval appeared in their tone of speech. To encourage me, they recited a poetic line that I did not comprehend as a child but live by it as an adult. They said “Who fears climbing the mountains ~~~ Lives forever between the holes.” As I grew up, knowledge became my key to freedom; freedom of thought, freedom of doing, and freedom of beliefs. In every decision I make relating to my academic world, a new wave full of challenges and unexpected turnouts unfolds. (D6)

The Arabic proverb with which she starts was uttered to her by her parents when she hesitated to go to school on the first day. She translates this proverb later in the paragraph as “Who fears climbing the mountains ~~~ Lives forever between the holes.” The Arabic proverb serves also as the title for the essay.

In addition to such proverbs and verses in Arabic script, Buthainah also adopted other types of translanguaging in her essay:

- My experience learning English has interesting twists. In many different stages of my life, I had a different motivation. At the end of the road, however, knowledge became the key for freedom, *ma sha Allah*.
- In sixth grade, my instructor wanted to challenge the students, including *moi*, by having us write about Riyadh as the Arabian Capital for Culture.
- Our first exposure to *real English* was at that airport. The man said *beaucoup de choes* that I could not understand.
- The motif used to divide her sections: ~  ~  ~ 
- At that time, my dear reader, I have not learned English in school yet since English was required to seventh graders and beyond; and I was in sixth grade ☺.
- A *ket-koot* is a small chick in Arabic. At that time I had about seven chicks [P.S. couple of them died =’(].

As we see, Buthainah transliterates Arabic expressions such as “*ma sha Allah*.” She uses French phrases in certain instances. There were also visual symbols that she considered part of her expressive repertoire: i.e., the motif she used to divide her sections, and other emoticons. Note also the elongation of “doon’t” in the paragraph quoted earlier to capture the auditory effect. Other idiosyncrasies such as the missing apostrophe in “my parents request” and the noni-

idiomatic expression “a new wave full of challenges and unexpected turnouts unfolds” will also be attributed to translanguaging by scholars and not treated as errors.

Note that this is the sixth draft Buthainah wrote. She had ample opportunities to change any idiosyncratic features earlier. She retained these features as she considered them important for her voice. Asked why she chose to include so many Arabic verses, she mentioned:

My objectives for using these poems are many. First, they are part of me. And this essay is about me. Thus, it seemed appropriate to include them in an essay on my literacy development. In addition, poetry is part of my Arabian culture because it is highly valued. . . . Why shouldn't I include it? (SR)<sup>2</sup>

On the motif used to divide the sections, she explained:

“It is a familiar shape that one may find in Islamic art. Since I am a Muslim, and Islam influenced me, it also influenced my literacy experience. Thus, using this particular motif was a hint to the reader to my heritage” (MC).

Even the spelling mistakes and unusual idiomatic and syntactic choices were explained by the fact that she focused more on rhetorical issues rather than form. She assumed that readers will negotiate them for meaning in context:

I did not see my essay as a one-way informative essay. It is a *negotiated essay* that seeks a better understanding from educators and future teachers to the multilingual experience. By addressing my readers, I am welcoming them to the discussion, which, in my perspective, [is] ongoing (emphasis added; MC).

As she expected, the idiosyncracies in form didn't cause any problem for comprehension. No one complained about these issues. Her peers were willing to negotiate the essay for meaning with her. I like to focus first on the strategies Buthainah adopts to encourage her readers to negotiate for meaning with her. I am especially concerned about the responses of NES subjects, as researchers haven't adequately studied how they behave in contact situations.

I call the first set of strategies Recontextualization Strategies. What Buthainah does is change the dominant orientations to textual reception in western educational institutions, so that readers will adopt the orientation of what Buthainah calls above a “negotiated essay”. The very opening of the essay (quoted earlier) indicates the ethos of the text and indicates a different orientation to reading. As Buthainah opens with Arabic and doesn't provide translations, readers are compelled to work for meaning. They understand that meaning is not given to one on a plate. There is evidence that there was uptake of this strategy. Tim, an Anglo-American student, mentioned in a peer review:

By not translating you are excluding a wider audience, your non-Arabic speaking audience from being able to engage fully with the text. Perhaps you are challenging them to bridge that gap as readers. That if they want to gain access to your writing (to a piece of you, perhaps?) they have to meet you halfway somehow. Or, maybe these poems are a special treat you mean only for those able to read Arabic to experience (PC, 10/22).

Bridging the gap and meeting halfway are the attitudes multilinguals display when they interact with other language groups in contact situations (see Khubchandani, 1997). Tim adopts this strategy to figure out the meaning and engage with Buthainah to construct meaning. Thus he moves away from the dominant orientation of autonomous literacy to approach this essay.

Buthainah also carefully gives clues about her preferred authorial identity to prevent readers from adopting native speaker norms. She shapes the context so that they will approach the text as a multilingual encounter. Buthainah distinguishes herself as a functional bilingual and not an ESL student throughout her essay. She says in an early paragraph in her essay:

I may sound and write like-or even better than- a native speaker, but I do not look like one. Many people would group all second language learners together not knowing that this grouping may be negative to the learner especially those who are considered functional bilinguals . . . “language users who may have [a] few problems with English, but were beyond the realm of ESL” (D6).

ESL status is stereotypically considered developmental and deficient. However, Buthainah constructs a more empowering identity for her. She suggests that readers should go beyond issues of form to consider the rhetorical and meaning-making abilities of multilinguals. Readers did adopt such an orientation to their interpretation, not letting form bother their reading. Chrissie, an Anglo-American student, shows uptake. She interprets Buthainah’s deviations from norms as not deficient, but having rhetorical implications:

As a student at an American University, she knows that following the “rules” of academic writing will get her far, but I think she does so with a sense of who she is. She obviously respects her L1 and explicitly shows us, the reader, throughout the text with poems, and how expressions are beautiful in Arabic, but awkward in English (for example) (PC 10/28).

In certain places in the text, Buthainah seemed to confront some of the stereotypes of her readers more directly in order to facilitate a less biased reading. In one place she wrote:

Couple of years later, my father began a new journey by enrolling in a master program in United States of America. He applied and, later, the IECP at X Uni-

versity accepted him. When the paper works were complete, my family and I traveled from Saudi Arabia to United States by air plane [P.S. I wanted to travel on a camel, but they were all rented!]. (D6)

I wasn't sure if the parenthetical comment was necessary. Therefore, I asked Buthainah: "This might be considered a digression by some readers. How would you respond to that criticism?" Buthainah responded:

Yes, it could be to some readers. However, when someone writes about themselves, they have to consider the stereotypes and whats going on around them that may influence the comprehension or the interpretation of the text. I wrote that sentence because there are, still to this day, people who think that I, as a Saudi, ride camels to school. It is a joke that tries to remove that stereotype. In addition, a joke was needed here because I may have readers who hold negative associations toward my ethnicity. And I tried to elevate that tension that the reader may have, and hopefully, it will never occur (SR).

It appears as if Buthainah is being proactive in bringing the biases into the open and forcing the readers to deal with them, so that they can read her essay with an open mind. In this and the other strategies above, Buthainah is engaged in negotiating the appropriate footing to read her essay. We find from lingua franca English (LFE) research that multilinguals engage in considerable foot work to establish a favourable context for language negotiation. Planken (2005) finds that Scandinavian business professionals engage in considerable preparatory work to create a "safe space" to negotiate their differences before they actually talk business. One specific strategy is joking about their accent so that both sides can lay aside their inhibitions and biases. This strategy of constructing a favourable context for language negotiation is what Kramsch (2009) calls *symbolic competence*. While communicative competence encourages sticking to the conventional codes for a context for successful uptake, symbolic competence refers to the possibility of resisting conventions and renegotiating contexts for alternate identities and meanings. Multilinguals are adept at such strategies for meaning construction.

I label another set of strategies Interactional Strategies, as they are calculated to engage the reader into co-constructing meaning. The direct address to the reader that we see in the last example was repeated in many other places in her essay. I was concerned that such addresses would violate the formality of academic writing. Buthainah responded to the criticism as follows:

I knew that I was taking a risk by addressing the reader. But, I wanted the reader to be included into my discussion. I did not see my essay as a one-way informative essay. It is a negotiated essay that seeks a better understanding from educators and

future teachers to the multilingual experience. By addressing my readers, I am welcoming them to the discussion, which, in my perspective, [is] ongoing (MC).

By addressing the readers directly, she intends to draw them more closely into her writing to negotiate meanings with her. Here again there was uptake. Chrissie mentioned: “There are also times when she directly communicates to the reader, which shows how much she values the readers opinion” (PC, 10/28). The feeling of being valued and encouraged to contribute their own reactions help readers to orientate to the text differently. They move away from the conventional detachment of autonomous literacy to engage with Buthainah in co-constructing meaning.

Buthainah’s strategy of delaying translations for her translanguaged items also encourages readers to engage in interpretive work. As we can see in the opening, she not only delays giving clues for interpretation, she also makes them less obvious. The English version of the Arabic proverb is not introduced as a translation. Readers have to align this with the other contextual cues to assume that both are connected. It is this imaginative reading that Buthainah had in mind when she translanguages. She said:

If I translated everything, then the readers would simply go through it. But, if I did not translate it or provide an immediate translation, then, I am encouraging the reader to question the relationship between the poem and the stories being told and promote critical thinking (MC).

Here, again, evidence from readers suggests that the intended effect was achieved. Mark, an Anglo-Canadian student, said:

To me, a non-Arabic speaker, this quote is a beautiful collection of alien writing, fascinating but incomprehensible. It is a statement to me that there is something Buthainah understands that I do not. It is a move that distances me from Buthainah but also leaves me intrigued and interest[ed] in reading more (PC, 10/28).

It appears that translanguaging helped him read closely for clues for interpretation. The alien codes create a curiosity that enables him to read with greater attention. In this sense, translanguaging probably creates a more engaged reading than monolingual writing. That interlocutors in a multilingual contact situation construct meaning through alignment has been well researched (Atkinson et al. 2007). Since multilinguals can never come ready with all the codes for the very divergent communicative contexts in contact situations, they have to align language, objects and other ecological resources for interpretation. Khubchandani (1997) calls this “synergy”. Readers of Buthainah’s article also had to look for alignment to interpret her text.

The most daring case of translanguaging – and a pointer to a more radical strategy – was Buthainah’s refusal to provide any clues for interpretation on one occasion:



بقدر الكد تقتسم المعالي

و من طلب العلي سهر الليالي

يروم العز كيف ينام ليلا

يغوص البحر من طلب اللآلي

و من رام العلي من غير كدّ

أضاع العمر في طلب المحال

علي بن ابي طالب

When I was in fourth grade, I became sincerely interested in enrolling in the Communication Club (CC). Students in the club have the opportunity to give a speech in front of all of the attendees at the school . . . (D6)

When I asked Buthainah what she had in mind, she said:

Translating this poem would take so much of its value and providing a two sentence explanation will not do any justice for these few lines. The message of these lines is that who desires the best, need to work for it. He/she needs to stay up late working for it just like how divers have to search for the natural pearls. And those who try to get to the top and not work for it, they will waste their life getting nothing. I feel that these few lines that I wrote above about this poem do not give it any justice. Leaving it stand alone is more powerful (SR).

That left me wondering what readers would do to negotiate these lines. Rita adopted what resembled Firth’s (1996) “let it pass” principle. She said: “I decided not to worry about what I couldn’t understand. I trusted my classmates to explain what was important.” (I: 05/09). We know from Firth’s research that when multilinguals confront a language feature they don’t understand, they go on with the communication, hoping that further occurrences of the item will provide more context to renegotiate it at a later point. Rita’s statement also shows that she adopts an extended temporal and social context for meaning negotiation. She hopes that she will get more clues for interpretation with others in the class later on, and that her interpretation doesn’t stop with her own reading at one point.

Some other students responded to the lines at an aesthetic level. Eunja, a Korean student, exclaimed: “Written Arabic – How elegant language it is! (I’m not quite familiar with spoken one^^)” (PC, 10/22). Mark advised: “I absolutely love the Arabic phrases in the text, please keep them, and I hope they’re Arabic

otherwise I feel kind of foolish” (PC: 10/22). It is important to realize that autonomous literacy has led to readers extricating meaning from texts and not responding to the visual and aesthetic dimension of the text. Blommaert (2008: 113) points out: “The essential role of aesthetics in the production of meaning has, however, not been widely recognized in the study of language. . . . The idea that one of the essential functions of language is the ‘poetic’ production of forms has not made it into the mainstream, and form and content are still firmly seen as separate domains of analysis.”

At another level, it appeared as if Buthainah was also turning the tables on native speaker students through this strategy. Just as mastering English involved struggle, failure, humility and great effort for her (which is the theme of her literacy autobiography), Buthainah is simulating this experience for her readers. When I mentioned this interpretation in my earlier draft, Buthainah wrote in her member check commentary that she was indeed “giving a sample or a taste of the experience that language learners go through to those who never experienced it, which may help them understand these stories and experiences better” (MC). It appeared as if NES students understood this strategy. Mark said:

Something can only be scene [sic] perhaps in the Arabic text. Perhaps Buthainah is willing to help the reader but at some point somethings can only be known to those who are willing to learn and become Arabic English bilinguals (PC, 10/28).

Chrissie was prepared to revise her attitude based on this recognition. She understood that the roles had shifted in this writing. It was her job to take steps to interpret the difficult lines:

Although, last week I wrote that she explain her Arabic poems, I now feel that they are a key part to her narrative. She is indirectly showing us, the reader, who she is through these poems . . . Perhaps it is up to us to figure out the significance of these words?? (PC, 10/28).

From these evidences, it appears that this is a performative strategy. What Buthainah is *doing* through these lines is more important than what she is *saying*. The experience and process of making meaning is as important as grasping the content.

What we find from Buthainah’s writing is that she adopts strategies that persuade NES students to negotiate meanings with her.<sup>3</sup> To a considerable extent, the NES students negotiate translanguaging like the multilingual students in the class. In this sense, the assumption that native students should be kept out of studies on contact situations as they bring divergent assumptions should be questioned. NES subjects can step out of native speaker norms to adopt multilingual orientations when the situation warrants it. Multilingual students

are able to anticipate such outcomes and write appropriately to help negotiate meaning.

### 5.2. *Orientations to literacy*

I don't mean to exaggerate the extent of uptake and meaning construction in this literacy event. Some students didn't appreciate the strategies Buthainah adopted or didn't succeed in constructing meaning. An NES student, Stacey, observed tongue in cheek: "I think that Buthainah has definitely gone above and beyond in letting her native voice ring through. At times though, I felt as if I was reading a discourse on the education system in Saudi Arabia. . . . we are interested in her version of it more so than a description with her voice appearing every so often" (PC, 10/22). What we have to realize is that meaning is not preconstructed or unitary in translanguaging. In writing that is co-constructed, meaning varies according to the participants and contexts. Mark understands this possibility and is open to such outcomes: "Buthainah may be making different meta-statements to different groups. . . . To me, a non-Arabic speaker, this quote is a beautiful collection of alien writing, fascinating but incomprehensible. It is a statement to me that there is something Buthainah understands that I do not . . . To Arabic speakers this quote could be an act of solidarity, an appropriative move perhaps bringing in a common quote and transforming it into something more" (PC, 10/22).

These realizations confirm that multilingual literacy is different from autonomous literacy. In autonomous literacy, readers believe that they can extricate a preconstructed content through objective and disciplined reading. In multilingual literacy, readers have to be ready for variable meanings from situated interpretation. There are other differences in the assumptions Buthainah and other students in this class bring to writing. The text has a social dimension – i.e., it is collaboratively constructed, with readers writing and writers reading, their roles fused. The text has an expanded temporal dimension – readers and writers are prepared to treat negotiation as "ongoing" (in Buthainah's words). They take meaning negotiation outside the text to include their interactions and talk around the text in their ongoing social interactions. The text has an expanded spatial dimension – i.e., participants are sensitive to the visual and aesthetic dimensions of the text. In these senses, multilingual literacy is multimodal – it accommodates oral and visual modalities that are kept out of autonomous literacy. Multilingual literacy is also performative – what readers do in reading is as important as what they understand. Translanguaging works most effectively in this orientation to the text. To prepare students to translanguage in literacy, we have to also encourage them to change their orientations to the text. If they

bring assumptions of autonomous literacy to this kind of writing, they won't appreciate multilingual strategies. In the context of Internet and digital communication, texts are indeed getting redefined in these directions by scholars in rhetoric and composition (see Nicotra, 2009; Ratcliffe, 1999).

In terms of the strategies adopted, it is evident that Buthainah is employing many of the strategies multilinguals adopt in face to face conversation, as indicated above. However, these strategies find different realization, given the modality of writing. There are different resources available for writers to adopt these strategies. For instance, Buthainah is able to exploit the "microecology of the text" (Creese and Blackledge 2010) to give more visual clues to her readers (through punctuation, font size, script, symbols and emoticons) for alignment and interpretation.

In terms of the negotiation of power, we see that Buthainah is very agentive. She is aware of power differences and adopts creative strategies to renegotiate footing and status differences with her readers. In some cases, as in the strategy of simulating the experience of multilinguals in learning English, she compels NES to look at communicative experience through the eyes of the multilinguals. Since such examples may give the impression that Buthainah is overly confident, I must also point out that she is very cautious and sensitive in other places. Buthainah's translanguaging becomes more bold, daring and creative in subsequent drafts. Compare the opening of her sixth draft (quoted earlier) with her second draft:

"Oh God! Give me more knowledge" –My education dictum through the years is a verse in the Quran stating: "قل ربّی زدنی علماً" (D2).

Here she starts with the English translation first and follows up immediately with the Arabic translation. In her sixth draft, not only did she start with the Arabic first, she also delayed her translation, and made the connection oblique, getting readers to do more interpretive work. Such examples also suggest that she is preparing her readers gradually for translanguaging, aware that not everyone is prepared for this kind of textuality.

The question of power brings us to the criticism that translanguaging is a threat to heritage languages. We find, however, from Buthainah's statements above that she considers translanguaging as a means for voice. She feels she is able to represent her values and identities more effectively through translanguaging. Hybridity can enable multilingual students to represent their complex subject positions that defy essentialization or stereotyping. I additionally discovered that even within hybridity, multilinguals have ways of indicating their desired codes and identities. Since Buthainah included very elaborate, lengthy and elegant lines in Arabic, but used only occasional and brief phrases in French, I asked her: "Most French words (unlike Arabic) are very simple words. Some

readers may say they don't serve any significant rhetorical functions in the essay (unlike the Arabic quotations). How would you respond? ” Buthainah said:

The reason that I did not include French poems or more French phrases is because French can not be compared to my Arabic language. The value of the Arabic language is much greater than that of French simply because it is the language of the Quran and the language of my heritage. To treat French the same way, it would be simply strange. In addition, when a reader is paying a close attention to my selection of French words and my selection of Arabic word, it would be apparent that what it was stated in the Arabic language contain significant meaning while what was stated in French can be easily replaced by English or Arabic. Does this make sense? (SR).

What we find is that Buthainah is able to indicate the different values attached to the different languages in her repertoire, conveying her greater investment in Arabic. This finding also goes against the view that translanguaging is a monolith, resembling Auer's (1999) fluid lects which don't have socio-pragmatic meanings.

### 5.3. *Toward assessment*

How effective is Buthainah's translanguaging? Are there signs that she is developmental? As we saw earlier, Buthainah's linguistic choices become more effective, daring and creative in successive drafts. She is exploring her footing and voice through several attempts. At times she displayed uncertainty about her choices. She gave different reasons for her parenthetical comments. First, in a stimulated recall interview she mentioned that she wanted to humor the reader. In a member check response, she mentioned that she wanted to give the readers more personal information through the asides. Later, she mentioned that she wanted to disarm readers of their stereotypes. Thus she clarifies her intentions and objectives through the writing process. She is also diffident about translanguaging. At the end of her third draft, she added a note to readers: “p.s. There is something in this essay that I do not like. I am not sure what it is– but I feel that this essay is different from everything I have done in the past (in an unpleasant way)” (D3). Such attitudes show that teachers have some work to do in giving students constructive feedback, channeling their linguistic resources in appropriate directions, or affirming their choices. It appears from Buthainah's experience that some students may be looking for such guidance.

Furthermore, we have signs that Buthainah is not fully in control of her text. There are inconsistencies in her usage. She transliterates the following

expression in three different ways: *ma sha allah*; Masha Allah; ma sha allah. When I asked her about these differences, she mentioned that they were mistakes, and her preferred usage was Ma Sha Allah. Similarly, there were spelling errors in other cases. I pointedly asked her about the choice in one case:

You misspell verses as versus. Since you have been very careful with your choice of Arabic and other stylistic devices in this essay, I was wondering how you would explain these spelling mistakes. Did you think these issues were less important? Did you think the readers will easily understand your meaning and therefore you don't have to worry too much about editing problems?

Buthainah replied:

I am quite embarrassed about this error (and another mistake below). I had multiple drafts of this essay, but did not notice this error. Of course, if I noticed it, I would have corrected it. I could have misspelled it, and the word document auto-corrected it. I was so engaged in developing the content that I did not notice it (SR).

What is interesting here is that Buthainah herself makes a distinction between error and mistake, indicating that teachers may have to help students identify them. Though I tried to pursue this distinction with Buthainah, I didn't make much progress in understanding her definitions of them. I provide some tentative definitions here: *mistakes* appear to be unintentional and unsystematic choices, such as the realization of Ma Sha Allah. However, when choices that are intentional fail to gain uptake, we can consider them *errors*. They can fail for many reasons. They may not have much rhetorical purchase. They may not also achieve success in encouraging readers to co-construct meaning. Buthainah's use of emoticons and smiley faces are of this category. Though she considered them part of her expressive repertoire, they were not identified by readers as enriching their interpretive experience. They may also be too informal for a university level essay. There are certainly more complex visual signs that can be used for expressive purposes. From this perspective, there is a social dimension to error. Errors occur when certain translanguaging choices are not effectively negotiated for meaning. Thus we can arrive at a practice-based or performative orientation to error, different from a norm- or form-based definition.

An example that touches on error but also relates to rhetorical effectiveness are cases of mixed metaphors and unidiomatic expressions. In her opening paragraph, Buthainah writes:

As I type each word in this literacy autobiography, storms of thoughts stampede to be considered and mentioned. Which experiences should I value, which shall I consider, and which should I ignore. . . . As I click the keys on the keyboard, an

illustration of my literacy development shunt me to continue my ongoing learning adventure from my academic communities, my home, and my life experiences. (D6)

I asked her: “The phrases I have highlighted . . . in this paragraph will be considered unidiomatic by native speakers. Did you have any second thoughts about using such phrases?” Buthainah replied: “I do not see why only bulls stampede – this verb can be used figuratively as well. I do not think that this is an issue of native speakers of English, I think that it is a stylistic choice” (SR). Though Buthainah insisted that she considered these choices creative, some readers have told me that they consider them inappropriate. There is a difference of opinion here and, thus, a failure of uptake. In such cases, it is useful that my questions help Buthainah reflect on her choices. My dialogical teaching approach helps Buthainah develop a reflective and critical awareness of her choices. This pedagogical approach is transferable to other teaching contexts as well. Though teachers may not always feel confident about correcting students’ choices, especially in cases where they don’t have competence in the repertoires of their students, their dialogical engagement with the texts through questions, feedback and reviews (in addition to peer review) will help student writers develop their translanguaging proficiency further.

## **6. Conclusion**

To conclude, I would like to discuss the implications of translanguaging for the academic and writing prospects of multilingual students. How does translanguaging help them? Scholars have pointed out that the promotion of one form of language – standard written English (SWE) – as the register for academic writing could alienate multilingual students and restrict their options for voice (Smitherman 2003). At the same time, we cannot say that anything goes, and allow students to adopt any registers and conventions they want in academic writing. A pragmatic resolution is to take the existing conventions seriously but find ways of bringing in one’s codes and values in a guarded and appropriate manner. This would be a strategy of resistance from within. It would gradually pluralize the academic text and facilitate more far-reaching changes over time. Some multilingual scholars are already adopting such a writing approach. I have published elsewhere the writing style of African American sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman (see Canagarajah 2006). She introduces African American Vernacular English for limited purposes in the overall framework of SWE. Her strategy is a form of translanguaging, and proves that academic conventions

are open to negotiation. I show such examples to students to suggest that they too can negotiate academic conventions to bring in their repertoires for voice. I emphasize that this kind of resistant writing should be undertaken with caution. Their choices should be rhetorically and contextually well motivated. Though students will often gain uptake and succeed, I also tell them that this strategy is risky. However, for many multilingual scholars and students, such a risk is worth the price for the eventual pluralization of academic literacy and classroom discourse.

## Notes

1. Though the notion of the native speaker has been deconstructed and rejected, I use the label here for want of a better term to distinguish students and subjects who speak dominant varieties of English.
2. Some of the typographical idiosyncrasies in the interview comments are explained by the fact that they were conducted through email.
3. For a more comprehensive list of Buthainah's strategies, see Canagarajah, forthcoming.

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