EMBRACING TRANSLANGUAGING IN ADULT ESL: THE ROLE OF BILINGUAL FACULTY

Jennifer Talley[1]

ABSTRACT: While pedagogical translanguaging has been shown to have substantive positive impact on student learning outcomes internationally, adult education has not yet widely embraced the concept. This paper introduces the idea of translanguaging, the concept of encouraging students to rely on their existing linguistic knowledge when learning a new language, and the many benefits it affords adult students who are learning English as a second or other language. The results of a mixed-methods study highlight the important correlations that exist between bilingualism and ESL faculty's pedagogical philosophies of instruction, understanding of the concept of translanguaging, participation in professional development, and receptiveness to new teaching methodologies. The study further describes common misconceptions about translanguaging and suggests some easy-to-implement translanguaging activities. While the United States adult ESL system remains entrenched in centuries-old teaching methodologies, this paper demonstrates how ESL programs can eschew antiquated English-only instruction in favor of culturally sustaining, additive ESL education that is contemporary and supported by research.

Keywords: translanguaging, ESL, bilingualism

The United States is rooted in culturally rich immigrant communities that historically embraced bilingual education. Centuries later, following fierce debate regarding the merits of English-only versus bilingual education models, bilingual education has once again been reinstated as a necessary component of an inclusive and effective K-12 curriculum. With many studies pointing to benefits afforded by bilingual instruction (Collier & Thomas, 2002; Cummins, 1981; Ramirez et al., 1991; Umanski & Reardon, 2014), the movement is slowly beginning to expand into the postsecondary environment, specifically in English a Second Language (ESL). One popular pedagogical approach has been translanguaging, a model in which instructors encourage the use of more than one language in the classroom and carefully design classroom activities with this goal in mind (García & Wei, 2014) to facilitate the acquisition of English as a second or other language. Content experts maintain that the lessons learned through decades of large-scale, longitudinal studies conducted in the K-12 context have not been adopted by postsecondary ESL programs as a matter of best practice (American Institute for Research, 2018; Auerbach, 1993; Community College Research Center, 2019; Hodara, 2015). Additionally, research exploring faculty perceptions of translanguaging has trended primarily in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, only recently expanding to US-based ESL instruction (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Dirkwen Wei, 2013; Lantolf, 2000). In recognizing that political and linguistic conditions in the United States do not mirror conditions in other countries, this study aims to address the substantial literature gap regarding faculty attitudes toward translanguaging in postsecondary ESL in the United States, specifically within the state of Illinois. The research questions guiding this study are a.) what is the relationship between faculty demographics, attitudes, and understandings about translanguaging, willingness to incorporate pedagogical

[1] Director of Educational Development and Assessment, Marquette University School of Dentistry, Milwaukee, WI 53202; jennifer.talley@marquette.edu

translanguaging, and actual incorporation of pedagogical translanguaging in the ESL classroom? b.) where did faculty understandings and attitudes originate? c.) what, if any, are the common misconceptions about pedagogical translanguaging? and d.) if faculty encourage translanguaging in class, which specific methods do they use?

Translanguaging

Cen Williams was the first to use the term translanguaging in the context of Welsh instruction in the 1980s. The term referred to a pedagogical practice in which students alternate languages for the purposes of reading and writing or for receptive or productive use. In this pedagogical methodology, translanguaging is the systematic and planned use of the students' two languages emphasizing input in one language with a response/output in another (Baker, 2011). Subsequent researchers have expanded upon this explanation and define translanguaging as more than a classroom-based pedagogical practice, but rather as a broader theoretical perspective about language learning (Creese & Blackbridge, 2015; García & Wei, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012). García and Wei (2014) describe the "translanguaging stance" as the understanding that students use their entire linguistic repertoires to make meaning, superseding elements of named languages. Hornberger and Vaish (2009) define it as "the possibility of teachers and learners to access academic content through the linguistic resources they bring to the classroom while simultaneously acquiring new ones" (p. 316). Canagarajah (2011) notes that emerging bilinguals naturally engage in translanguaging as a normal process during second language acquisition whenever they attempt to make meaning. Translanguaging also recognizes that students' use of two languages transcends simple code-switching, the notion that bilingual individuals simply switch back and forth between languages in the appropriate contexts, turning linguistic abilities off and on depending on the situation. While translanguaging exists as both a pedagogical stance and an orientation, a lens through which to view bilingual education, this study investigated translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy. When faculty employ translanguaging methodologies, students negotiate meaning and acquire new linguistic resources through the use of two languages, allowing students the opportunity to engage their entire linguistic repertoires in learning (Garcia et al., 2017; Hornberger & Vaish, 2009; Lewis et al., 2012). Contrary to other bilingual models, translanguaging in ESL requires instructors to create a safe, constructivist classroom environment that allows students the freedom to explore the many ways in which the first language can scaffold their understanding of English.

Proponents of bilingual education in higher education often cite translanguaging as a methodology that utilizes first language transfer to help adults learn a second language. Pedagogical translanguaging is characterized by strategic language planning that is necessary to ensure the languages used during educational activities are equally developed and have equal status (Baker & Wright, 2017). In practice, this might include input in one language (e.g., reading a text) with the output in another language (e.g. the discussion of the text) during the same teaching/learning activity. Baker (2011) goes on to identify potential educational advantages to the use of translanguaging and its importance as a pedagogical practice in higher education, which include deeper understanding of the subject matter, strengthening the weaker language, and helping the

integration of fluent speakers with those who are less proficient (p. 281-282). Additional benefits of pedagogical translanguaging in the postsecondary environment include: higher-level discussions, improved reading comprehension, improved participation, increased metalinguistic knowledge, persistence in language programs, and enhanced vocabulary acquisition (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Caroll & Sambolin Morales, 2016; Dirkwen Wei, 2013; Lantolf, 2000; Parmegiani, 2014; Tatar, 2005).

Methodology

The mixed methods approach to the study's research questions utilized both quantitative and qualitative analyses in a study design that a) involved the collection and rigorous analysis of both open-ended and closed-ended data, b) required the integration of the two forms of data in analysis, c) considered the timing of the data collection, and d) was informed by the theoretical frameworks that guide the study's design (Cresswell, 2014). The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design marked by the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data with separate analysis and subsequent integration of information in the post-analysis interpretation of results. The survey instrument followed the two-phase design outlined by Creswell (2014). First, a broad survey found in sections I and II generalized results to a particular population (in this case academic ESL faculty at Illinois community colleges), and phase two focused on open-ended questions. Further guiding the adoption of the mixed methods design was Grotjahn's 1987 explanation of hypothesis-testing vs. hypothesis-generating approaches to data collection and analysis. Whereas deductive quantitative approaches are generally employed in correlational and experimental designs, inductive qualitative methods are typically adopted for ethnographic exploration of a phenomenon among a sample population. As this study seeks to explore correlation as well as to identify attitudes toward a specific phenomenon occurring in ESL instruction, a mixed methods research model provides the optimal approach. Quantitative analyses were conducted in JASP used to generate descriptive statistics outlining trends via frequency distributions and to identify the directionality and strength of correlation between variables. Multiple regression provided a model for the outcome and predictor variables, which included demographics (age, gender, highest degree earned, years since degree was earned, employment status, years of experience, status as mono/bi/multi lingual, and frequency of participation in professional development), knowledge of translanguaging (measured by one quantitative and one qualitative survey item), and attitudes toward translanguaging (also measured by one qualitative and one qualitative survey item). Reliability was calculated through Cronbach's alpha, which was .71, falling within acceptable range (Carlson & Winquist, 2021).

The online survey administered through Survey Monkey was used to collect data from participants over a three-week survey period in the summer of 2022. The survey consisted of 17 total items including 13 closed-answer and four open-answer questions. The survey was conducted at eight community colleges in Illinois using snowball sampling (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). In this model, the survey was sent to program administrators with a request for them to forward the survey to the appropriate faculty within their departments. The total sample size after elimination of incomplete surveys

was 49. First, raw quantitative data was exported from the survey platform into Excel. The matrix Likert scale items contained within survey item number 13 were assigned values of 1 to 4, with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing agree, and 4 representing strongly agree. Next, correlational analysis was conducted to determine the strength and directionality of correlated variables. Correlation matrix plots provided visual representations of pairs demonstrating positive or negative correlations. In those cases in which a significant correlation was identified, multiple regression provided a model for the outcome and predictor variable(s). Open-answer responses to prompts were analyzed to determine themes in participant responses. While quantitative data relied on descriptive statistics to determine trends as well as regression to determine relationships between variables, written narrative responses provided insight into attitudes toward translanguaging (either positive or negative), an approach used in McMilan and Rivers (2011).

Results

Quantitative data indicated three statistically significant positive correlations were observed when using the significance threshold p=<.05 (Carlson & Winquist, 2021). Data indicated that status as a bilingual or multilingual speaker was significantly positively correlated to professional development activity [r(5)=.32, p=.027], suggesting that bilingual and multilingual faculty are more involved in professional development than their monolingual colleagues. Status as a bilingual or monolingual speakers was also positively statistically significantly correlated to pre-existing knowledge of translanguaging [r(5)=.288, p=.047], which indicates that those who have a greater understanding of a language other than English were more likely to have been familiar with the concept of translanguaging at the time of the survey. A positive, statistically significant relationship was also seen between degree of pre-existing knowledge of translanguaging and involvement in professional development activities [r=.353, p=.014], suggesting that those who often participate in professional development were more likely to be familiar with translanguaging than their colleagues who were less active in professional development. Descriptive statistics paint a picture of the average survey participant:

- Female (79%)
- Adjunct faculty status (46.94%)
- MA TESOL holders (65.31%)
- 49.5 years old
- 13.7 years of full-time teaching experience
- 79.6% report knowing nothing or little about translanguaging
- 59.19% report their programs do not encourage first language (L1) use
- 63.27% believe the L1 is beneficial in learning a second language (L2)
- 63% report that their attitudes about L1 use have become more positive over time
- 33.33% learned about the concept of pedagogical translanguaging from coursework
- 36.73% are monolinguals or have only beginner proficiency in L2
- 81.63% incorporate L1 in class “sometimes” or “never”

- 53.06% are not interested in learning more or feel they know enough about translanguaging

Regression determined that years of experience, bilingual status, PD participation, and prior knowledge cannot be used to predict actual use of translanguaging. However, existing attitudes toward translanguaging positively predicted actual use of translanguaging, such that more positive attitudes toward translanguaging as a natural part of second language learning increased the actual use of translanguaging in the classroom. Existing attitude was the strongest predictor of actual use of translanguaging in the classroom, with a positive, one-unit increase in attitude resulting in .411 increase in actual use in the classroom. ANOVA analysis indicates that the r^2 value of .006 yields a statistically significant model. Likewise, two independent variables can be used to predict effect on a faculty's willingness to adopt translanguaging: participation in professional development and years of full-time teaching experience. While a one-unit increase in professional development involvement results in .393 increase in willingness to adopt translanguaging, a one-year increase in teaching experience results in a decrease in willingness to adopt translanguaging of .023. ANOVA analysis indicated that the r^2 value of .0026 yields a statistically significant model.

In qualitative, open-ended responses, it became evident that faculty's own experiences learning a second language provided a lens from which they viewed language acquisition. These responses demonstrated that while coursework, professional development, and independent research on the topic were important when learning about pedagogical translanguaging, those who were themselves language learners expressed familiarity with the concept by having experienced it firsthand. Instructors commented:

- "As a second language learner myself, I've always found it helpful to have some sort of explanation in English, my first language."
- "When I was learning Spanish in high school and college, I had a Spanish-English dictionary with me at all times and I was constantly comparing my English language knowledge to what I was learning in Spanish."
- "It (translanguaging) was beneficial for [my mother's] communication, and I see it currently with my students." (in reference to the instructor's mother learning English as a second language)

Other findings indicate that there is a pervasive lack of understanding about pedagogical translanguaging. As indicated in open-ended responses, the most widely held misconception was that translanguaging requires the instructor to share the students' L1(s) and to engage in some degree of instruction in each of the L1s represented in the classroom. While this sentiment was shared by many faculty members, bilingual instruction is not a necessary component of pedagogical translanguaging. On the contrary, it can be implemented by monolingual faculty utilizing a variety of strategies that do not assume proficiency in a second language. Other comments that illustrated this misconception include:

- Translanguaging is only beneficial "when the instructor speaks the students' language well enough to effectively communicate the concepts being taught."
- "With students from over 50 countries in our program, several languages are

> spoken. I only know two languages, so I would not be able to incorporate most home languages in class."

In the qualitative responses, faculty also indicated a very strong preference for using translanguaging only in the lower levels, indicating the misconception that translanguaging at the advanced stages is less appropriate. On the contrary, Carroll and Sambolín Morales (2016) indicated that encouraging translanguaging at the advanced levels assisted students in engaging in more robust academic discussions and can encourage a more active role in class participation. Faculty tended to agree that use with beginners was warranted, but that when used in the advanced levels, use of L1 became a "crutch" and that "prolonged reliance on L1 would be "counterproductive." Another common misconception was that translanguaging can only be effective when more than one student in the classroom shares a common language. While pedagogical translanguaging may take the form of fluid transitions between languages amongst a group of students and faculty who share a common language, pedagogical translanguaging can also take place in linguistically diverse classrooms in which some or none of the students share a common language. Common faculty responses included the theme that translanguaging would not be appropriate in their ESL classrooms given the wide variety of languages represented by students. Faculty often voiced concerns about students feeling isolated or unable to participate during translanguaging activities if they did not speak the language spoken by the majority of students.

The most commonly stated strategy for incorporating translanguaging in the ESL classroom was translation. Translation was also commonly noted as a strategy to teach syntax and grammar, specifically at the advanced levels. To accomplish this, faculty encouraged students to compare and contrast structures and identify similarities and differences in expression and structure. Faculty noted the importance of translating grammar and syntax from the L1 to L2 to gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between structure, grammar, and expression. Faculty often cited using translation in class to accomplish administrative tasks such as ensuring all students understand directions or instructions of an activity or assignment. Less frequently, faculty cited the strategy of having students share language and culture with the whole class. Many faculty members recognized the rich cultural and linguistic composition of their classes as an opportunity to introduce translanguaging through language and culture sharing. For example, faculty may ask students to "share L1 vocabulary with the class to learn/clarify vocabulary," or have students "share phrases in their native language…as a way of opening up a discussion on different cultures represented in the classroom." Faculty also reported asking students "to share features, idioms, saying from their language" to raise intercultural and interlinguistic awareness and to foster an inclusive classroom environment. Perhaps one of the most controversial but frequently mentioned strategies employed by faculty in the classroom was the instructor using an L1 during instruction, a strategy commonly used in bilingual environments but less so in more diverse ESL environments. Most importantly, this study paralleled others that demonstrated that despite ideological support of the concept of linguistic interdependence (applying L1 to aid in the acquisition of English), faculty still demonstrated resistance to implementing translanguaging strategies in the classroom, a finding first reported by

Fallas Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri (2015). This common phenomenon presents a conundrum. Faculty may feel that their academic freedom to encourage L1 use is stifled by strict English-only policies (Burton & Rajendram, 2021). over 58 percent of faculty noted that their programs did not encourage students to reflect or use their L1 in the classroom.

Discussion

An understanding of the relationships between the study's variables provides a roadmap for administrators and faculty who wish to incorporate pedagogical translanguaging into their courses and/or programs. The findings of this study also signal that community college ESL faculty, on average, are not familiar with the concept of translanguaging. They believe L1 in language acquisition is important in learning a L2, yet there is a misalignment between ideology and practice as many do not actively incorporate opportunities for L1 transfer in their teaching methodologies. It also demonstrated that faculty have some degree of resistance to the term "translanguaging," perhaps because they perceive it to be synonymous with bilingual instruction. Dispelling the misconception that translanguaging requires bilingual instruction or that translanguaging can only occur in linguistically homogeneous classrooms is critical to gaining faculty support of the concept. As English-only philosophy is steeped in hundreds of years of US history, changing these antiquated attitudes will also be a gradual learning process. It remains clear from this study's findings that the most impactful steps programs can take to bolster faculty support for translanguaging are a) to instill in faculty the reality that L1 use is a natural part of language learning and b) to provide regular professional development. There are multiple ways to achieve these goals. One way in which ESL leaders can begin to shift the narrative to an additive approach to ESL instruction via translanguaging is by introducing the concept earlier, during MA TESOL training. The majority of the faculty participants in this study held MA TESOL degrees and had no knowledge of the concept, evidencing that it is not yet part of mainstream preparation for future ESL instructors. Secondly, professional development as sustained practice will keep faculty current and invested in the latest research and its implications for instruction. Combined, these two recommendations will produce well-informed ESL leadership who can disseminate the many benefits of translanguaging and advocate for an end to poor student achievement and progression in community college ESL. The overwhelming absence of courses addressing alternatives to English-only instruction is entrenched in MA TESOL curricula. In a review of curriculum at each of the five MA TESOL granting institutions in Illinois, none of the five programs required courses in bilingualism. Only two institutions offered elective courses in bilingualism, bilingual education methods and materials, and/or law and policies in language instruction. Without this introduction to bilingual education, graduate students are stripped of the opportunity to understand additive versus subtractive models of language instruction and are not encouraged to reflect regularly on how they can encourage a culturally reaffirming classroom environment. They are also oblivious to the groundbreaking work in bilingual K-12 that underpins pedagogical translanguaging. While students who are committed to learning about bilingualism relative to teaching ESL have the option to pursue cross-listed elective courses in other departments, such classes are not part of the core curriculum.

Resultantly, future ESL instructors find themselves unaware of new developments and the efficacy of alternative pedagogies to English-only at the end of their graduate programs. The preference for English-only is also present in admission requirements for Illinois MA TESOL programs. Two of the programs had no second language requirements for native English speakers. One program required just one semester of study of a language other than English, one required three semesters of a second language, and one required the equivalent of two years of foreign language study. All programs had clearly articulated guidelines for admission of non-native English speakers, however. Qualitative data collected in this study indicated that faculty often recognized the natural role L1 transfer plays in learning a second language through their firsthand experiences in studying a second or other language. Previous studies also point to the fact that bi/multilingual faculty have heightened awareness of the interplay of L1 and L2s (Ellis & Shintani, 2013). This study demonstrated that positive existing attitudes toward translanguaging was this single most significant variable impacting use of translanguaging in the classroom. Therefore, early exposure to the many benefits of translanguaging during the MA TESOL curriculum or in program-led professional development available to early career faculty may help faculty to develop positive attitudes toward translanguaging.

Of those respondents who reported having some familiarity with translanguaging, many reported learning about the concept in professional development activities such as conferences (29 percent). Additionally, previous studies have proven that formal, structured professional development in translanguaging does positively impact teachers' perceptions and understanding of the concept (Fernández Álvarez & Montes, n.d.; Gorter & Arocena, 2013; Menken & Sánchez, 2019). As such, programs that seek to incorporate a translanguaging approach to instruction are advised to prioritize robust professional development for all faculty. Bilingual faculty can promote the use of translanguaging by introducing the concept to their monolingual peers, leading internal professional development sessions, and/or by urging administration to reevaluate English-only policy. Institutional philosophies to professional development vary widely; some community colleges may impose mandatory professional development requirements for faculty with financial support for completing these requirements, whereas others may have no expectations and offer no support for attendance. In this study, overall, senior faculty expressed less interest in adopting pedagogical translanguaging than their less experienced colleagues. This finding suggests that those early career ESL educators with limited experience are most likely to be impacted by their professional development experiences. As such, programs should make a concerted effort to invest in and develop early career professionals who collectively tend to demonstrate more receptiveness to new pedagogical strategies that challenge the status quo.

To this end, programs should develop strategic plans that prioritize development by investing in professional memberships, sponsoring conference attendance and travel, hosting in- house development workshops, and fostering a culture of pedagogical inquiry amongst colleagues. Unfortunately, in periods of low enrollment and pandemic-related budget slashing, professional development is often one of the first "discretionary" expenses to be eliminated (Gappa, 1993). Rather than admit defeat in the face of

shrinking budgets, programs can implement cost-effective, creative solutions for providing valuable professional development. Those faculty with experience in translanguaging or incorporation of bilingual pedagogy in ESL may offer opportunities to have colleagues observe pedagogical translanguaging in action in the classroom or offer to mentor novice faculty (Borg, 2018). Improving faculty confidence through observation has been shown to increase faculty adoption of new classroom strategies and philosophies, and peer-led development is often well received (Borg, 2018). Simple departmental brown-bag sessions in which a common translanguaging article is discussed is recommended, and sessions in which faculty read an article about translanguaging and provide an informal presentation to their colleagues are free and foster a culture of inquiry (Borg, 2018). Faculty can also engage in directed reflection about how they might integrate translanguaging into their courses at the level at which they feel most comfortable (Borg, 2018). This may mean incorporating simple word walls for those who are less receptive to leading bilingual group projects presented in English for those who are more comfortable.

While bilingualism/multilingualism was not found to be a predictor of willingness to adopt translanguaging in this study, there was a statistically significant correlation noted between the variables. Faculty who supported translanguaging also shared that their rationale for their beliefs stemmed from their own language learning experiences. Similarly, other studies have established that bilingualism positively impacts faculty perceptions of translanguaging (Ellis, 2013; Prilutskaya, 2021). In considering professional development activities, it follows that faculty may benefit from periodic reminders of what it feels like to be a language learner, keeping in mind that 36.73% of survey participants reported being monolingual or having only a rudimentary understanding of a second language. Providing additional opportunities for ESL faculty to assume the role of students who are learning an unfamiliar language can in itself be a powerful professional development activity.

Hamman, Beck, and Donaldson (2018) provide faculty with a framework from which to approach the design of translanguaging activities. The acronym PIE provides the three principles of the framework: P (purposeful), I (inclusive), and E (enriching). Practical, easy-to-implement translanguaging strategies can be introduced by both bilingual and monolingual faculty. Some examples include:

- Reflection of vocabulary terms between languages and identifying common root origins, prefixes, suffixes, cognates, and false cognates.
- Taking notes in multiple languages.
- Planning activities that include input in one language and output in another.
- Using home language texts and videos to process content.
- Allowing use of bilingual dictionaries or translation websites and apps.
- Encouraging students teach words, phrases, and ideas in their home language
- Comparing/contrasting phonetics and syntax of languages.
- Grouping students according to home language for small group activities.
- Creating a word walls or vocabulary lists in English and the home language.
- Conducting research for class projects in the home language.
- Previewing content in the home language.

- Encouraging more proficient students to explain vocabulary and concepts to others in the home language (Celic & Seltzer, 2013; Mazak & Carroll, 2017).

Conclusion

The literature is replete with examples of ways in which an additive, translingual approach to ESL instruction can improve student outcomes in many contexts including K-12, EFL, and postsecondary. Additionally, findings from this study indicate that understanding of translanguaging and its incorporation into postsecondary ESL classes can be enhanced through early exposure to the concept and sustained professional development. This study confirmed that two independent variables can be used to predict a faculty's willingness to adopt translanguaging: participation in professional development and years of full- time teaching experience.

This study found a statistically significant correlation between bi/multilingualism and knowledge of translanguaging, though knowledge of a second language did not prove to be an effective predictor of either willingness to adopt translanguaging or of actual use of translanguaging in the classroom. This study did confirm, however, that faculty often rely on their own language learning experiences when considering how receptive they are to the concept of translanguaging. In this way, it can be determined that bi/multilingualism or, minimally, experience learning a second language, may assist faculty in understanding the value of L1 in language acquisition.

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