

Disrupting Linguistic Inequalities in US Urban Classrooms: The Role of Translanguaging

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Introduction: Context

The population of the United States has always been superdiverse, the result of its imperial designs and policies of ‘Manifest Destiny’ which required the enslavement of Africans, the submission of Native American communities and of the Mexican population of the southwest, and the attraction of white European immigrants to come to its shores, populate the growing territory, and work the land and its industries. But historically, the linguistic diversity of the United States has been mostly hidden from public view. Although the diverse sounds of African, Native

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American, Spanish, and immigrant languages have been present in plantations, different territories, and especially urban centers for a long time, these languages rarely exist in the social imaginary of the United States. With very few exceptions (e.g., the late-eighteenth-century up to the mid-nineteenth-century bilingual schools in English and German in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and the use of Spanish in schools in the southwest territories in the nineteenth century), languages other than English have been excluded from schools. At times, this exclusion has been carried out with legislation that has prohibited the use of languages other than English in education. But at least since 1923, when the US Supreme Court struck down state language-restrictive laws in 34 states and declared that understanding English 'cannot be coerced with methods which conflict with the Constitution' (as cited in Del Valle 2003, p. 37), more tolerant language education policies have been in effect (for more on the history of language education policies in the United States, see Wiley 2005; see also chapter 8 in García 2009).

The more tolerant language education policies of the twentieth century focused on the linguistic assimilation of all immigrants through English-only schools while paying little attention to the linguistic diversity of the children. Minoritized communities' language practices were simply ignored until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s created an impetus for these communities to claim a voice in society, one that could be expressed only with diverse language practices. Federal support for bilingual education came in 1968, when the Bilingual Education Act was passed. But spaces to educate using the diverse language practices of language-minoritized populations started to shut down as the United States became enthralled in the globalization of political and economic practices that accompanied the neoliberalism of the turn of the century. In supporting strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (see Harvey 2005), neoliberalism has left some spaces to educate for bilingualism, but only in the form of a 'model' called 'dual language' that does not name bilingualism, that always insists on separating English from the 'language other than English' (LOTE) and prefers to have half of the student population be speakers of English and half be 'English language learners.'

We argue here for an alternative education practice that privileges language diversity and brings back the voices of communities and children,

whatever those may be, in an attempt to ‘do bilingualism from the bottom-up’ (García and Sylvan 2011). In so doing, this practice, which we here call *translanguaging* (see Creese and Blackledge 2010; García and Li Wei 2014; Hornberger and Link 2012; Lewis et al. 2012a, b; Li Wei 2011; Otheguy et al. 2015), opens up spaces for diverse voices and content to be heard, advances social justice, and disrupts the privileging of English over other language practices. By translanguaging practices, we mean here the use of the learner’s full language repertoire in teaching and learning.

Translanguaging rests on the theoretical position that a bilingual speaker does not simply have two separate languages, since the concept of language does not have linguistic reality, although it exists in the world (and especially in schools) as a social and political reality. Instead, translanguaging poses that bilingual speakers have a language repertoire from which they select features to construct a discourse that fits the demands of the social reality, for example, the accepted languaging practice in schools (see García 2009; García and Li Wei 2014; Li Wei 2011; Otheguy et al. 2015). Thus, students are not simply ‘learners’ of a whole ‘second language’ but ‘emergent bilinguals’ who dynamically incorporate new features to their single linguistic system (for more on the use of ‘emergent bilingual,’ see García and Kleifgen 2010). As a pedagogical practice, translanguaging has the potential to open up multilingual and multidialectal spaces where the diverse voices of children are leveraged to learn, both within what are considered ‘monolingual’ classrooms and in spaces that are considered ‘bilingual,’ including those presently viewed in the United States as ‘dual language’ classrooms (see especially Palmer et al. 2014; and also Sayer 2013). Translanguaging is not a substitute for bilingual education but a disruption of the privileging of two standard languages at the expense of not leveraging the diverse language practices of children and communities to teach and learn.

This chapter focuses on two case studies of superdiverse classrooms with immigrant students who are considered emergent bilinguals. We first describe what happens in the two classrooms—one a primary classroom where students are mostly Karen speakers (a Sino-Tibetan language from Burma/Myanmar), the other, a secondary classroom that has a large number of recently arrived immigrant students from diverse countries.

That is, we focus here on two cases that are prevalent throughout the world and where bilingual education, as implemented in most contexts (see García 2009), may not be a possibility. Education in Karen has not been prevalent in the students' rural communities of Burma or in the refugee camps of Thailand; therefore, bilingual education for the Karen speakers in the US primary school is not feasible. The fact that students in the secondary classroom have so many diverse language practices does not make bilingual education viable. Translanguaging offers the opportunity in these 'English language' classrooms to use and leverage students' diverse language practices and to release their voices and engage them in learning rigorous content, that is, translanguaging opens up multilingual spaces within these supposedly monolingual classrooms. Each case study starts out by describing the school, for unless the school's leadership supports a multicultural and multilingual ecology, it would be difficult for a teacher to enact a translanguaging pedagogy. We then describe how and why the teacher leverages translanguaging in teaching, and its meaning for children as they learn. The case studies are then used to further reflect on theoretical and practical aspects of translanguaging classrooms (for more on this, see García et al. 2017).

Translanguaging in a Primary School

The School

Public School (PS) 45 International School is an elementary school in Buffalo, New York, whose diverse student body represents over 70 countries and 30 languages. Because of the heterogeneous make-up of the population, there is no official bilingual program. For those students classified as 'English language learners,' there are classrooms where students are taught in English through a 'structured or sheltered English approach.' Some students receive specialized support in English as a New Language in 'pull out' classes or supported by English as a Second Language (ESL) specialists in 'push in' mainstream classrooms. Although PS 45 officially provides instruction in English only, it makes great efforts to represent students' languages and cultures through the multicultural and multilingual ecology

of the building. All hallways are lined with student work, including a project done at the beginning of each year called 'All about me.' Completed by students in every grade, the project features a photo of each child as well as his or her country of origin, languages spoken, and personal information such as hobbies or favorite foods. There are also maps of the world illustrating students' countries of origin. In addition, major 'landmarks' in the school, such as the library, main office, and cafeteria, are labeled in English and the four most spoken languages at the school—Arabic, Burmese, Karen, and Somali.

Many of the students at PS 45 are refugees or children of refugees from the Karen state in Burma, and thus teachers and school staff are dealing with a range of issues from post-traumatic stress disorder to culture shock to extreme shyness and fear. To best address these and other issues, the school has partnered with local refugee organizations such as Journey's End (<http://www.jersbuffalo.org/>) to provide support and resources to students and their families. As a result of this collaboration, the school has been able to hire Karen-speaking teacher-assistants, referred to as 'academic coaches,' who work with teachers in classrooms.

PS 45 also has a spacious, inviting multilingual library, where teachers bring their students to pick out books and read with the librarian. The school has created a Karen Language Resource Room within the library, which holds books, cultural materials, and audio/video resources in Karen and about Karen culture.

The Teacher and the Classroom

Nicole Nichter, a third-grade ESL teacher at PS 45, came to teaching through her work with the refugee community in Buffalo. Her time spent as a volunteer with Journey's End was where, she says, 'I dug my heels in and grew some roots in the refugee community.' These roots led to her being hired as a teacher of ESL at PS 45, which served many of the children of the families with whom she worked. Her personal stake in the refugee community has made her a devoted teacher who works hard to foster strong personal relationships. She visits students and their families at their homes and invites them to her home. She constantly attends

cultural and social events around the city, immersing herself in the daily realities of her Karen students. To work even closer with these students, Nicole convinced the school leaders at PS 45 to create a homogeneous ESL class of emergent bilingual Karen speakers. Nicole knew that having a group of students who came from similar backgrounds and spoke the same language would allow her to engage in a pedagogy that would help students achieve proficiency in English without moving away from their Karen language and culture.

Nicole's pull-out ESL group contains ten students, all of whom are from the Karen ethnic group in Burma and speak Karen (for more on this Sino-Tibetan language, see Funk 2012). All students but one come originally from the Karen state, with one coming from the Karenni State and speaking also Karenni. In addition, many students also have varying levels of proficiency in Thai and Burmese because many were displaced to camps along the border with Thailand before they arrived in the United States. Nicole's ESL classroom is neatly organized, colorful, and inviting. There are teacher-made materials on the walls containing words and phrases in both English and Karen, and a Karen flag hanging in the front of the room. In this classroom, both teacher and students are engaged in a translanguaging pedagogy that challenges traditional teacher-student roles, leads to higher engagement and excitement about learning, and fosters the multilingual and multicultural identities of the students.

A Lesson

When PS 45 received a grant that enabled them to buy Karen-language resources, Nicole jumped at the chance to utilize Karen more formally in her classroom. Nicole came across Karen-language versions of *Aesop's Fables*. To get a sense of her students' literacy in Karen, she pulled several students from her ESL classroom aside and asked them to read excerpts from the fables. Not one student was able to read Karen, which did not surprise Nicole, as only about half of the students' parents are literate in the language and they have not received any instruction in Karen in the school. With all this in mind, Nicole decided that she would craft lessons

that leveraged students' ability to speak and understand Karen, rather than read and write it. She knew that starting with the oral language would help students engage with the fables and serve as a jumping-off point for developing their reading and writing in both English and Karen.

After getting translations of the titles of the fables in the Karen books, Nicole asked the librarian, Mrs. Keegan, to look for copies of *Aesop's Fables* in English. Together, they compared the titles of the Karen fables with the English fables and found five or six stories that lined up. With the help of a Karen-speaking academic coach, Nicole and Mrs. Keegan picked out key vocabulary words in English and Karen. They wrote out the words on small pieces of paper and taped the Karen into the English books and the English into the Karen books. Nicole also posted key words in both languages for each of the fables on a bulletin board in the classroom.

Because Nicole does not speak, read, or understand Karen, she asked several bilingual/biliterate members of the Karen community and their families over to her house for dinner. After cooking up a meal and setting their children up to play board games while they worked, Nicole explained to the adults what she had in mind. She wanted the adults to read the Karen fables, and she would use her iPhone and the app iMovie to record them. Then she would play the videos on her SMART Board for her students to listen to, in addition to hearing the same fable in English. The adults were eager to help and read the fables as Nicole recorded them. By the end of the process, Nicole had videos of members of the community—some of whom were family or family friends of her students—reading six different fables in Karen.

Once Nicole had the two versions of the fables—the Karen and the English versions—she went about planning how students would engage with the fables as they listened to them. Thus, before they read a fable, Nicole introduced a specific literacy skill to her students, such as compare/contrast, sequencing, or cause and effect. After being introduced to the literacy or language practice, Nicole took her students to the library where Mrs. Keegan read students a fable in English. As she read, she stopped at the key vocabulary words. Over the words she had written the phonetic transcription of the Karen words in Roman script. She then asked students to say the words in both English and Karen. Nicole and Mrs. Keegan framed this as an opportunity for students to teach *them* new words. In

addition to discussing key vocabulary, Mrs. Keegan paused throughout the reading to ask students to ‘turn and talk’ to one another in Karen about what they were hearing in English. After finishing the fable in English, Nicole brought the students back to her classroom where she gave them copies of the fable in Karen before playing the video of the fable being read. She explained to students that she would play the video twice and that the first time they should ‘just close their eyes and listen,’ and the second time they should follow along with the Karen text and look for the key words that they heard. Though students could not read the text, Nicole encouraged them to start making connections between what they heard and what they saw on the page. She also brought in the Karen-speaking academic coach to help students locate key words as they listened.

After hearing the fables in both English and Karen, students engaged in activities that encouraged them to draw from both versions of the story to make meaning. For example, after reading ‘The Tortoise and the Hare,’ students were asked to locate causes and effects within the story. First, Nicole reviewed causes and effects with the whole class in English. Next, she asked students to turn and talk to one another in Karen about causes and effects within the fable. Once they had shared their ideas with their peers, the students shared out what they had discussed in Karen and the academic coach would write out their ideas in Karen on the board. Students then copied the written Karen as they recorded moments of cause and effect on a handout. Thus, even though they could not read or write Karen themselves, students were able to see the ideas they shared orally written out in Karen. The end product of the lesson was a multi-modal, bilingual explanation of the causes and effects within the story, represented in both English and Karen and illustrated with students’ drawings of moments from the story.

The Meaning of Translanguaging for Students and Teacher

The use of translanguaging in Nicole’s lessons around *Aesop’s Fables* had a visible effect on students. Nicole explains, ‘The most noticeable [differences] were motivation and engagement ... total, 100% attention.’

According to Nicole, lessons given solely in English often ‘go over [students’] heads. They float by, they’re in outer space. They’re not really listening.’ In contrast, when students listened to the fables in English and Karen, they were more motivated to learn and listen because Nicole and Mrs. Keegan created a shared learning experience. The teachers’ use of Karen vocabulary in the context of an English literacy practice changed their role from passive listeners to active teachers and experts. When students were held responsible for teaching their teachers new words in their own language, they excitedly rose to the challenge. According to Nicole, these moments of role reversal were incredibly meaningful and established a ‘good bond’ between the students and their teachers. Nicole says, ‘When I incorporate translanguaging in this way, I notice how happy students are...they want to understand [the text] because they’re proud [of their language].’ It is this pride in being experts that leads to motivation and empowerment, which in turn leads to deeper engagement with and comprehension of the text.

When asked about what translanguaging meant for her as a teacher, Nicole said:

Translanguaging is a way to showcase how special [my students] are and what I feel as a person, not just as a teacher. It has given me the support that I need to do what I want to do with these kids. Before it was like, ‘*shh*, hush it under the rug, use English only, use the English version’...[translanguaging] is a defense, a support, for me to showcase who they are, make them feel special, and give me a chance to learn about them.

What Nicole expresses is what many teachers intuitively feel—that translanguaging is the natural and obvious, in fact the *only*, way to teach emergent bilingual students. Translanguaging enabled Nicole to develop strong, authentic relationships with her students and helped her align her social justice-oriented, humanitarian philosophy to her pedagogy. Through translanguaging, Nicole was able to be the kind of teacher she always knew she was—one that was devoted to connecting her students’ histories and lives to academic success in their new country. For Nicole, translanguaging is much more than a set of strategies that help her teach English more effectively. It is a way for her students and for her to be their

authentic selves. Translanguaging allows teaching to be, in Nicole's words, '...a heartfelt thing. It's something inside of you that makes you want to know more about [the students] and make them shine. It's something that you love.'

Translanguaging in a Secondary School

International High School at La Guardia Community College

International High School at La Guardia Community College (IHS @ LAGCC) is located in Long Island City, a neighborhood in Queens, New York. There are approximately 500 students, who hail from 60 different countries of origin and speak 52 languages. Founded in 1985, IHS @ LAGCC is the first of the International High Schools, a network of now 18 small, public district high schools in New York, California, and Virginia that serve recent immigrant emergent bilingual students. All of the schools are designed according to five 'core principles,' known as the Internationals Approach (for more on these types of schools, see García and Sylvan 2011). These are:

- Heterogeneity and collaboration
- Experiential learning
- Language and content integration
- Localized autonomy and responsibility
- One learning model for all

These principles are visible at IHS @ LAGCC in many ways, examples of which are:

- Students are not tracked in any way—they are heterogeneously grouped by language proficiency and academic preparation. At IHS @ LAGCC, 9th and 10th graders are grouped together in the same classes (junior institute) as are 11th and 12th graders (senior institute).

- All classes are predominantly organized into small collaborative groups of approximately four students each. The classrooms are set up to facilitate collaboration: students sit at hexagonal tables around which four to five chairs are placed. The teachers actively circulate listening to the conversations, answering questions, and probing students to go a little deeper when necessary. Most of the time these groups are heterogeneous in terms of academic preparation, home language, English proficiency level, but teachers also vary groupings to suit the needs of the project or activity in which students are engaged. At times students are grouped with others who share their home language or who all need to work toward a particular objective that they have not yet mastered while others are able to move on.
- Teachers are organized into teams of five to six teachers who are all responsible for the same group of 90 to 100 students for the two years that the students are in either the junior or senior institutes. Teachers are given time in their schedules to meet on their interdisciplinary teams every week to plan curriculum, conduct case management of students, plan trips, or engage in other collaborative activities.
- The curriculum is structured around project-based units through which students work collaboratively on solving a problem, conducting research, creating a model or other tasks in which they are authentically engaged with the content, and thinking skills of the various disciplines they are learning. Teachers often plan interdisciplinary units so that students are looking at the same topic (or aspects of the same topic) through multiple disciplinary lenses at the same time.
- All teachers are considered to be both teachers of language and teachers of content. There are no stand-alone ESL classes; instead, language development strategies and structures are infused throughout all of the content areas.
- At IHS @ LAGCC, students do not have a formal 'Native Language Arts' class because there are so many languages. Nevertheless, the use of students' home languages is strongly encouraged and classrooms are structured so that translanguaging inevitably occurs in all classes throughout the day. Students are encouraged to negotiate the material in whatever language they wish. Often texts at students' tables are in multiple languages or students are working on a text that is in English

with questions in English, but students are discussing their responses to the questions in their home language before responding in English. During class discussions, students translate for one another. Students are also required to submit a 'Native Language Arts' project as part of their graduation portfolio.

The Teacher, the Classroom, and a Project

Amy Burrous is an 11th- and 12th-grade Humanities teacher who has been teaching at IHS @ LAGCC since 2001. Amy has lived in New York City since 1997. Amy did not originally seek out to work with recent immigrant emergent bilingual students but accidentally discovered her passion for doing so. During her teacher preparation program, she was encouraged by a former mentor to do her practice teaching at IHS @ LAGCC because of her interest in alternative and urban education. For Amy, being immersed in this intercultural and multilingual population is the best part of teaching and living in New York City. She loves the excitement with which her students approach learning in a new language.

Amy's classroom is organized in a way to facilitate student conversation and collaboration, making it a natural setting for translanguaging to happen as well. The classroom is composed of 25 students who speak approximately 15 different languages. Her students are all in the 11th and 12th grades and have been in the country anywhere from one to six years. At student tables, there are a variety of resources (activity guides that include visuals and graphic organizers, texts in multiple languages, home language dictionaries, and electronic translators). On the walls are a variety of sentence starters that facilitate group discussion and clarification that students are encouraged to translate into their home languages as well.

IHS @ LAGCC has had a 'Native Language Project' as part of students' Graduation Portfolios for approximately 20 years. Although students are encouraged to write often in their home language throughout their time at IHS @ LAGCC, the Native Language Project provides a formal opportunity to do so. Part of the Native Language Project is writing a reflection that includes a linguistic analysis as well as students'

responses to questions on their use of the home language and its value. The faculty of IHS @ LAGCC wants to send students a clear message that they value bilingualism and multiculturalism and that the school community is enriched by the presence of so many different languages and cultures. Amy talked about the gift that students at IHS @ LAGCC have in being able to leave the school identifying so many different languages just by hearing them or seeing them written, and in being so open to other ways of thinking, talking, and acting. This flexibility of language and thought that students learn during their years at this school, according to Amy, opens the students up to many valuable opportunities.

A 'Native Language Project' on Taboos

Amy designed a Native Language Project around the concept of taboo in order to get students to develop a deeper understanding of, and tolerance for, other cultures and beliefs systems, as well as understandings of their home languages. Researching this topic also lent itself well to having students involve their families and communities with natural opportunities for using their home languages in a purposeful and authentic way. The project centers on having each student research, write about, and present a custom or practice that is taboo in his/her own culture or in other cultures. Students do so not simply in English or in home languages, but by using the different language practices in interrelationship with each other to make themselves understood as well as to understand themselves.

To begin the project, Amy had students sit with others from the same home country or region of the world to brainstorm any practices and customs they knew to be different in their home country and the United States in the areas of marriage, food, death, and birth. Students discussed freely using their home languages and English. Because students knew they would need to share the major points of their discussions with the rest of the class, they also worked together on translating into English their thoughts. Each group created a written poster in English and home language with some key examples of different customs and hung their posters around the room. All students then participated in a 'silent conversation,' walking around the room writing down comments and questions on post-it notes that they

stuck on the posters. Later, all groups looked at the comments and questions their classmates asked and chose a few to which to respond.

Amy then put up the word 'taboo' on a piece of chart paper and asked students to look up a translation of the word in their home languages. She then asked for various students to offer a definition of taboo in their own words in English. She wrote down the first definition given and asked other students how they would change the definition to be more precise. Once they arrived at a class definition, Amy had her students compare it to an official definition of the word in a dictionary to see if they had left anything out. She then posted the students' final definition on the chart paper. Each home language group then wrote the translation of the word 'taboo' along with a definition in their home language on a colorful card and posted the card around the poster so that each student's home language was represented.

Amy then asked for students to brainstorm the words, ideas, images, and examples they associate with the word 'taboo' in their home language groups. She then called on different students to share what they discussed with the whole class in English.

Amy created a word web at the front of the room with the word 'taboo' in the middle. As each group shared its contributions, Amy noted the various associations around the word taboo. Amy then asked the groups to go back to the original posters they created about differing customs in their home country/region and in the United States and to put a star next to any examples they had written about that were either taboo in the United States and not in their home country or vice versa. Once again, students were encouraged to discuss in any language.

Armed with basic information about taboos, over the next few days, Amy showed students various episodes from a National Geographic television series on taboos. Each episode focuses on a different topic (marriage, death, drugs, food, etc.). Each episode begins by showing the audience the map that highlights the part of the world where a particular taboo exists. The episodes also contain interviews with people from around the world about their customs, many of which are in languages other than English.

After viewing each of the episodes, students were grouped according to home language and country/region to discuss focusing questions that

they had been given. Amy then led a large group discussion in English in which members of each group shared the highlights from their small group discussions. Amy described the 'generative' power of having students discuss the taboos in their home languages with others from their home country or region. The discussions were animated, and students showed a deep understanding of, and interest in, the topic. Having seen multiple examples of descriptions of taboos from around the world, and having brainstormed with others from their home country or region, students were then prepared to choose the taboo on which they wanted to conduct individual research.

The actual research assignment contained several requirements that organically integrated the use of translanguaging. The first was that students conduct two interviews in their home language with family members or adults from the community. The assignment also called for the use of at least two home language sources, either videos or written texts. Students who didn't know how to read in their home language (or whose language was not written) had to rely on non-written texts. Some students used only videos and interviews, whereas others were able to incorporate newspaper articles, online texts, or textbooks.

One of Amy's goals in this project was to have students integrate their home language into their English writing or formal oral presentations. Students were required to incorporate quotes from their interviews or videos in languages other than English, whenever possible. Amy provided students with examples of how professional writers and orators incorporate other languages into their multilingual productions.

The final product for this project on taboo was written essays that contained some paragraphs written in English, some in home language, and some in which language features from both languages were present, for example, those that quoted from the interviews. Amy required that the parts written in the LOTE be checked and signed by someone who knew how to read and write that language or who could write the words phonetically in case of languages that were not written.

Amy was pleased with the final products written by her students. She found the writing authentic and interesting with strong evidence of rigor and thought. Amy had each student make a formal presentation of his or her research. Some examples were:

- A Chinese student who was new to English wrote about the taboo of eating dog. Because of his limited English, he was not able to do much writing in English, but wrote in Mandarin and found pictures to share in order to describe different dishes that include dog meat as an ingredient. He also included a reflection that showed an understanding of why the practice of eating dog is taboo in other places.
- A student from Peru wrote about the practice of eating Guinea Pig, which dates from the time of the Incas. According to Amy, students were initially somewhat ashamed of this practice, as it was associated with ‘country bumpkinness.’ The class had a conversation about how people in different countries eat different types of food that seem strange or distasteful in some places and commonplace in others. Students realized more and more that these different practices cannot be judged as good or bad, but grow out of a historical and cultural context that explains their existence.
- One student from the Dominican Republic wrote about cockfighting, which he had been directly involved with when he lived in the Dominican Republic. One of the home language sources he used was a sports broadcast from the Dominican Republic (showing clearly that cockfighting is treated as a sport in his country and not as something taboo). He was interested in finding out about the differences in the laws of the United States and the Dominican Republic and some of the cultural differences behind those laws.

Through this project the students gained much linguistic and cultural tolerance toward practices other than their own and developed great transcultural and metalinguistic awareness. The giggles and exclamations from students at the beginning that certain practices were ‘weird’ or ‘bad’ gave way to curiosity, open-mindedness, and extensive questioning of one another.

Translanguaging in Practice: Principles

Despite the fact that these classrooms are officially conducted in what is considered the ‘English language,’ these schools, and the teachers who design instruction, support another type of language use for teaching and

learning—what we have called translanguaging. Here we discuss the principles of schooling, teaching, and learning that a translanguaging pedagogy involve:

- A school-wide multilingual ecology
- Educators' stance as caring and co-learning
- Instructional design of relationships
- Students' deep engagement with learning

A School-Wide Multilingual Ecology

In the two schools here portrayed, the school leaders are conscious of the fact that education needs to adapt to the communities they teach. They understand the complexity of language practices in their school community and do not limit this awareness to two or three languages, but encompass all language practices. The school leadership has found ways to support a multilingual ecology in their schools, where all language practices are nurtured and developed, despite these not having an official space in multilingual instruction. That is, the schools do not teach the languages other than English explicitly, but nurture them and use them in education in ways that sustain the students' language practices in relationship with the new ones that they are acquiring.

In the primary school, signs are displayed not only in the Karen spoken by many of the students, but also in Arabic, Burmese, and Somali, the most numerous languages of the school. In addition, the school leaders have created and supported the 'All About Me' project, in which the country and the languages spoken by each child are identified. With 70 countries of origin represented in the student body, and over 30 languages, the school sees itself as a microcosm of the world and proudly displays its language diversity.

The secondary school sees itself as part of a network with an innovative educational approach that is centered on educating immigrant adolescents for whom English is a new language. Respect for the schools' multilingual ecology and the students' varied language practices has been the cornerstone of the work of these public international high schools. At IHS @ LAGCC, students are encouraged to work through their many

language practices, even when the product is expected in 'English.' A multilingual ecology is nurtured, so that the students' home languages are not only used in instruction, but also sustained and expanded through the students' own learning practices, despite the fact that teachers are not familiar with these ways of using language.

A school-wide multilingual ecology is most important if teachers are going to be encouraged to develop translanguaging pedagogies. Translanguaging requires a philosophical stance that cannot be carried out in isolation, but in a supportive context that understands its potential. It is to the educators' stance as caring for, and co-learning with, immigrant students who are emergent bilinguals that we turn to next.

Educators' Stance as Caring for, and Co-learning with

A translanguaging pedagogy needs a special type of teacher—one who cares deeply for her students and their learning, and one who is then able to turn this belief and caring attitude into becoming a co-learner. Both Nicole Nichter and Amy Burrous are totally committed to their students and their communities. They believe that teaching these immigrant newcomers is about social justice and building more equitable opportunities for them. But caring for these students goes beyond plain commitment; it also has to do with viewing their language practices through a different lens.

For Nicole, commitment to the Karen-speaking community and an attitude of learning from them certainly came before teaching. She had, as she said, 'some roots in the refugee community.' For Amy, it was her initial experience in teaching immigrant adolescents that nurtured her commitment to this population. What is striking about both teachers is that although they are outsiders, they see themselves as having 'roots' in the communities of practice of these speakers. And those roots enable them to go beyond the walls of the school. Nicole visits homes and engages families in helping her plan lessons, breaking down the walls between the community and the school. Amy plans assignments that bring the voices of the adults and families into the school, engaging the community in sharing their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al. 1992).

Both teachers know that part of their responsibility is to develop their students' new practices in English, but they also deeply believe that their students' new language practices emerge in interrelationship with their old language practices. Thus, they don't just '*shh*, hush it under the rug, use English only, use the English,' as Nicole expresses. Although Nicole doesn't speak Karen, she sees translanguaging practices as 'a heartfelt thing,' 'something that you love.' In many ways, Nicole's philosophy of language and teaching reminds us of Mignolo's (2000) concept of 'bilanguaging love.' Mignolo says:

Love is the necessary corrective to the violence of systems of control and oppression; bilanguaging love is the final utopic horizon for the liberation of human beings involved in structures of domination and subordination beyond their control. (p. 273)

Bilanguaging love means disarticulating the imposition of 'standard' colonial languages and liberating the language practices of subaltern populations whose voices have been silenced. Mignolo reminds us that this 'corrective' can happen only with love, a care that frees up language practices that have been constrained by colonial and oppressive education systems, thus conjugating them with other language practices. This is precisely the commitment that leads to translanguaging and that potentializes translanguaging. The linguistic features of the minoritized students' repertoire are released in the classroom. It is this liberation of different language practices, with their different histories and expressing varied ideologies, that makes students 'shine,' as Nicole expresses. Both Amy and Nicole act on their deep commitment to their students, as Nicole says, 'as a person, not just as a teacher.' Nicole and Amy are not just technocrats with specialized teaching skills; they are people who care.

Nicole expresses the second aspect of the teachers' stance when she says, 'It's something inside of you that makes you want to know more about [the students].' This stance, and that of Amy, clearly has something to do with what Li Wei (2015) has called 'co-learning,' the ability to be 'joint sojourners' in the learning activity (see García et al. 2017). Both teachers feel they are learning from their students. Nicole says it

explicitly: ‘Translanguaging ... gives me a chance to learn about them [students].’ In explaining how teachers who are co-learners design teaching activities, Li Wei (2015) explains:

The teacher would become a learning facilitator, a scaffolder, and a critical reflection enhancer, while the learner becomes an empowered explorer, a meaning maker, and a responsible knowledge constructor. (p. 169)

The next section describes how both Nicole and Amy design instruction in ways that empower students to be explorers, create meaning, and construct knowledge by building on what we call ‘instructional designs of relationships.’

Instructional Designs of Relationships

For the two teachers of the two classrooms profiled here, a translanguaging pedagogy is, as Nicole says, ‘a way to showcase how special students are.’ To do so, they enact a pedagogy of relationships—one that acts on the bilanguaging love that we discussed above. Whereas much instruction in classrooms today is of isolation—of languages, of subjects, of topics, of students, of teachers, of the school—a translanguaging pedagogy is one of relationships with others and with other things. Mignolo’s ‘bilanguaging love’ is inscribed into the pedagogy, building on relationships and collaborations with others, and among language practices and multimodalities. We start with identifying the designs of relationships among actors in the education enterprise and then discuss the designs that honor the relationships between semiotic systems of meaning-making, including language practices.

The translanguaging design of the lessons planned by Amy in the secondary school is clearly a result of the collaborative design of the International HS Network of public schools. At least three of their five principles speak of relationships—heterogeneity and *collaboration*, language and content *integration*, *one* learning model for all. Collaboration, integration, and ‘one for all’ are then put alongside the incredible heterogeneity of language and cultural practices that exist within the school.

García and Sylvan (2011) referred to this practice as ‘singularities within pluralities.’ That is, teachers have to look at the many different language practices in the school in both singular and plural terms. They have to adjust the teaching lens to think of the totality, without losing sight of the different idiolects of the students and of the many ‘ones.’ To do so, collaborative structures are needed that are capable of providing the ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ capacities that teachers need.

The lesson designs that we profile in this chapter are all done in collaboration with others—with other educators, with other speakers, with other community members.

Nicole doesn’t operate in isolation but relies on the collaboration with Ms. Keegan, the librarian, as well as with the Karen-speaking coach, to plan and deliver the translanguaging lesson. Nicole needs the language expertise of the Karen-speaking coach and the book knowledge that the librarian brings. In the secondary school, Amy works as a team with other teachers who are responsible for the same students. The lesson design is arrived at collaboratively, as the team discusses the activities of the ‘Native Language Arts’ project.

Both Nicole and Amy rely on collaboration also with the community and the families. Nicole’s relationship with the Karen community-based organization has been a key element in her teaching. She collaborates with them in all aspects. And she not only visits the students’ homes, but also plans for parents to visit her in her own home, as they eat and contribute to lessons together. This is possible because there is a great amount of trust between Nicole and the parents, established over a long period of time in the context of community. Nicole’s lesson design relies on parents who provide recordings of the fables in Karen and the Karen-speaking coach who helps align the Karen translations to the English versions. Amy, teaching in NYC and tending to 15 different languages within her high school classroom, relies on her adolescent students to be the bridge to their communities and families. Thus, she designs lessons where the communities’ funds of knowledge are an essential part of learning. In this way, she brings in the knowledge of the community into the classroom, including their language practices—knowledge and practices that are not represented in books, especially when the language practices of the students are not represented in writing.

Finally, students also collaborate with each other as co-teachers. This is very evident in the high school, where students are seated in small collaborative groups around hexagonal tables. The jigsaw puzzle design of lessons also maximizes collaboration. Still this jigsaw puzzle design is not artificial but created naturally as students work through their own home languages. Thus, not all groups have access to the same information, making it imperative that they collaborate to make meaning for the whole class, and also for the teacher. At the elementary level, this collaboration among students is especially evident in the 'turn and talk' process, where students are asked to dialogue about what the teacher has just modeled to the entire group. In this way, students are becoming co-teachers, as they discuss and raise questions with each other about the teacher's modeling and questions. The pairs of students maximize the messages and understandings delivered by the teacher in English.

But it is in maximizing the relationship among different signs and their modes of expression that the translanguaging design of these lessons demonstrates its greatest potential for meaning-making. A translanguaging instructional design addresses the students' use of all the features in their language repertoire, and not just simply those that are socially defined as English or the LOTE. That is, in some ways, a translanguaging instructional design constructs the linguistic reality that the dis-invention of languages (Makoni and Pennycook 2007) as whole autonomous language entities has deconstructed. Translanguaging corresponds to the linguistic reality of speakers' individual mental grammars constructed in social interaction, that is, to a state beyond what nation-states have claimed as 'languages' (Otheguy et al. 2015). By encouraging students to reflect on the nature of language as a social construction with real material consequences, and on the role of the nation-state and systems of control in that construction, students build the Freirian 'conscientiousness' needed to 'read the world' (1970). Students become aware of the systems of control and oppression that have been responsible for banning their fluid language practices in education. Both Nicole's and Amy's lesson designs work to release students' voices. To do that, they bring texts, scripts, images, videos, and all types of multi-modal signs and place them alongside each other. Students are expected to work with visuals and graphic organizers, images and videos, oral and

written texts in multiple languages, scripts and genres, dictionaries and electronic translators, as well as traditional school-based texts.

Nicole not only ensures that there are books in Karen alongside those in English but also develops her students' reading in Karen, a language they do not read and that she does not speak. By providing them with the phonetic transcriptions of Karen words in Roman script, students start identifying Karen words. At the same time, students share their Karen words with the teachers. In the secondary school, Amy encourages her students to conduct research on the web, using websites in different languages, with different modalities. Students then put these texts, as well as those derived from interviews with community members, alongside the English texts they have read. Whereas Nicole relies on pictures to accompany the reading of the fables in primary texts, Amy ensures the multimodality of the texts she uses by showing students the TV episodes on taboos, the topic of the lesson. Thus, oral and written languages are integrated, and images and texts interpenetrate each other, as students' opportunities for meaning-making are enhanced. This translanguaging design of the lessons then results in students' greater engagement with learning. This is the topic of the next section.

Students' Deep Engagement with Learning

A translanguaging pedagogy engages students deeply in the lesson. Nicole states that lessons in English only 'go over [students'] heads.' And yet, when she uses translanguaging, there is 'total, 100% attention.' Nicole continues by saying that when she uses translanguaging, she notices how happy and proud students are. Being engaged, motivated, and proud is precisely what Norton (2000) describes as 'investment' in language learning, the identity that will enable students to be successful not only in developing new language practices but also in becoming successful learners.

In the secondary classroom, Amy also describes the 'generative' power of discussions among students using translanguaging. Amy reports that students were 'animated,' and they showed 'deep understandings.' Furthermore, students were then able to carry this interest and understanding to the discussion conducted in English with the whole class, as

well as to the final written products, which showed, according to Amy, 'strong evidence of rigor and thought.' Translanguaging then is not only important for teaching, but it is most effective in deepening students' engagement and understanding of rigorous content.

Conclusion

Translanguaging in theory and in educational practice seems to point in different directions. Whereas in theory translanguaging signals a going beyond the social construction of national languages, and releasing the language practices of human beings, their personal idiolects, in societal practice, and especially in schools, translanguaging often acquires material substance as national 'languages.' That is, as a theoretical construct, translanguaging refers to the language repertoire of individual speakers. Schools, however, exist in the world, and in societies that have dominant and subordinate languages. Language education is then overtly manifested in what we have learned to call 'languages.'

The two cases in this chapter show how translanguaging can work in schools, and especially in schools that teach minoritized students in dominant languages. We cannot escape the privileging of standard national languages that schools impose. However, we can ameliorate learning for minority students if we encourage linguistic performances that are constitutive of who they are and that promote their investment as successful students.

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