

“I Don’t Let What I Don’t Know Stop What I Can do”—How Monolingual English Teachers Constructed a Translanguaging Pre-K Classroom in China

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Abstract

Guided by translanguaging pedagogy, this study examines how monolingual English teachers in a Pre-K school in China navigate between English and Chinese to construct a translanguaging classroom. Findings based on classroom observations and interviews reveal that, despite being constrained by their monolingualism, the English teachers enacted translanguaging in multiple ways creating three translanguaging components: translanguaging assistance, translanguaging assessment, and translanguaging showcases. Translanguaging assistance enables children to learn English with the assistance of their first language; translanguaging assessment evaluates children’s English language skills within a spectrum of multilingual funds of knowledge, and translanguaging showcases define strategic activities to unlock children’s full linguistic repertoires, activate their creative voices, and let their bilingualism shine. This study provides pedagogical guidelines that balance the goal of learning a language and developing children’s bilingualism through an iterative enactment of the three translanguaging components.

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INTRODUCTION

In English learning classrooms, pedagogies based on an ideology of monolingualism often treat the use of bilingual students' first language (L1) or codeswitching as inappropriate, insisting that learning English depends upon communication occurring solely in English. This practice is often based on code-separation dogma in language teaching, in which effective language teaching is presumed to rely on the exclusive use of the second language (L2).

Translanguaging has advanced the field of language education, especially English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) education, toward a multilingual approach. Studies have shown the benefits of a translanguaging pedagogy for learning among emergent bilingual learners (Duarte, 2016; Garza & Arreguín-Anderson, 2018; Vaish, 2018), and the importance of transforming teachers' belief systems to value multilingualism and language variation (Shi & Rolstad, 2020). The increasing number of studies emphasizing the importance of translanguaging pedagogy in ESL/EFL programs has created a need to explore the strategies monolingual English teachers can employ to implement translanguaging when they do not speak students' L1(s). It is particularly important to address this issue because of the growing disparity between the numbers of bilingual students and the very limited availability of bilingual teachers in English learning classrooms (Hansen-Thomas, Stewart, Flint, & Dollar, 2021). The same problem has plagued international schools in China because in these schools, English teachers, who are primarily from western countries, are typically monolingual (Cai & Hall, 2016). In addition, while prior research has shown that it is possible for monolingual teachers to incorporate students' L1(s) in the classroom (Daniel, Jiménez, Pray, & Pacheco, 2019; de Oliveira, Gilmetdinova, & Pelaez-Morales, 2016; Rowe, 2018), translanguaging extends beyond using the L1 to scaffold learning and emphasizes the development of bilingual students' entire repertoire (Li, 2011). In other words, from a translanguaging perspective, English teachers working in ESL/EFL contexts should not only use learners' L1(s) to teach English but should also seek to develop students' bilingualism.

Situated in an international Pre-K school in China, this study aims to understand how monolingual English teachers can construct a translanguaging classroom by placing children's bilingualism at the center of teaching English. The purpose of this study is to provide evidence of how monolingual English teachers can use translanguaging not only to help students learn a new language but also to develop

and elaborate their L1, thereby even more significantly expanding bilingual students' linguistic repertoires.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translanguaging Theory

Bilingual instruction has long used language mixing as a pedagogical approach; one popular lesson format in use since the 1960s is Preview-View-Review, where Language A is used to preview a topic, Language B is used to engage the topic, and then Language A is again used to review the topic. For example, teachers and students might use Spanish to introduce/preview a topic, then read/view an English-language text that provides detailed information, then discuss/review that reading in Spanish. Each part of a Preview-View-Review lesson presents new information; nothing is merely translated, which means that L1, L2, and subject matter thinking all become elaborated through these multilingual lessons. (See Ferlazzo & Hull Sypnieski, 2018.) Unfortunately, the hard work by bilingual teachers to promote students' bilingualism and biliteracy through multilingual pedagogical practices has been obscured and denigrated as part of anti-immigration backlashes in the US. (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Cen Williams introduced *translanguaging* in Welsh-medium education in 1994 to refer to “the planned and systematic use of two languages inside the same lesson” (Baker, 2011, p. 288). García (2009) and others developed it along *conceptual*, *pedagogical*, and *theoretical* lines of inquiry (MacSwan, 2017; Shi & MacSwan, 2019). Conceptually, it takes seriously Grosjean's (1989) observation that a bilingual is not two monolinguals in one, but a uniquely-talented language user whose languages each reflect the lived experiences of a bilingual speaker. Pedagogically, translanguaging champions children's L1 as a critical resource for L2 teaching and learning, while also capitalizing on its association with the more elite English-speaking students seeking fluency in additional languages (García, 2009; see Faltis, 2020 for historical antecedents).

As in other critical approaches (e.g., MacSwan & Rolstad, 2010; Wiley, 2005), translanguaging disrupts language hierarchies by focusing on how the language practices of minoritized communities become marginalized and address the inequities and symbolic violence that speakers confront (e.g., Li & Zhu, 2013). Translanguaging thus reveals the sociopolitical challenges that minoritized students face (Flores & García, 2013) and helps teachers create inclusive environments, laying a foundation for anti-bias pedagogy (Derman-Sparks &

Edwards, 2010; Rolstad, Swadener, & Nakagawa, 2008). Moreover, translanguaging validates students' bilingual identity (Sayer, 2013). Students' "identity repertoires" (Blommaert & Varis, 2013) are not merely emblematic but also psychological and performative. Translanguaging mirrors bilingual students' desire for identity affirmation and contests language ideologies that favor socially dominant languages.

These conceptual and pedagogical attributes of translanguaging have been widely accepted in the field of language education. However, in recent years, theoretical dimensions of translanguaging have evolved in some different directions, with contestation focused on the nature of bilingualism in society and individuals. The primary contrast may best be captured in historical terms, as *early translanguaging theory* versus *late translanguaging theory*, as suggested by MacSwan (2022a). Ofelia García's influential book, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*, conceptualized translanguaging as dynamic language use, but not as in competition with other traditional concepts in bilingualism such as codeswitching, first and second language acquisition, or language rights. In that early work,

translanguagings are *multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*. Translanguaging therefore goes beyond what has been termed code-switching ..., although it includes it, as well as other kinds of bilingual language use and bilingual contact. (2009, p. 45, italics in original)

Early translanguaging theory was seen as buttressed by codeswitching, borrowing, and other dimensions of language contact, as evidenced by the extensive and positive discussion of these terms and bodies of research in this early work, highlighting their sociolinguistic and pedagogical significance (García, 2009, pp. 48–50, 298–301). However, under the influence of post-structural/post-modernist work in language planning and policy (e.g., Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Pennycook, 2006), a *late translanguaging theory*, which "calls into question the very idea of multilingualism" (García, Flores, & Spotti, 2017, p. 8), emerged. This more recent theoretical development, which denies that *languages* exist at the community or individual level, is sometimes called *deconstructivism* (MacSwan, 2022a). Late translanguaging theory disparages traditional research in bilingualism and second language acquisition and insists that language users are speakers of individual languages (*idiolects*) rather than members of linguistic communities and that bilinguals have internalized linguistic systems in which their bilingualism is disaggregated and undifferentiated (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). For example, García and Li (2014) present harsh criticism for several language education researchers because they "still speak about L1, L2 and code-switching, signaling that there has not

been a full shift in epistemological understandings about language, bilingualism and education in the ways in which translanguaging points” (p. 62).

While early translanguaging theory has been widely accepted in the field, many critical concerns have been voiced about the deconstructivist turn and consequent rejection of important notions like L1, L2, and codeswitching. These and other concerns, for example, are raised by Auer (2022), Block (2018), Bhatt and Bolonyai (2022), Cummins (2017, 2021), Cook (2022), Edwards (2012), Faltis (2020, 2022), Gee (2022), Genesee (2022), Gort (2020), Grin (2018), Jaspers (2018), King and Bigelow (2020), Kubota (2014), Mackenzie (2014), HENDERSON and Sayer (2020), MacSwan, Thompson, Rolstad, McAlister, and Lobo (2017); MacSwan (2022a, 2022b), Marks, Satterfield, and Kovelman (2022), Martínez and Martinez (2020), May (2022), Nicholas and McCarty (2022), Tigert, Groff, Martin-Beltrán, Peercy, and Silverman (2020), and Wiley (2022), among others.

As alternatives to late translanguaging theory, MacSwan et al. (2017) and Cummins (2021), respectively, offer the *multilingual perspective on translanguaging* and the *crosslinguistic translanguaging theory*. The multilingual perspective on translanguaging accepts “language diversity as psycholinguistically real and socially significant, drawing on empirically-informed theories of language and society to challenge prevailing language ideologies which oppress and disadvantage linguistically diverse communities” (MacSwan, 2022a, p. 31). At the individual linguistic level, MacSwan et al. (2017); MacSwan (2022b) sees bilingualism as internally *integrated* in the sense that bilinguals have both shared and discrete linguistic subsystems. Cummins’ (2021) crosslinguistic translanguaging theory similarly “claims that bilinguals actually do speak languages, involving multiple registers, and effective teaching promotes translanguaging involving conceptual and linguistic transfer across languages” (p. 4).

Despite some differences between MacSwan’s and Cummins’ perspectives on academic language, both perspectives can be conceptualized broadly as “multilingual approaches” to translanguaging as they both accept the psychological and social significance of multilingualism. Importantly, as in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics generally, both views see languages as socially constructed and reject rigid instructional practices which insist on language separation.

In addition, while deconstructivists see “named languages” as objectionable because colonizing forces have sometimes used them to oppress (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006; García et al., 2021), the multilingual perspective emphasizes that language naming can also be used to *decolonize*, as in Indigenous language revitalization efforts (Nicholas & McCarty, 2022); that most named languages are not associated with

nation-states, and many (e.g., Yenish, Kurdish, Swahili) have no clear political homeland (Cook, 2022), and that language names are important aspects of meaning-making in codeswitching discourse (Auer, 2022; Bhatt & Bolonyai, 2022). Perhaps of greatest concern, erasing ‘named languages’ eradicate not only those associated with empires but also those associated with a vast terrain of linguistic diversity and the necessary fight against language prejudice and racism; the ontological status of these language communities must be *named* in order to mount effective advocacy (MacSwan, 2022a; Wiley, 2022). However, as in sociolinguistics generally, the multilingual perspective repudiates standardized language ideology, noting that it persists independently of whether or not one denies the existence of ‘named languages’ (MacSwan, 2022a).

Thus, in the present study, we adopt a *multilingual perspective on translinguaging*. We see translinguaging as consisting in “*multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*” (García, 2009, p. 45), or what Canagarajah (2011) has called “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (p. 401). Like Henderson and Sayer (2020), we “embrace an understanding of translinguaging that does not imply a single language system, but rather an evolving meaning-making repertoire with multiple systems and constant movement across different, intersecting, and continuously evolving linguistic and cultural conventions” (p. 218). As in early translinguaging theory, we see codeswitching in a positive light, and acknowledge with a long history of sociolinguistic researchers that “code-switching is a sophisticated linguistic skill and a characteristic of speech of fluent bilinguals” (García, 2009, p. 50). Thus, like numerous other scholars who find conceptual and pedagogical utility in translinguaging as a construct, the multilingual perspective adopted here permits us to access constructs like *first language (L1)*, *second language (L2)*, *L2 proficiency level*, *codeswitching*, and *multilingualism* as part of our theoretical resources supporting the empirical analysis presented below. Although translinguaging is relevant to people of all ages, our primary focus in the present study is on the language practices of young children.

Translinguaging Pedagogy

Cook (2001) noted that language pedagogies committed to language separation are incompatible with students’ multilingual competence, and reflect a biased view of students’ multilingual practices, including codeswitching. Turnbull (2018) points out that code

separation treats students as English learners rather than as emergent bilinguals with complex linguistic repertoires. In contrast to monolingual pedagogies that negate or neglect the complex linguistic assets of bilingual students, recent studies have shown that bilingual pedagogies foster L1 and second language (L2) learning and are beneficial for students' long-term academic achievement in L2 (Castro, Ayankoya, & Kasprzak, 2011). In a meta-analysis comparing English-only, transitional, and long-term bilingual pedagogies, the programs which used the most L1 were found to result in the highest levels of bilingualism and biliteracy (Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005).

Given these findings, English language education is called upon to reconceptualize its pedagogies to acknowledge a bilingual speaker's full linguistic identity and repertoire (Turnbull, 2018). This reconceptualization has led to an increased interest in translanguaging to capture dynamic language practices that can aid bilingual development. Translanguaging challenges the view of strict boundaries separating language use in teaching; it refers to the deployment of a "speaker's full linguistic repertoire" (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 14). Translanguaging scholars advocate pedagogies that acknowledge children's full linguistic repertoires and focus on their bilingualism rather than on separate languages.

Many studies have shown that translanguaging can be an effective pedagogical practice by making visible learners' linguistic and cultural practices, and leveraging them to enhance learning. Although conducted in various contexts, translanguaging pedagogy is particularly congruent with young children's organic learning (Kirsch & Seele, 2020; Velasco & Fialais, 2018). Translanguaging pedagogy "puts back the emphasis on educating the child bilingually, not just on teaching languages" (García, 2017, p. 258), and serves multiple functions; primarily, translanguaging fosters dynamic bilingualism and language development. For example, Latisha and Young (2017) reported that a teacher in France used Turkish words and concepts to show her preschoolers her appreciation for their cultural practices, helping children connect linguistic and cultural practices between home and school, facilitating their learning. Similarly, Palmer, Martínez, Henderson, and Mateus (2014) argued that translanguaging enables young children to develop languages for communication in different contexts. Leonet, Cenoz, and Gorter (2020) reveal how activating young children's prior knowledge through translanguaging increased their morphological awareness, which develops literacy, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Alamillo, Yun, and Bennett (2017) also showed that children demonstrated significant academic growth through translanguaging.

Additionally, translanguaging pedagogy helps children build relationships (Björk-Willén, 2007; Cekaite & Björk-Willén, 2013). Sanders-Smith and Dávila (2019) show how translanguaging helped preschoolers negotiate peer relationships through linguistic improvisation and accommodation. Such studies demonstrate how translanguaging helps bilingual children establish peer relationships, an important element in their learning environment.

Furthermore, early childhood translanguaging pedagogy helps foster cultural identity and promotes anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Based on their observation of teachers' translanguaging practices in a Hungarian-English early childhood classroom in New York, García-Mateus and Palmer (2017) explored the co-construction of identities of emergent bilingual children whose teacher embraced dynamic bilingualism. They found that translanguaging pedagogy empowered educational and language-learning opportunities and resulted in challenging language prejudice while developing bilingual identities. These studies show how, by using both English and their L1(s) in a balanced way, children develop an ethnolinguistic identity while increasing academic success.

Despite research showing the importance of translanguaging, many schools and teachers remain steadfast in their monolingual orientation (Menken, 2013). The challenges for translanguaging stem not only from teachers' insufficient understanding of theory or from the school's monoglossic ideology, but also teachers' limited bilingual competency, widely considered an obstacle to the implementation of translanguaging pedagogy. To overcome this challenge, previous studies have provided pedagogical strategies for monolingual teachers. For example, English teachers can prepare multilingual texts using online translation (Kleyn & Yao, 2016) or engage with students through co-learning (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2021). Although these studies show possibilities for monolingual English teachers to employ bilingual students' L1(s) through translanguaging for the purpose of teaching English, we argue that in a translanguaging classroom, the English teacher should not only use translanguaging to scaffold English learning but should also use their "English teaching" as a tool to expand bilingual students' integrated and holistic linguistic repertoires. To this end, drawing on data from four monolingual English-speaking teachers' translanguaging practices, this study aims to explore two research questions:

1. How do monolingual English teachers construct a translanguaging classroom in order to both teach English and develop children's bilingualism?

2. What strategies do monolingual English teachers use to enact translanguaging?

METHOD

Setting

This study is situated in an international Pre-K school called Concordia,¹ in an east coast city in China. The school has 15 classrooms, divided among three age groups: Year 2 classrooms contain 2-year-old children, Year 3 classrooms 3 year olds, and Year 4 classrooms 4 and 5 year olds. Fifteen children are in each classroom on average. Children of many different first-language groups are represented at the school, but children from Chinese-speaking homes and children from English-speaking homes constitute the two largest groups. Concordia's English-speaking teachers are from English-dominant countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom due to a shortage of English language teachers who are Chinese nationals.

Concordia operated initially in a strict English-only model. In 2016, with the rising popularity of Mandarin worldwide (Wang, 2018), Concordia decided to change to an English-Chinese² dual language approach. An international consultant, recruited to provide curricular guidance, introduced translanguaging as an approach to language teaching and learning, encouraging teachers to allow all children to draw on the full range of their linguistic repertoires. In the new model, each monolingual English teacher was paired with a Chinese-speaking paraprofessional, team-teaching to maximize students' exposure to both languages. The paraprofessionals, or aides, were emergent English-Chinese bilingual speakers and were able to facilitate communications between teachers and the Chinese-speaking students. In each classroom, the teacher and the paraprofessional interacted with children during the free-play time and carpet time to teach their respective languages, following child-led activities during the free-play time. Carpet-time activities include storytelling, show and tell, and phonics.

We chose Concordia for our study because the new school policy explicitly required teachers to implement translanguaging pedagogy, where teachers and paraprofessionals were required to teach in their designated languages without restrictions on children's language choices; students were encouraged to use any language they choose.

¹ The school and all participant names are pseudonyms.

² "Chinese" and "Mandarin" are used interchangeably in this study.

Participants

The participants include four English teachers, each in their own classroom teaching one age group or the ESOL group. Although there were many instances when these four English teachers applied a translanguaging approach with help from bilingual Mandarin aides, there were also many moments when the English teachers were teaching or interacting with children alone. This study focused on the occurrences when participants were teaching without facilitation from the Mandarin aides. All participants taught in a single classroom except Mariam, who taught in both Year 3 and ESOL classrooms (see Table 1). The participants are self-reported that they were monolingual English speakers because, despite understanding a few Chinese words, they could not communicate in Chinese.

Data Collection, Preparation, and Analysis

One of the authors, bilingual in Chinese and English, collected and translated the data. She used digital video recordings to document teachers’ and children’s naturally occurring participation in free-play time and carpet time. The observer remained in the background to minimize distractions to children or teachers. Overall, she documented ten storytelling and show-and-tell sessions and forty hours of free-play activities.

We also conducted ten interviews with the teachers to help us understand our observations of translanguaging practices. We invited teachers to reflect on the strategies and intentions behind their practices, asking open-ended questions, such as, “I saw you [doing x] in the class; can you talk about why you did that?”

Pearson, Albon, and Hubball (2015) emphasize caution when researchers are investigating another’s pedagogy. We kept the researcher’s positionality transparent to the participants when collecting data. We assumed that some participants might display an overly positive view toward translanguaging. We stressed our position as researchers, not evaluators who judge or reveal specific teachers’ teaching performance, opinions, or actions.

TABLE 1
Participant Information

Name	Age	Classroom	Nationality
Daniel	35	Year 3	Australia
Jean	25	Year 4	UK
Mariam	32	Year 3, ESOL	Australia
Sue	35	Year 3	Australia

The data were coded using NVivo software and analyzed using ethnographic content analysis, which offers a flexible yet “systematic and analytic” methodology (Altheide, 1996). The ethnographic content analysis enables the examination of data without pre-conceived categories, letting patterns and themes emerge. We first watched the videos and selected the moments showing teachers’ translanguaging practices (instances where both Chinese and English were spoken by teachers or students, or where only one language was spoken but another was mentioned). Next, we followed an inductive process to analyze and code the teachers’ translanguaging practices to understand the strategies they used. These codes included translation, teachers’ bilingual recasts of student talk, using small L1 groups, and teacher as co-learner. In the third step, we analyzed the functions of the translanguaging practices in the selected segments. These included, for example, efforts to promote engagement, clarify instruction, or maintain the flow of interaction. Interviews provided secondary data to discuss our interpretations of teachers’ intentions. Table 2 highlights sample codes for the function and nature of observed translanguaging practices. Finally, we categorized the codes to explore themes that reflect how teachers constructed a translanguaging classroom. We identified three themes: translanguaging assistance, translanguaging assessment, and translanguaging showcases described in the Findings section.

FINDINGS

Below, we illustrate how the four teachers overcame their monolingualism to transform English classrooms into translanguaging classrooms, both teaching English and developing children’s bilingualism.

TABLE 2
Functions and Nature of Translanguaging Practices

Samples of coding categories	Sample codes	
Functions of translanguaging practices	Translanguaging Assistance	Promoting engagement Clarifying instruction Managing activity Maintaining interaction flow Assessing learning
	Translanguaging assessment	
	Translanguaging showcases	Building relationships Affirming bilingualism
Nature of translanguaging practices		Teacher recasting bilingually Small groups Teacher as co-learner Translation

Combining class observation and interview data, we found that English teachers constructed translanguaging classrooms by creating three translanguaging components: translanguaging assistance, translanguaging assessment, and translanguaging showcases. We introduce the pedagogical function of each component and the strategies the teachers employed, through five examples that highlight how the teachers disrupted linguistic boundaries and generated authentic language learning opportunities.

(1) *Translanguaging Assistance*

We define translanguaging assistance as the sort of temporary scaffolding that help emergent bilinguals process and respond through their L1.

Translanguaging assistance primarily occurred during carpet time to facilitate English learning. [Excerpt 1](#) shows how Mariam implemented translanguaging during vocabulary time in ESOL class.

In this excerpt, Mariam wanted to teach the word *marble*. She let the children read the word, then explained it. She noticed four Chinese girls in the back, seemingly disengaged and talking together. Instead of requesting their attention, Mariam intentionally asked Xiaodi how to say marbles in Mandarin (line 6). By doing so, she intended to engage the girls in the lesson, assuming they were confused about what the word meant. Xiaodi knew what a “marble” was—he has a lot of marbles at home—but did not know the Mandarin word, so he described one (line 7). From Xiaodi’s description, Han translated *marble* into Mandarin, drawing Li’s attention. Li stopped

- | | | |
|----|-----------|--|
| 1 | T: Mariam | ((holds a flash card showing marbles)) It is a kind of stone. A special stone. |
| 2 | | Sometimes we have little holes on the ground ((using hand to mimic a small |
| 3 | | hole)) and we play with marbles. Put your hands up. Do you have |
| 4 | | something to say about marbles? ((Li and some other girls sitting in the |
| | | back are talking to each other)) |
| 5 | Xiaodi | I have a lot of marbles at home. |
| 6 | Mariam | You have a lot of marbles at home. How do you say marbles in Mandarin? |
| 7 | Xiaodi | ((shakes his head no)) It is a little round glass ball. |
| 8 | Han | dàn zhū!
[Marble] |
| 9 | Li | ((stops talking to other girls)) Oh, dàn zhū!
[Marble] |
| 10 | Mariam | Dàn zhū. Little tiny balls. They sometimes look like glass. You can play |
| 11 | | like this ((uses her thumb and index fingers to show how to play Marbles)). |
| | | You can hit. |
| 12 | Li | If you eat that, you could die. |
| 13 | Mariam | Right! If you eat it, you could die! |

Excerpt 1

talking and said “oh, *dàn zhū*” (oh, marble) and commented, “If you eat it, you could die” (line 12). Li had been disengaged, but Xiaodi’s description and Han’s translation helped her to bridge the gap between what she knew and what she did not.

In a non-translanguaging classroom, the teacher might have ignored the children’s L1 and insisted that they not use L1 vocabulary. However, based on Mariam’s understanding of translanguaging, Mariam aided the children’s comprehension through translanguaging scaffolding and captured their attention with the L1. She considered each child’s English capacity and initiated an opportunity for children to translate. Although Mariam did not know the word *marble* in Mandarin, through her initiation, bilingual children offered their various contributions (Xiaodi’s description, Han’s translation, and Li’s comment). Mariam used the children’s L1 as a valuable resource to bridge from the known to the unknown. As a result, learning and engagement were escalated through translanguaging assistance. Reflecting on the marble lesson, Mariam stated:

It was such an interesting, like, triangular conversation between these three, um, bilingual children, bilingual English/Mandarin children. And it really, to me, highlighted the different ways that those children can use their bilingualism to support, not only their own understanding, but others...and that, for me, I think, was the catalyst to see that, you know, I don’t need to be a Mandarin speaker to support these children because they can support one another.

Excerpt 2 shows how Mariam, after telling the story Mummy and Me, used small groups as a translanguaging scaffolding strategy to promote children’s learning.

In this segment, Mariam utilized the children’s Chinese skills to support language learning by alternating Chinese and English in small groups. Knowing that some students, such as the new student Yang,

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Mariam | I want you to have a think. What are some lovely things you do with your |
| 2 | | mummy? And make everything feel right. Make you feel really happy. And |
| 3 | | now you are going to turn to your partner. Tell your partner about it. And |
| 4 | | you can tell your partner in Mandarin or English. What do you like to do |
| | | with your mummy? Here you go. |
| 5 | Yang | ((turns to his partner Mat talking in Mandarin)) <i>Wǒ māma dài wǒ gēgē gēn</i> |
| | | <i>wǒ qù mǎi iPad</i> |
| | | [my mom took my brother |
| | | and me to buy iPad] |
| 6 | Mariam | (After the group discussion) Mat, what does Yang like to do? |
| 7 | Matt | Buy iPad. |
| 8 | Mariam | Buy an iPad. ((looking at Yang)) You go shopping together. ((Yang nods his head)) |

Excerpt 2

would experience difficulties conducting entire conversations in English (interview data), Mariam explicitly allows children to share in whatever language they prefer (line 4). In line 5, Yang said in Chinese that he liked going with his mom to buy an iPad. In line 6, Mariam asked Matt to report in English what Yang said, then repeated Matt's answer in English to reinforce the English input. In this segment, the alternating use of Chinese and English allowed Yang to participate without hindrance and increased Yang's learning opportunities when his partner and the teacher repeated his words in English.

The two examples above show that translanguaging assistance enables students to engage in tasks that are beyond their capability in the instructional language and can help them expand their learning opportunities. In these two examples, Mariam offered no Mandarin input herself; rather, she invited the bilingual children's support and the children helped each other. In her interview, she expressed her belief that translanguaging is not reserved for bilingual teachers.

I do get that comment from [monolingual English-speaking] teachers, you know, "I don't speak their language," or "I don't have time to look things up on Google Translate!" I say to them, just ask the child to tell it to you in their home language. Just say, just, "How would you say that in your home language?" For some children, just the process of articulating it, then they can go through that process of trying to help you understand that thing. I don't know how many teachers actually have taken that on board and tried it, so, yeah, that argument doesn't hold with me. "I don't speak all their languages!" [mimes Mariam]. I don't speak all their languages. But it doesn't mean there is no place for translanguaging in classrooms.

(2) *Translanguaging Assessment*

Translanguaging assessment is important in validating students' dynamic ways of language, made possible by holistically assessing the performance of bilingual students who are learning English. The excerpts below demonstrate how the teacher used translanguaging assessment to evaluate students' learning by allowing them to use their full linguistic repertoire.

During carpet time, the English teacher, Jean, told a story about a house. She wanted the children to identify items in a house, such as a *water tap* and *bathtub*. She asked the children to draw a house to share with her, with explanations. In [Excerpt 3](#), Lili, a 5-year-old Chinese girl, shares her drawing of a two-story house.

In this excerpt, Jean informally assesses children's learning through a holistic translanguaging approach. There are three important elements in the translanguaging assessment Jean employed. First, Jean

She patted Lili's head to show her affirmation.³ Then, she continued the conversation, recasting Lili's words to enhance English learning very naturally. For example, she said, "Oh, you have to climb the stairs" (line 20) after Lili said *pá lóutī* (climb stairs) with a hand gesture. The bilingual recast exposed Lili to the new word without negating Lili's contribution.

Third, during this informal translanguaging assessment, Jean expressed her recognition of Lili's bilingual skill and identity by becoming a learner herself. She asked Lili to teach her how to say the Chinese words (line 3, 9, and 18). She also asked Lili for pronunciation feedback, as a student might do (line 9). Her interest in Chinese created a relaxing, positive environment for the children. When Jean had difficulty pronouncing *pá lóutī*, Lili giggled, showing that Lili was proud of her L1 and was happy with her ability to serve as a Chinese teacher.

(3) *Translanguaging Showcases*

Unlike translanguaging scaffolding, which aims to teach English by relying on children's L1, the four English teachers strategically created time and activities for children to purposefully incorporate both languages. We define these creative periods and activities as translanguaging showcases. The idea of a translanguaging showcase is similar to translanguaging space, which is "interactionally created by the individual through strategic use of the social resources, including linguistic resources, that are available to them [bilingual students]" (Li, 2011, p. 1234). We use "showcase" instead of "space" in this study to emphasize another function of this translanguaging component: Letting children's bilingualism shine.

Translanguaging showcases occurred during carpet time and free-play time. Serenity consistently allowed the children to share all their linguistic knowledge during show-and-tell. Although her Mandarin was very limited, Serenity's translanguaging approach facilitated show-and-tell without interrupting children's bilingual practices.

Excerpt 4 is an example of how the children used their full linguistic repertoire in show-and-tell, and how Serenity welcomed and appreciated their abilities.

As in many Concordia classrooms, the children's English levels vary in Serenity's classroom. Yangyang expressed herself freely in English (Line 2 and 4) and Chinese (Line 7), whereas others, such as Bowen, used Chinese almost exclusively (Line 11, 13, and 17). However, because Serenity strategically created a space where translanguaging

³ In China, head-patting is a typical teacher response to show appreciation to children.

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 1 | Serenity | What are you going to tell us today? |
| 2 | Yangyang | It is an Elsa drawing book |
| 3 | Serenity | Wow. It is an Elsa drawing book! What do you like about this book? |
| 4 | Yangyang | I drew all the (...) with colors |
| 5 | Serenity | Look at this drawing that Yangyang has done. She has worked very hard to |
| 6 | | color the whole dress in purple! ((shows the book to the whole class)) |
| 7 | Yangyang | <i>Zhè yǒu yīgè huáng sè de</i> (shows another drawing in yellow) <i>Hái yǒu huángsè</i>
[There is a yellow one, a yellow one] |
| 8 | Serenity | <i>Huángsè</i> What is <i>huángsè</i> ? |
| 9 | Yangyang | This ((points to yellow in the drawing)) |
| 10 | Serenity | Yellow! |
| 11 | Bowen | ((jumps out of the circle)) <i>Wǒ yě yǒu</i>
[I also have] |
| 12 | Serenity | You also bought an Elsa book |
| 13 | Bowen | No, <i>Wǒ yǒu yīgè tángguǒ, Elsa tángguǒ</i> ((making a candy shape with his fingers))
[I have a candy, Elsa candy] |
| 15 | Yaya | Candy |
| 16 | Serenity | Oh! You have an Elsa candy, and you didn't bring to share with me?
((pretends to be sad and crying)) |
| 17 | Bowen | <i>Wǒ jiějie de</i>
[My sister's] |
| 18 | Serenity | Oh, it is your sister's candy! <u>Got it!</u> |

Excerpt 4

was appreciated, all children participated enthusiastically and followed the conversations, due to the collaboration between Serenity (in English) and Yangyang (in Chinese). Bowen jumped into the conversation in line 11, using Chinese to participate enthusiastically in the interaction. Serenity paid close attention to Bowen's language and gestures to include and expand his contributions in the lesson, while also learning a new Chinese word (*huángsè*) from him. After Bowen said, "*Wǒ yě yǒu*" (I also have), Serenity thought he meant he also had an Elsa book. Bowen tried to explain in Chinese (line 13) that he had an Elsa candy, not a book, which Serenity misunderstood. Finally, with Yaya's translation (line 15) and Bowen's gestures (line 14), Serenity understood that Bowen had an Elsa candy, and she was thus able to carry on the conversation. During show-and-tell, this translanguaging showcase provided opportunities for the interception, merging, and sharing of linguistic and other semiotic resources in communication. Serenity reflected:

My focus during the "show and tell" is on the children. I don't care what language they use, as long as they actively participate. You know, it is important to let them talk. I believe they learn a lot through talking. I learn a lot through their talk, too.

Teachers also created translanguaging showcases during the free-play time. Through conversations with children in their L1, teachers

demonstrated recognition of children's bilingual skills and established rapport with the children. **Excerpt 5** is an example of how Daniel invited 4-year-old Dongdong into a natural conversation in English by becoming a learner of Chinese himself.

Dongdong's English learning journey at Concordia had begun only 5 months before. According to Daniel, Dongdong is very shy and often plays alone. Dongdong cannot yet speak English, but understands much. The conversation occurred during free play, when Dongdong was alone, reading a book about dentists. Daniel reported (interview data) that Dongdong could not speak English, nor could Daniel speak Chinese; therefore, Daniel created a translanguaging showcase by switching roles. Daniel intentionally showed his appreciation of Chinese and positioned Dongdong as his Chinese teacher (line 1, 3, and 6), as Daniel constantly affirmed Dongdong's bilingual skills. For example, he said, "See? You teach me again!" During the second part of the teacher-student role switch, Daniel and Dongdong disagreed about how to say purple in Chinese (line 8-13). Daniel asserted that purple is *zǐsè*, but Dongdong had confused purple and red. In this conversation, Dongdong freely used his whole linguistic repertoire (English for understanding and Chinese for expression). He also received authentic English input and naturally produced English output (line 13).

Reflecting on this conversation, Daniel stated:

My Chinese vocabulary is so limited. It is very difficult for me to get the pronunciations right. But I don't let what I don't know stop what I

- | | | |
|----|-----------|--|
| 1 | T: Daniel | Dongdong, how do you say teeth in Mandarin? |
| 2 | Dongdong | <i>Yáchi</i>
[teeth] |
| 3 | Daniel | <i>Yáchi</i> . Wonderful! What else can you teach me? Let me see. How do you |
| 4 | | say to brush teeth? |
| 5 | Dongdong | <i>Shuāyá</i>
[brush tooth] |
| 6 | Daniel | <i>Shuāyá</i> ? See, you teach me again! Oh I remember we saw some purple |
| 7 | | water, I am gonna try if I can say it correctly. Can you turn back? Let's go |
| 8 | | to the page with the purple water. Here it is. Could that be <i>zǐsè shuǐ</i> ? What |
| | | is purple in Mandarin? |
| 9 | Dongdong | <i>Hóngsè</i>
[red] |
| 10 | Daniel | <i>hóngsè</i> ? I thought purple is <i>zǐsè</i> . Shouldn't it be <i>zǐsè shuǐ</i> ? ((pointing to a
purple color in the book)) |
| 11 | Dongdong | Oh, yeah. <i>Zǐsè</i> .
[Purple] |
| 12 | Daniel | <i>Zǐsè</i>
[purple] |
| 13 | Dongdong | Yeah! Purple water is not <i>Hongse de shuǐ</i> . Haha. I wrong. |

Excerpt 5

can do! [He pointed to the word wall and explained how children helped him to build it.] Kids like to be teachers. So I let them teach me and I use these opportunities to build a trust relationship with them. Daniel has a Mandarin “word wall” in his classroom (see photo 1). Whenever his “teachers” taught him a word, he wrote it on the wall. He said he could not remember all of them, but when he needed a word, he always modeled turning to the wall for help. Daniel said the children were proud of being his teacher and were excited to see on the wall all the words they had taught Daniel. Through reversing the roles of teacher and student, Daniel built rapport with Chinese-English bilingual children, appreciating their translanguaging, while also maximizing their English exposure.

DISCUSSION

This study explores different translanguaging components monolingual English teachers constructed during free-play and carpet time and the strategies used to create translanguaging classrooms. Our exploration of teacher-student interactions shows dynamic and responsive languaging practices that reflect teachers’ holistic view of bilingualism, and their skillful navigation across languages despite themselves being monolingual. The interviews reveal that teachers’ willingness to surpass the limitations of their monolingualism empowers their communicative skills, strengthens teacher-student relationships, and makes translanguaging possible. Our findings also provide evidence for enacting a translanguaging pedagogy that validates and develops bilingual children’s linguistic identities and entire repertoires, as well as achieves the goal of teaching English regardless of whether the teacher is bilingual or monolingual.

The data from the teachers illustrate that they constructed three translanguaging components, which we conceptualize here as translanguaging assistance, translanguaging assessment, and translanguaging showcases (see Figure 1). Translanguaging assistance gives emergent bilingual children the scaffolding required for learning. The teachers provided translanguaging assistance because they understand that bilinguals’ languages are never “balanced” and proficiency in each language varies. Translanguaging assessment means gauging bilingual children’s English performance holistically, using their entire language repertoire to evaluate and validate bilingual children’s dynamic ways of languaging. Translanguaging assessment connects all the various data points about how bilingual children use language for communicative and academic purposes (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). It provides teachers with a holistic understanding of what emergent bilinguals know,

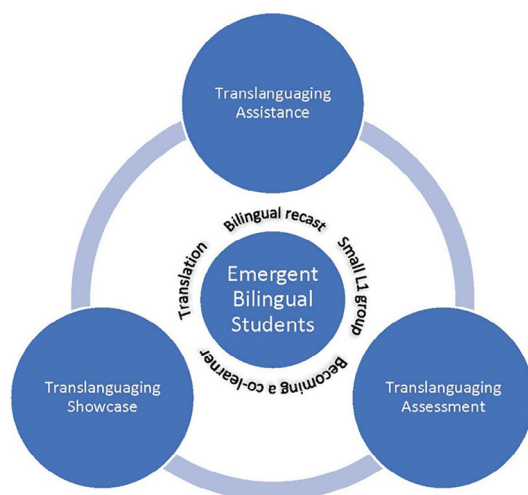


FIGURE 1. Translanguaging components and strategies.

and what they can express using only English vs. using their entire repertoire (Sánchez, García, & Solorza, 2018).

In a translanguaging showcase, bilingual children were not only given the freedom to make meaning by drawing from their personal history, attitudes, and cognitive and linguistic capacity, and generate their creativity and criticality (as the notion of translanguaging space describes), but they were also encouraged to display, even to flaunt, their bilingual expertise and creativity. Translanguaging showcases thus highlight bilingual children as performers on a special stage where they can present themselves as they truly are at that point in their linguistic development. During translanguaging showcases, teachers step back to become audience and learners. This role-shifting allows for the sort of authentic interactions that bilingual children encounter in their communities, where there is no deliberate teaching but only communication and meaning-making among interlocutors. These interactions allow teachers and children to build rapport, learn from each other, and challenge a linguistic hierarchy that, in China and the US, often positions English as a superior language.

The three components work together to center emergent bilingual students and to achieve García and Lin's (2016) proposed combination of "weak translanguaging" (for learning English) and "strong translanguaging" (acknowledging/developing children's linguistic repertoires). In this study, the teachers transcend their monolingual limitations and navigate between these two versions of translanguaging. During the translanguaging assistance phase, teachers initiated

translanguaging practices by asking children to deliberately use Mandarin, to support children's English learning, but not at the expense of Mandarin. This type of scaffolding is temporary or is perhaps a detour children take to reach their destination of learning English. Therefore, translanguaging assistance represents the weak version of translanguaging.

Translanguaging assessment was used mainly for assessing children's English skills with the assistance of their L1. However, the teacher also created a stage where children could freely display their bilingual skills. As [Excerpt 3](#) shows, Jean's admiration of Lili's Mandarin encouraged Lili to talk and perform in both languages without being aware of her language being assessed. Therefore, translanguaging assessment combines the weak and strong versions of translanguaging. In contrast, a translanguaging showcase demonstrates the strong version of translanguaging; its purpose is to let children's bilingualism shine. Through translanguaging showcases, teachers create translanguaging opportunities and then step aside to let the children take center stage and lead the conversations. A translanguaging showcase serves not to teach English, but to build a relationship (according to Daniel) or to enhance children's bilingualism through the languaging-thinking process (according to Serenity).

Although the teachers in this study could not codeswitch because they were not "fluent bilinguals" (García, 2009, p. 50), their teaching was not limited by their monolingualism; instead, they employed multiple translanguaging strategies, such as bilingual recasting, becoming learners, and using small L1 groups to make translanguaging pedagogy flow coherently through the three components ([Figure 1](#)). In so doing, teachers thoughtfully constructed a responsive translanguaging environment where students were encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire to learn English and were encouraged to use English in order to develop their linguistic repertoire, developing bilingual identities. These practices indicate the applicability and feasibility of translanguaging pedagogy even for monolingual teachers who do not speak their students' L1. The four teachers in this study did not let their linguistic limitations stop them. They trusted the transformative nature of translanguaging, privileging the children's bilingualism and its normative practices (Durán & Palmer, 2014), and they reserved their classroom space for bilingual development and authentic expressions of bilingual identity (Gort & Sembiante, 2015).

It is worth noting that although the strong version of translanguaging is not concerned with learning a specific language, it need not diminish students' opportunities to learn a language. In the above examples of translanguaging showcases, every child who participated

in the Mandarin activities was exposed to authentic English by talking to the teachers or peers. In Serenity's show-and-tell activity, although Bowen did not say anything in English, he was actively responsive to Serenity's English. In Daniel's case, Dongdong was able to produce an entire sentence in English toward the end of the interaction without Daniel's explicit instruction.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has important implications for early childhood language education. First, the lack of bilingual teachers requires monolingual teachers to employ practical strategies to enact translanguaging pedagogy. A common strategy is to employ translation software; however, monolingual teachers in our study expressed concern about such tools, citing insufficient time to use them effectively. Instead, they drew on students' dynamic bilingualism as a resource for teaching and learning. The strategies illustrated above can help monolingual teachers go beyond their linguistic limitations to construct a translanguaging classroom.

Second, although translanguaging can be natural and effortless, especially for young children, it takes deliberate effort for teachers to create translanguaging classrooms. This study shows that translanguaging moments did not occur by chance but through teachers' deliberate design, making translanguaging moments seem natural. Their translanguaging stance (García & Kleyn, 2016) helped them to translate translanguaging from theory to praxis. By centering children and their emerging bilingualism, they were able to devise and employ translanguaging strategies to meet children's needs. Additionally, their translanguaging stance empowered them to implement translanguaging pedagogy consistently without concern about their own monolingualism or whether translanguaging might limit their opportunities for teaching English. Consistent use of the various translanguaging strategies also enabled children's spontaneous translanguaging, because translanguaging had been established as the classroom norm.

Finally, this study shows that the three translanguaging components can combine to transform the classroom. Many translanguaging studies have focused on using students' L1 when acquiring another language (translanguaging assistance), and have rarely presented a collective project of translanguaging assistance, translanguaging assessment, and translanguaging showcases. In contrast, this study provides guidance for teaching a language (weak version of translanguaging) while developing children's bilingualism (strong version of translanguaging) through an

iterative enactment of the three translanguaging components (see Figure 1). We recommend that translanguaging classrooms push beyond the common practice of merely allowing occasional use of students' L1 because that is insufficient for implementing translanguaging. Instead, teachers should consider employing all three translanguaging components, allowing them to transcend their own language background and capability.

However, we caution that the present study is descriptive in nature, and has important limitations. It is not evaluative in nature, but rather reveals translanguaging strategies which monolingual English-speaking teachers found effective as a means of engaging preschoolers in language learning in an international setting where fluent bilingual teachers were not readily available. Further study is needed to better understand the effectiveness of the three translanguaging components documented here.

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