

Guest Editorial

Embracing Translanguaging Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Possibilities for Promoting Equity and Diversity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language ideology permeates all facets of language education, exerting its influence on policy formation, instructional methods, and interpersonal dynamics within educational settings. At its core, language ideology is intricately intertwined with the nation-state and colonial governmentality, associating the concept of “a language” with specific racial, ethnic, or national groups. This phenomenon manifests tangibly in the landscape of language education, particularly in the context of bilingual education in the United States—a legacy of social justice movements such as the Civil Rights Movement. However, ongoing debates persist regarding the effectiveness of bilingual education and its true beneficiaries, revealing the enduring impact of nation-state and colonial influences, albeit in evolving ways.

The prevalence of monoglossic language ideology and raciolinguistic ideologies, elucidated by various critical language scholars studying young children (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Flores & Rosa, 2015; García et al., 2011; Rosa, 2019) in early childhood language education settings in the United States, is reflective of larger societal trends. Children identified as English Learners are often subjected to labels necessitating additional language support, with educators assessing their proficiency in the dominant language upon school entry. Regrettably, these assessments have faced criticism for pathologizing the bi/multilingualism inherent in these children (Flores et al., 2020). The concept of “idealized” and “correct” language versions, influenced by socio-political constructs (Cushing, 2023), significantly contributes to sustaining inequality and reinforcing the dominance of certain languages (KC et al., 2023; Souto-Manning, 2016). This notion extends to academic English, acting as a biased construct that perpetuates racial and socioeconomic inequalities, thereby creating obstacles for

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racialized and minoritized learners in accessing specific subjects and employment opportunities (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Wei, 2022). This mindset is ingrained from early childhood years, influencing children and their families.

In response to these challenges, translanguaging emerges as a transformative approach. By challenging the biased framing of academic English and viewing it as a political construct rooted in raciolinguistic ideologies favoring dominant racial groups (García & Torres-Guevara, 2010; Wei, 2022), translanguaging takes center stage as a pivotal role. García (2009) defines it as “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (p. 45). García (2009) challenges conventional notions of bilingualism and bilingual education, urging a shift from viewing languages as distinct entities to understanding them as dynamic processes. Embracing this perspective can foster a learning environment that celebrates linguistic diversity and challenges traditional language categorizations. To address these issues, translanguaging pedagogy has proven effective in supporting the academic learning of linguistically minoritized students (Esquinca et al., 2014; Infante & Licona, 2021). It also serves to affirm their bi-/multilingual and cultural identities (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017) and challenges the dominant colonial and monolingual ideologies present in school curricula (de los Ríos & Seltzer, 2017; KC et al., 2023; Menken & Sánchez, 2019). It is a “political act focused on reinterpreting language as a decolonizing process and liberating the language practices” of linguistically minoritized children (García & Kleifgen, 2020, p. 556). In advocating for translanguaging pedagogy, we, as guest editors, emphasize the importance of 1) embracing linguistic diversity as a strength and 2) dismantling systemic barriers to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students.

2. STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY

As critical scholars, our interest in translanguaging in early childhood education stems from a deeply personal and academic perspective. English being our second language, we have experienced the pervasive influence of its perceived superiority over our home languages. This dynamic has not only affected us mentally and emotionally but has also fueled our commitment to critically examine the language power structures within educational settings.

Our positionality as early childhood education scholars and teacher educators places a strong emphasis on dismantling linguistic hierarchies and challenging the assumed dominance of English. We recognize the profound impact language has on shaping identities and voices, particularly among minoritized children. As ethnographers, we delve into the intricate ways in which language practices in the classroom influence the construction of identity and the expression of voice for these children.

Our special issue is not only an academic pursuit but also a personal endeavor to contribute to a more inclusive educational landscape. By advocating for translanguaging in early childhood education, we aim to empower minoritized children, acknowledging the richness of their linguistic repertoires and creating spaces where their voices can flourish. This commitment is rooted in our own experiences, recognizing the significance of language in shaping scholarly perspectives and fostering an equitable educational environment for all.

In seeking to further explore translanguaging pedagogy in early childhood education, we present articles that expand the understanding of this approach in the field. This special issue aligns with the aims of the *Journal of Education, Language, and Ideology* (JELI) in its international and interdisciplinary outlook. We explicitly intend to contribute to a wider debate in recognizing and responding to the diverse cultural backgrounds and languages of young children. Specifically, we seek to promote an inclusive discussion around linguistically minoritized children and the importance of embracing translanguaging pedagogy. This special issue of JELI intends to respond to these questions:

- How can educators and researchers actively promote translanguaging to embrace linguistic diversity and advance equitable opportunities in education?
- What are the nuanced possibilities and challenges associated with the implementation of translanguaging in educational settings? What insights can be derived regarding the potential of translanguaging as a tool for empowering young learners or influencing power dynamics?
- How can adults respect and acknowledge the children's use of translanguaging in their everyday lives in both academic and non-academic settings?

3. PRACTICES OF TRANSLANGUAGING

As noted, the concept of translanguaging embraces the notion that speakers utilize all features of their linguistic repertoire (García, 2019) in communication and interaction, regardless of whether these features appear to be conventional language or not. This approach empowers bilingual children to achieve linguistic liberation, creating a safe space for the deployment of their full repertoires. In this regard, translanguaging pedagogy emerges as a means to promote the translanguaging practices of bilingual children. In the first paper in this special issue, Yun, La Croix, and Kidd observed Korean heritage language teachers implementing translanguaging pedagogy to foster students' writing skills. The researchers examine heritage language teachers' pedagogical practices, incorporating translanguaging as a method for advancing the emergent writing skills of bilingual children. Their study reveals insights, such as the utilization of linguistic repertoires and multiple semiotic representations by students to express themselves, and the cultivation of emergent writing skills through authoring

experiences. Yun, La Croix, and Kidd emphasize the strategic integration of heritage language teachers' oral and written translanguaging practices into their pedagogical approaches.

While the language practices employed by bilingual children including other-than-language are merely recognized and legitimized as language in a monolithic classroom, studies have shown that language performances with multimodal (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 1997) and material (Hackett & Rautio, 2019) features play a crucial role in children's meaning-making processes. In the second paper, Yoon explores the translanguaging practices with embodied and material features of 4- and 5-year-old immigrant and emergent bilingual children. In this study, Yoon employs the framework of translanguaging theory through a posthumanist lens and the concept of performativity. Through this approach, this study examines how the translanguaging practices of linguistically minoritized children are intricately interwoven with various modes of communication and materials. It also delves into the unbounded dynamism of translanguaging, shedding light on how it serves as a catalyst for semiotic and material flows in performative ways, ultimately reconfiguring power dynamics within the classroom. By investigating the performative aspects of translanguaging, Yoon offers insight into the possibilities of translanguaging as a decolonizing approach and liberating action for linguistically and culturally minoritized children. We expect readers will gain valuable insights into the possibilities it holds as an empowering tool for these young learners.

4. TRANSLANGUAGING FOR CREATING RELATIONSHIPS

Translanguaging has been utilized as a framework to understand young multi/bilingual children's linguistic practice in formal and informal settings. Numerous studies have delved into how children make sense of the world by using multiple languages and illuminated how their translanguaging practice is meaningful for their cultural identity. These studies have challenged the belief in the benefits of English-only instruction or the deficit perspective on 'dual language learners' that is cloaked under the achievement gap (Serafini et al., 2022). For instance, in our third paper, Yu observed 10-year-old students from different linguistic backgrounds to explore how these children adeptly employ their linguistic and cultural repertoires to engage in language and literacy activities across various contexts. Yu considers the multifaceted role of multiliteracy in their learning, shedding light on their capacity to connect with the curriculum and instruction, as well as their sense of belonging within peer groups, classrooms, and their home countries. She employs innovative methodologies such as mapping and go-along interviews, revealing the intricate web of translanguaging practices embraced by these children, their yearning for their homeland, and the intricate web of belonging they weave. Through this study, readers will not only gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of children's literacy practices across multiple languages but also be urged to

further explore the potential and practical applications of translanguaging pedagogy in diverse classrooms.

This exploration of young children’s multilingual experiences delves into informal settings, including their homes, family environments, and early childhood contexts. In the final paper, Olğun-Baytaş and Lyu illustrate the multilingual experiences and translanguaging practices of a 2-year-old toddler. Employing the parent-as-researcher perspective, Olğun-Baytaş and Lyu delve into an emergent bilingual child’s journey of navigating languages he encounters in various contexts. The study illuminates the co-construction of a “translanguaging space” where this young child actively participates, forging a profound sense of belonging within their family context. In a world of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, this article underscores the importance of creating bi/multilingual environments for toddlers through the incorporation of translanguaging practices. This approach emphasizes exposure to each language, highlighting the pivotal role of translanguaging in shaping the linguistic and cultural development of our youngest learners. By delving into this empirical study, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics of language development in early childhood and be inspired to consider the broader implications of translanguaging practices in nurturing a sense of belonging, cultural appreciation, and multilingualism among our youngest generation.

We had the privilege of interviewing Angie Zapata, a dedicated scholar advocating for fostering justice-oriented language and literacy experiences among bi/multilingual/multidialectal children within educational settings. In this insightful interview, Zapata shares practical and valuable suggestions for teachers and educators working with children and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This special issue also includes one thought-provoking book review contributed by Hakans. This review critically examines translanguaging and its implications in classrooms, providing a nuanced understanding of how these practices intersect with pedagogies to promote justice. We believe that the interview and book review offer valuable insights into the ways in which translanguaging practices contribute to a more equitable and just educational experience.

In closing, this special issue dedicated to translanguaging pedagogy in early childhood education has illuminated the profound impact of embracing linguistic and cultural diversity in our classrooms. The articles presented here have showcased the transformative potential of translanguaging, not only as a pedagogical approach but as a vehicle for decolonization, empowerment, and liberation. As we conclude this exploration, we invite educators, policymakers, and researchers to consider the insights shared in these articles and to continue the dialogue on how translanguaging can shape a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape. The journey is far from over, but with these valuable contributions, we take a significant step towards fostering a learning environment where every child's linguistic repertoire is cherished and utilized to its fullest potential.

As guest editors, we express our genuine gratitude to the editorial team of JELI for affording us the invaluable opportunity to enlighten the significant contributions in this special issue. We hope that the discussion and debate on translanguaging in young children's contexts presented in this platform will enable us to work in the field of early childhood education to reframe young children's language practice and practically implement its approach for an equitable orientation in early childhood education for different stakeholders.

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