

*Research Article*

# Performative Translanguaging in a Monolithic Classroom: Decolonizing and Liberating Language Practices of Linguistically Minoritized Children

Yeojoo Yoon \*   
California State University, Chico

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*This paper explores the translanguaging practices of two young immigrant and emergent bilingual children while they create paper bags in a monolithic classroom environment in South Korea. Translanguaging is a prominent language practice employed by immigrant and emergent bilingual children. While scholarly attention has often focused on translanguaging as an alternative or additional representational tool used by linguistically minoritized children in predominantly monolingual environments, little is known about how translanguaging interacts with other materialities and*

*what emerges from these interactions. Drawing upon translanguaging theory with a posthumanist lens, I discuss 1) how the linguistically minoritized children's translanguaging practices are intertwined with other modes of communication and materials and 2) how the unbounded dynamic of translanguaging facilitates semiotic and material flows in performative ways and reconfigures power dynamics in the classroom. This study provides insights into the possibilities of translanguaging as a decolonizing approach and liberating action for linguistically minoritized children.*

**Keywords:** emergent bilingual children; linguistically minoritized children; performativity; posthumanism; translanguaging

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's multicultural and multilingual societies, classrooms often serve as microcosms of diverse linguistic backgrounds. While there is increasing interest in linguistic and cultural diversity in the field of education, linguistically minoritized children continue to face challenges in schooling (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Scholars have criticized that educational institutions have traditionally prioritized monolingual norms, favoring majority languages and marginalizing the diverse linguistic assets that minoritized children bring with them (Shin, 2017). Given the monolithic language ideology, the education system tends to privilege the majority language (Kirsch, 2020), and languages other than the majority language are often considered an obstacle to developing language and literacy skills (Flynn et al., 2021).

In recent years, a paradigm shift has occurred in language and literacy education, recognizing the potential benefits of embracing and valuing students' entire linguistic repertoire. The concept of "translanguaging" has emerged as a powerful framework that challenges traditional language boundaries and promotes the fluid use of multiple languages in educational contexts. Translanguaging recognizes that minoritized

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\* Yeojoo Yoon, Department of Child Development, California State University, Chico, 400 W. First St. Chico, CA 95929, the U.S.A., [yyoon@csuchico.edu](mailto:yyoon@csuchico.edu)

children’s linguistic practices are not deficits to be overcome but valuable resources that can enhance their learning experiences (Kleyn & García, 2019). As the term has the prefix “trans,” it refers to movements, connectivity, interchangeability, and fluidity in linguistic practices of bilingualism. Language and literacy scholarship has documented bi/multilingual children’s fluid and dynamic use of linguistic repertoires in schools, homes, and communities and the possibilities of translanguaging pedagogy as a way of recognizing and valuing the children’s linguistic assets in their learning (Infante & Licona, 2018).

With the emphasis on children’s entire linguistic repertoires, the account of multimodal and multisensory languages has been focused on language and literacy scholarship. The underlying premise behind multimodality and multisensory perspectives is that meanings are made through a variety of communicative and representational ways (Jewitt, 2008). Given that various forms of communication encompass text, image, sound, gestures, gaze, facial expressions, and movement, this perspective challenges the prevalent emphasis on grammar and vocabulary in early language development. Instead, it provides valuable perspectives on language as a multifaceted interplay of modes and sensory experiences influenced by culture and context (Hackett, et al., 2021). Looking beyond this viewpoint, recognizing the substantial impact of physical bodies and redirecting attention from language alone enables us to identify moments that may not inherently convey meanings. Emphasizing the existence of something “inside” language unrelated to meaning or signification, encompassing “non-verbal, affective, and sensory forces” (Hackett, et al., 2021, p. 3), my focus lies on the meaning-less moments children engage in, which extend beyond the confines of meaningful communication within an educational context. In this context, I found Barad’s (2003) concept of performativity useful in highlighting the seemingly meaning-less and disruptive play of linguistically marginalized children in a classroom setting. Children’s use of translanguaging can be viewed as one of these less meaningful interactions, particularly within a monolingual setting that attempts to establish fixed language-outcome relationships. Yet, adopting a performative understanding of language challenges the idea that words hold significant power to merely represent preexisting things (Barad, 2003).

There is increasing scholarly attention on translanguaging practices and pedagogies, and they often focus on translanguaging as an alternative or supplementary way of expression employed by linguistically minoritized children. Research has extensively explored the translanguaging practices of young children, emphasizing its adaptable use across two or more languages (Flynn, 2021; Kirsch & Mortini, 2023), connectedness to play, stories, and beyond text (Seltzer et al., 2020), and pedagogical possibilities (Gort & Ponier, 2013; Kirsch, 2021). This perspective of translanguaging is commonly associated with individuals whose native languages are marginalized (Vogel & García, 2017), and scholarly discourse often portrays translanguaging as an embodiment of these children’s linguistic practices and identities. However, there is limited understanding of the

interactions between translanguaging and other material aspects and the outcomes that arise from these interactions.

In this study, I aim to delve into the phenomenon of translanguaging through a “performative lens” (Barad, 2003) among linguistically marginalized children in an early childhood classroom. I seek to understand the translanguaging practices of young immigrant and emergent bilingual children, specifically four- and five-year-olds named Victoria and Mariya (all names are pseudonyms), and the semiotic and material flows with other bodies, including human and non-human bodies, through a posthumanist lens (Barad, 2003). This approach allows us to shed light on the often overlooked and unacknowledged moments that carry more meaning for linguistically marginalized children. Ultimately, I propose that recognizing the material and performative aspects of translanguaging is a way to recognize their entitlement to a sense of vitality, belonging, and acknowledgment of their existence. This represents a liberating and decolonizing approach to those children in the classroom.

## **2. TRANSLANGUAGING AND LINGUISTICALLY MINORITIZED CHILDREN**

With a multilingual turn (May, 2013), applied/sociolinguistic scholars have focused on “superdiverse” linguistic environments that come from increasing globalization and mass migration across the globe (Vogel & García, 2017). In an attempt to understand the speech patterns of bilinguals, scholarly focus has been directed towards the phenomenon of code-switching—a distinctive alternation between named languages. The idea of code-switching assumes that there are separate language systems and individuals draw codes from the two different reservoirs and learn while they excerpt from each system (Otheguy et al., 2015). Code-switching is typically understood as bilinguals’ linguistic performance, which refers to switching between two or more different linguistic codes that are undertaken with named languages, such as Russian, Korean, and English.

Yet, there is criticism that viewing bilingual language practices within bounded and separate language systems possibly prescribes the discourse of the limited linguistic capability of bilinguals through “double monolingualism” (García & Kleifgen, 2020, p. 557). In contrast, translanguaging scholars propose perspectives on understanding the unitary linguistic repertoire of bilinguals that allow them to use their own repertoire to enhance their meaning-making potential (García & Kleifgen, 2020). It draws scholarly attention to the increasingly dynamic human interactions and the notions that languages are mobile resources embedded in social, cultural, political, and historical settings (Blommaert, 2010, p. 2). This view brings the idea that bilinguals’ linguistic resources are drawn from a unitary language system, instead of separately switched between named languages (Kleyn & García, 2019). This idea highlights the dynamic and

fluid repertoires of bilingual children drawn in their language practices, which is known as translinguaging.

Based on critical pedagogies and critical race theory, scholars question the prevailing beliefs in monolingualism and dominant discourse of linguistically minoritized children as inferior and deficient (García et al., 2017; García & Otheguy, 2019; Kirsch, 2020). The perspectives are rooted in the characterization of these individuals as possessing two linguistic systems that are incomplete. This perception arises from viewing their linguistic repertoires as distinct entities, leading to an assessment of the children as not enough. This framework perpetuates a historical discourse of languagelessness, implying a lack of proficiency in any language utilized by these children (Flores et al., 2020). Adopting a translinguaging perspective becomes pivotal in mitigating such assessments, as it empowers children to engage their full linguistic repertoire, transcending the limitations imposed by viewing languages in isolation. Within translinguaging spaces, individuals from linguistically minoritized groups can access the same privileges afforded to the dominant monolingual population. This paradigm shift not only challenges the prevalent deficit-oriented narratives but also fosters an environment where the diverse linguistic resources of the linguistically minoritized children are recognized, valued, and leveraged to their full potential. In this sense, the translinguaging perspective offers a renewed understanding of those children's language practices, learning, and schooling, and decolonial potential in education.

### **3. TRANSLANGUAGING AS MATERIAL AND PERFORMATIVE TRANSLANGUAGING**

Recognizing the fluidity and interconnectedness of translinguaging practices with other modes of communication, such as visuals (Ollerhead, 2019), bodily movements (Blackledge & Creese, 2017), spatial repertoires (Canagarajah, 2018), and social semiotics (Pennycook, 2017), the translinguaging theory has performed as a seminal way of understanding and representing bilinguals' dynamic language practices. Sociolinguistic scholars emphasize that the multimodal nature of language, such as gesture, prosody, facial expression, and body movement, enhances language comprehension, creating more meaningful contexts for both speakers and audiences (Skipper, 2014; Vigliocco et al., 2013). Despite the fact that language has been historically viewed as the only way of meaningful communication, as language and literacy scholars (e.g., Gallager et al., 2019) point out, other-than-language, such as non-verbal, sensory, emotional, moving, and materialized accounts produce meaningful moments in communicative interactions and relationships. The exploration of dimensions beyond language enhances our understanding of the intricate and dynamic language practices of children.

Considering the focus on language, it is crucial to recognize the role of the body and materials in language practices and communication. In the philosophical tradition of the

dualism of mind and body, particularly in Cartesian theories, language has been valued over the body (Lenters & McDermott, 2020). The binary of mind/body permeates educational discourses and creates hierarchical relationships between language/body, language/materiality, and intellect/sensation (Murriss, 2020). Language is traditionally regarded as representing inherently pre-constituted meaning. However, as highlighted by Leander and Boldt (2013), drawing upon the perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), it is imperative to recognize that “texts are not ‘about’ the world; rather, they are participants in the world” (p. 25). Consequently, in the context of children’s practices within educational settings, households, or any other environments, language assumes the role of artifacts intricately linked to these practices, rather than merely describing them. It becomes evident that certain aspects of practices extend beyond the realm of representation through text and language. Embracing non- or post-representational modes of thought and methodologies facilitates a departure from the hierarchical interplay between language and meaning (MacLure, 2013). By viewing language as bodily practices (Kuby & Rucker, 2020) and recognizing the materiality of language (MacLure, 2013; Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2012), the conceptualization of language can be expanded. When children draw, narrate, move, and express through their bodies (Wright, 2019), and when children read through and with their bodies (Jones, 2013; Leander & Boldt, 2013), their bodies, language, and materiality of the things they interact with are not separated. Rather, the active engagement in each other’s actions generates intensity, excitement of emergence, and moment-by-moment meaning-making.

In accordance with posthumanist scholarship, this study focuses on the materiality of translanguaging, which entangles with other communicative modes and affords vital forces and movements. To address the emergence of aliveness and vitality along with translanguaging, I follow Barad’s (2003) posthumanist notion of performativity, which incorporates material, discursive, social, scientific, natural, and cultural factors. The concept of performativity has been explored by scholars including Foucault (1980) and Butler (1993). Foucault highlights how power operates through discipline and normalization, while Butler focuses on the performative nature of gender, challenging fixed identities. Barad (2003) expands the concept to include the performative nature of matter itself, emphasizing relationality and blurring subject/object, words/things, and discursive/material boundaries. She believes that all bodies, including human and nonhuman bodies, come to matter through performativity entailing forms of agency.

In this study, I look at the performativity of translanguaging among linguistically minoritized children. Adopting the agential approach to translanguaging illuminates the intricate ways in which translanguaging practices intersect with bodily refrains, sensory experiences, modalities, and material objects, contributing to the production of complex formations. In this context, it is crucial to recognize that translanguaging extends beyond being solely a discursive practice; rather, it embodies material-discursive dimensions. As articulated by Barad (2003), discursive practices transcend mere linguistic expression, serving to “define what counts as meaningful statements” (p. 819).

Consequently, translanguaging becomes a phenomenon characterized by dynamic possibilities, shaping the parameters of meaningful communication through its entangled relationships with both human and nonhuman bodies.

Notably, this perspective offers a decolonizing approach to minoritized children’s translanguaging, learning, and schooling. As García (2019) states, historically, “language has been used as a tool of domination, conquest, and colonization” (p.152). In a monolingual context, such as schools, the dominant language asserts its supremacy, perpetuating monolingualism as the norm, which results in the marginalization of linguistically and culturally diverse minority children. Within this framework, children who speak languages other than the majority language are often viewed as lacking proficiency in the majority language and are seen as needing correction and education. Posthumanism challenges the binary distinctions between human and non-human, mind and body, and subjects and objects, rejecting the idea of supremacy inherent in these binaries. The supremacy attributed to language reinforces the notion that children’s rhythmic, rhizomatic bodily expressions with objects are often deemed problematic in the classroom. As Hackett et al. (2018) point out, there is a tendency toward disapproval and rejection of the materiality of language, resulting in an attitude bordering on revulsion towards the language habits of marginalized groups. In educational settings, minoritized children’s bodies, in particular, tend to be devalued, and their embodied expressions are often punished and considered to be fixed (Boldt, 2021). Within this context, the language practices of linguistically and culturally marginalized children, which involve deploying all features of their repertoires, including translanguaging and embodied languages, are often overlooked or not officially recognized as meaningful. In this regard, this study offers a new perspective on translanguaging, which liberates linguistically minoritized children from the discourse of inferior and deficient learners in school settings.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Context**

#### **4.1.1 Koryo-Saram Children**

Since the 2000s, the South Korean government has recruited labor and marriage immigrants via a variety of channels due to the country’s fast industrialization, labor shortage in low-paying manual professions, growing gender imbalance, and declining fertility rate (Kim-Bossard, 2017).

The nation has actively promoted multiculturalism in response to the rising number of immigrant families and children, also known as “damunwha (multicultural)” families and children, in an effort to control these new populations who come from racially and

culturally different backgrounds from the local population. One of the immigrant groups recently increasing is Koryo-saram.

Koryo-saram refers to a group of ethnic returning migrants who, in generations past, fled Korea during the Japanese colonial times (1910–1945), but who have recently returned to their ancestral homeland in order to pursue more stable employment and higher education. They share similar social environments with many other young immigrants, yet they phenotypically resemble many Korean youngsters. They differ greatly from other populations as a result of their social liminality (Turner, 1977). The South Korean educational system classifies Koryo-saram children as “jungdoikguk (migration in the middle of their lives)” children, a subgroup of refugee children, children from marriage-immigrant children, and other foreign-born foreign children (Chae, 2019). The languages and cultures of the Koryo-saram children differ greatly from those of other South Korean children, although they have a similar ethnic heritage. The participants in this study were born before their families relocated to South Korea, like many Koryo-saram children living there today. In particular, Victoria and Mariya’s parents mainly spoke Russian at home. Having relocated to South Korea during their youth, the bulk of their linguistic and cultural resources come from Kazakhstan and Russia, their countries of birth. According to studies on young Koryo-saram immigrants, scholastic accomplishment, schooling, cultural acculturation, and language acquisition are all challenges for these children (Kim, 2016, 2018; Song & Yoo, 2020).

#### **4.1.2 Language and Literacy Education in Research Site**

The social and cultural discourse of multiculturalism in South Korea is heavily entwined with racial hierarchy and ethnic homogeneity (Watson, 2012), which is deeply rooted in the long-standing discourse of Koreanness (Seol, 2005; Yoon, 2023). When the notion of Koreanness comes to education, it creates deficit ideas about immigrant children who are forced to prepare for school by learning the Korean language and literacy and conceptualizes the children as having deficiencies that need to be rectified because of their diversity and “lack” of Korean language skills (Ahn, 2013, 2015). It also exacerbates the discourse of “others” toward immigrant families and children and influences those children’s schooling and educational practices.

In the Sunshine classroom, as in other typical preschool classrooms in Korea, the definition of literacy is dominantly Korean. English holds the position of a second language or a foreign language that students can learn. Although the preschool is located at the heart of the Russian-speaking community, both the preschool and its classrooms adhere to a curriculum and pedagogical approach focused on teaching the Korean language. Although the immigration policy for young children released a “multicultural workbook” for students speaking languages other than Korean (Ministry of Education, South Korea, 2020), and it has a version in Russian, it is only implemented by a few, selected preschools across the country. As I learned in later

informal interviews with the teacher, the teacher did not have any support for professional development for teaching multicultural children or children who speak languages other than Korean. The category of “proper” students in the classroom identifies those who speak, write, and read Korean. The latest revision of immigration policy released from the Ministry of Justice, South Korea (2018) states that schools can enhance immigrant children’s capability through targeted education and social integration programs, including teaching the Korean language and culture. Throughout the one-hundred-page description of the policy, immigrant children and families are envisioned as human resources of the future that are required to “nurture global talents for future society” (Ministry of Justice, South Korea, 2018, p. 55). While the children and families’ cultural and linguistic resources come from global contexts, non-Korean ways of speaking, interacting, and learning are not validated as resources for the future of the country. The Sunshine classroom’s Korean-only instruction, pedagogical practices, and narratives empower the Korean language and Koreanized traditions.

## 4.2 Data Collection

In this paper, I focus on data excerpted from a larger ethnographic case study, which investigates young immigrant and emergent bilingual children in a preschool in South Korea. I stayed in the preschool classroom for four to five hours during each of my two to three weekly visits for seven months in 2020. I followed three children who spoke Russian and Korean, and at the same time, I also collected data when they engaged in play, communication, or other relationships with children in the classroom. I also traced the trajectory of materials that played a significant role in generating vital relations, emotions, feelings, unexpected movements, and power. This paper offers two short vignettes as data examples with which to consider translanguaging as material that is entwined with multimodal and multisensory modes of communication.

As a participant observer (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998) seeking to delineate the experiences, activities, and worldviews embedded within the lifeworld of the participants (Dennis, 2009), I positioned myself adjacent to the children. I engaged in their play upon invitation, and offered them access to my research materials, such as field notes or a pen. As a middle-class, educated Korean woman and a native Korean speaker, not proficient in their home language, Russian, I recognized the potential influence of power dynamics and personal biases that could exist toward immigrant children living in Korea during my fieldwork. To mitigate the impact of these biases and power differentials, I employed various methods to evaluate (Hagues, 2021) my field notes, responses, and the perspectives and angles captured in the videos I recorded. This involved cross-referencing their responses and behaviors through video analysis and field notes, establishing a rapport with the children to foster a friendly dynamic (Corsaro, 2003), and employing triangulation by consulting with colleagues to critically assess the underrepresented experiences. To prevent my own biases from shaping perceptions of the Koryo-saram children, I focused on faithfully documenting their



conversations, behaviors, and utilization of materials through documenting and filming. The children were conscious of the language disparity between us. They communicated in Korean when approaching me. Yet, over the research, they used Russian and engaged in translanguaging while I observed or participated in their play. Whenever Russian or translanguaging was used, I documented the entire conversation, context included, and subsequently translated and transcribed it.

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

This study aligns with the non-representative data analysis expounded by MacLure (2013). In a concerted effort to comprehend the diverse and unforeseen modes of communication among linguistically minoritized children—modes that extend beyond officially-sanctioned language practices—I try not to adhere to what language represents in data as fixed, coded, and pre-established meanings through an analytical lens. As MacLure (2013) points out, while representation indicates the “cultural, ideological, and symbolic productions form a legitimate focus” for data in research, it has the possibility to create “structures and stasis out of movement and proliferation” (p.659) and produce the hierarchy of representation. To mitigate reliance on textual representations that create categorical and judgmental understanding, my approach to data analysis deliberately steers clear of conventional habits as researchers including coding, metaphorical interpretation, categorization, sub-categorization, and presuming participants’ cognitive states based solely on their verbal expressions.

In this sense, I consider children’s language and literacy practices, bodily movements, and engagement with their surroundings as “ontologically a priori to ‘child’ - as giving rise to diverse mores of being a child” (Hackett & Rautio, 2019, p. 1020) rather than viewing them as what children do. Through the renewed ontology, I look at the children’s translanguaging, their bodies, movements, materials coming along with the bodies, discourses, and space as active and vital matters that produce analysis. As MacLure (2013) points out the data itself has material forces, which come from the materiality of language as “non- or pre-representational thought and methods” (p. 658). I take this notion to analyze how the matters intertwined and what is produced through the entanglements. In this regard, in analyzing data with video, audio, photos, and artifacts that I collected during the research period, I focus less on the children’s productive learning or development in language and literacy through the data sources. Instead, I try more to look at what emerged through the relations of all matters.

### **4.4 Participants**

In this research, I closely followed two Koryo-saram children, namely Victoria and Mariya (pseudonyms). As the study aims to understand the language experiences and practices of linguistically marginalized children, I selected Victoria and Mariya, two out

of the three children in the classroom who speak languages other than Korean. They speak Russian as their home language and Korean with limited proficiency. In this paper, I focus only on the two children, Victoria and Mariya, since another immigrant child typically hangs out with other groups of children, and Victoria and Mariya spend much time together and frequently use translanguaging while they communicate.

Victoria and Mariya often spent their time together in the classroom despite the age difference—Victoria being four years old and Mariya being five years old—and variations in their proficiency levels in the Korean language. As a response to this, Ms. Sue, their teacher, tailored their learning materials, assigning separate worksheets, tasks, and assessments. The seating arrangements were also organized based on their ages. Despite this, during unofficial periods such as free-play time, transitions, recess, and after-school activities, they naturally gravitated towards one another and engaged in contextualized exchanges using both Russian and Korean languages, employing various modes of representation. Mariya demonstrated fluency in both Korean and Russian, whereas Victoria was fluent in Russian and had limited proficiency in Korean. Victoria was more comfortable communicating with Mariya in Russian, as she did not read or write in Korean and often used simple and short Korean sentences containing three to four words. In light of these language dynamics, Mariya frequently interacted and played with other Korean children, such as Ha-Young, a five-year-old child who presents in the following sections, yet Victoria's preferred playmate was invariably Mariya. Although Victoria occasionally interacted with other children, she consistently sought out Mariya during free playtime. Mariya also enjoyed playing with Victoria, forming a close bond that extended beyond the preschool setting, often meeting at the Taekwondo academy, and spending additional time together at local playgrounds. In addition to the human participants, this study adopts an approach that considers both humans and nonhumans as active contributors in the meaning-making process. In this context, nonhuman materials, including red tape and papers, as well as the overall classroom space, were regarded as active participants. The red tape, a specific type of masking tape available in the classroom, was particularly relevant to the children's activities.

## **5. RESULTS**

In what follows, I draw two play scenes excerpted from data to demonstrate the intricate relationship between translanguaging and various modes of communication and materials. These vignettes illustrate what emerges from the unforeseen interweaving of material-discursive practices, encompassing translanguaging, human bodies, and materials, and how this interplay reshapes the pre-existing power dynamics within a preschool classroom. The vignettes illustrate how these two children seamlessly utilized both Russian and Korean based on the context, showcasing translanguaging practices.

As I observed Mariya and Victoria engaging in translanguaging, their physical movements, the trajectory of materials like the red tape, and the emergence of feelings,

emotions, and sensibility, I became intrigued about the deeper significance of translanguaging in these specific moments where all entities, human and nonhuman, come together to create something distinct. It was evident that Mariya and Victoria’s translanguaging practices during play were not limited to generating meanings but were deeply entwined with the materiality of their surroundings, allowing for both semiotic and material flows. As a researcher familiar with working with emergent bilingual children, I recognized that the translanguaging of Mariya and Victoria went beyond the linguistic domain. They were entangled with the materials, influencing the dynamics of excitement, energy, relationships, creativity, and empowerment within the space and time. These vital movements were a testament to how translanguaging contributed to shaping the experiences of these children, who are typically linguistically and culturally minoritized.

## 5.1 Translanguaging Reworking Power Dynamics in the Classroom

In a bustling preschool classroom on a Monday morning, three young girls—Mariya, Victoria, and Ha-Young—gather around a designated craft table. This table, commonly used for “craft, drawing, and writing” activities, is a focal point of their creative endeavors. Adorned with an assortment of tools and materials, including varying sizes of paper, a roll of red-colored masking tape, crayons, markers, small scissors, and glue sticks, the craft table sets the stage for their imaginative pursuits.

When I approach the table, Ha-Young looks at me. It seems that she requests my attention. Then, she proudly shows me her “book” filled with her writing and drawings. First, she points to a space where she has written her name with a red crayon and decorated it with red hearts and stars. Next, she describes how she has added sparkly outlines for the texts and pictures.

Victoria looks at Ha-Young. Like Ha-Young, she holds a notebook and a pen, but as I come to understand, the material makes a significant difference to these girls. Victoria looks carefully over at Ha-Young’s crafting and drawing- she is intrigued. Finally, with an unsophisticatedly pronounced Korean and a Russian word, Victoria quietly says to Ha-Young, “I... I... the ручка (pen). Can I use the sparkle pen?”

Ha-Young shakes her head to rebuff her request and puts her head down to return to her work. Victoria tries again.

“Just one time.” Victoria’s tone has changed, and she is now desperate. Her voice is shaky in pursuit of this pen, which is Ha-Young’s and not classroom material. Ha-Young once again shakes her head and denies her.

“No, this is not for a baby!”

“Pshaw.” Victoria lets out an exasperated sound, almost like air escaping from a balloon. Her unpleasant feelings and frustration have materialized on her face.

Riiip! I see Ha-Young tears off a white paper from her sketchbook. Next, she cuts the edge to trim the ragged and messy parts. Then, almost as if she is affixing piping to a pillow, she places the short red tape around the perimeter. Next, she reaches for the scraps she cut, and I see she is making a bag.

Victoria turns around, clearly expressing interest. Ha-Young observes that she is seeking help, both from Ha-Young and myself. Even before she verbally speaks, her body frame straightens, and she leans forward. She wants to make a bag, just like Ha-Young.

She asks Ha-Young to give her some materials:

“I need the paper. Ha-Young, please give me one page.”

Ha-Young denies this request, moving further away. “No. I just have two pages left over.”

Victoria looks crestfallen and drops her voice “I really need the paper. I want to make a bag.” Her Korean is understandable but lacks the force and strength of the first request. Now, she almost mumbles this.

A moment passes, and she lifts her head. Nearby, she spots Mariya to ask for her help.

Victoria moves to Mariya. “мне нужна эта бумага (I need this paper).” She speaks this softly. Mariya, hearing Victoria’s soft and babyish voice, changes her posture and expression: she is visibly upset. Mariya walks over to Ha-Young with a stern look and then suddenly switches into a sweet, almost coyishly delivery. “We need the paper. Can you please give them to us?” Mariya begins moving her body. Mariya wiggles her body humorously while asking for the paper Ha-Young changes her expression. Ha-Young laughs in response and then reluctantly gives the last two pieces from the sketchbook.

Victoria and Mariya are close friends who frequently engaged in play together during informal classroom periods like free play, transitions, and recess. As is the case in the vignette above, they engaged in collaborative activities like drawing, writing, creating books, and crafting. As illustrated in the vignette, while in the classroom, Victoria predominantly spoke Russian. When Victoria and Mariya were alone together in play areas, they primarily conversed in Russian. However, they also used Korean, depending largely on the play scenarios, circumstances, and settings. When joined by other children in their play, they incorporated more Korean words and sentences. For example, during family role play with other Korean children, they seamlessly switched between languages, saying phrases like “детка, пей 우유 (Baby, drink the milk),” which seems a typical form of code-switching observed in bilingual children (Moore, 2002). In the context presented, however, it’s essential to differentiate this language practice as translanguaging, where Victoria and Mariya seamlessly integrate their language repertoires to communicate. When Victoria said “I... I... the ручка (pen). Can I use the sparkle pen?” to Ha-Young and “мне нужна эта бумага (I need this paper)” to Mariya, she exhibited her adeptness in utilizing diverse linguistic repertoires to make sense of the situation and resolve the issue at hand. Victoria's soft and tremulous voice suggested

an influence of power dynamics at play, specifically the impact of Ha-Young's possession of sophisticated materials and language proficiency.

Nevertheless, the materiality of translanguaging altered the dynamics when it intersected with other modes of communication, including humorous bodily movements, as well as elements of power such as Mariya's age, stern expression, and commanding voice. As Blackledge and Creese (2017) discuss, translanguaging involves fluid and natural use of multiple languages, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication, to convey meaning and express themselves comprehensively. It represents a holistic language practice that goes beyond isolated language switches, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of languages in their communication. In this sense, viewing the translanguaging practices within the broader conceptualization of language can be understood as a “political act focused on reinterpreting language as a decolonizing process and liberating the language practices of bilingual minoritized populations” (García & Kleifgen, 2020, p. 556). For these minority language children, the practice of translanguaging facilitated the creation of a safe space wherein they could freely communicate and articulate their desires. It shows that Victoria and Mariya demonstrate an unbounded, dynamic, and fluid utilization of their entire linguistic repertoires through improvised and emergent meaning-making processes.

Additionally, the translanguaging practices employed by Victoria and Mariya exerted influence over the pre-existing hierarchical relationships within the classroom. In mixed-age classrooms, like the Sunshine classroom, there often exists a hierarchical dynamic between older and younger children, as documented in prior research (Stone & Christie, 1999; Ahn, 2016). Given that Victoria is a year younger than Mariya and Ha-Young, the older children exhibited behaviors that solidified their identities as ‘older’ individuals (Edwards et al., 2009). They demonstrated this by providing assistance and modeling behavior for Victoria, treating her in a manner aligned with the expectations for a “younger” child, almost akin to caring for a baby.

The language employed further played a pivotal role in reinforcing this hierarchical relationship. Victoria's proficiency in speaking Korean was notably lower than Mariya's, as evidenced by her limited vocabulary and ability to construct only short sentences when interacting with her Korean-speaking peers. Even though there were other four-year-old children in the classroom, Ha-Young labeled Victoria as a “baby” when asked for a sparkle pen and a piece of paper. As shown in the vignette, Ha-Young wielded power through her age and control over the materials she possessed. Despite Victoria's attempt to request them through translanguaging, her rudimentary pronunciation, brief sentences, and childlike voice were not effective in persuading Ha-Young. The embodiment of translanguaging, considering Victoria's linguistic capabilities and physical attributes and Mariya's engagement, activated power dynamics within the spatial and temporal context. The emergent bilingual children's language practices were not solely within bounded and separate language systems. The language performances

are intertwined with other modes of communication and broader contexts, including their bodies, objects, relationships, discourses, and power dynamics.

Through the materiality of translanguaging and its (re)assembling with materials, bodies, discourses, and spaces, the pre-given power was reworked. As seen in the vignette, Victoria, Mariya, and Ha-Young sat around a table to draw, write, and craft with classroom materials. Within the context of using limited resources from the classroom materials, Ha-Young's glittery pen and an extensive sketchbook were positioned over the pre-existed materials. In addition, Ha-Young's age, one year older than Victoria, and her proficient language and literacy skills have also placed her in a privileged position for writing, drawing, crafting activities, and plays. To borrow Ha-Young's pen, Victoria used two languages at her request. As play evolved, her translanguaging practices and the ramification of bodies and materials operated as a catalyst for transforming materials, space, discourse, and bodies. The act of translanguaging becomes intricately interwoven with other elements of power. As Wei (2011) recalls, the translanguaging space always brings transformation that occurs in the "in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries" (p. 1). In the translanguaging spaces, the boundaries of literate subject, appropriate literacy, and proper use of the body as a student were blurred and transformed. They created their own spaces, not in a separate space of domination and submission. The table where the three children gathered turned into the translanguaging space, which transformed the power dynamic rooted in the linguistic hierarchy among the children. The translanguaging practices and the intertwined encounters with other materials allowed them to overcome the discourse of minority, multicultural children, deficient learners, and the powerless.

## 5.2 Performative Translanguaging

The following vignette illustrates how the two children engaged in play with classroom materials, employing translanguaging. The assemblage of translanguaging and materials, encompassing bodies and classroom objects, is showcased as transformative, changing the atmosphere around Victoria and Mariya and contributing to a process of decolonization. In the following scene, after Victoria and Mariya had a piece of paper from Ha-Young, they started to create a bag, utilizing various classroom materials, such as glue, scissors, and red tape, and then, they changed the way of playing with the materials.

Mariya takes off a short piece of red tape from the tape roll that she picked up from a literacy and craft corner. She suddenly affixes the segment of the papers and tapes to her left arm, indicating she is finished with making a bag. She first put the tape on the white paper and cut the piece to a similar width and length. Next, she makes it not stick on her arm but move around her wrist like a bracelet. She then wraps around her wrist with red tape and paper as she wears the bracelet. She continues wrapping around her pointing finger as a ring. Victoria immediately mimics Mariya's jewelry-

making and puts them on her body. She covers the red tape around her wrist and finger. Suddenly, the bright red tape moves to the children’s nail tips and then lips. Now the tape turns out to be their nail polish and lipstick. “Я наношу это на губы (I put this on my lips).” They check their red tape lipstick in front of the mirror that they are usually using during hand-washing time. “Look at this!” The two girls look at each other’s bodies and accessories, giggle, and laugh aloud. While Mariya and Victoria decorate their bodies with the tape, they talk in Korean and Russian as they usually do in free-play time (Figure 1).

A few minutes later, as they seem finished with their body decorating, the two girls cross each other’s arms, wave their hands, and walk like a model. Their model walking and waving hands are elegant and graceful. Their runway starts in the middle of the classroom and ends in front of cubbies. After they walk across the classroom, they sing a song in Russian and dance together. The two children’s song-singing sounds, “колеса в автобусе крутятся и крутятся (the wheels on the bus go round and round),” reverberate in the classroom.

*Image 1.* Mariya and Victoria putting red tape on their bodies



*Image 2.* Mariya and Victoria walking like models



Acknowledging the significant educational roles of materials in early childhood classrooms (Curtis & Carter, 2007), Ms. Sue purposefully curated the classroom environment by carefully selecting and arranging materials that aligned with the specific educational objectives of each center within her classroom. The literacy and craft center

in the Sunshine classroom, for instance, was thoughtfully furnished with a variety of tools for writing, drawing, and crafting, including pencils, erasers, crayons, colored tape rolls, glue sticks, scissors, papers, and an origami guidebook catered to children. The deliberate placement of red tape in the corner guided the ways in which children interacted with the tape rolls, both explicitly and implicitly, encouraging the acquisition of art- and/or literacy-related knowledge. However, if a child's usage of the materials extended beyond the predefined disciplinary boundaries set within the classroom, disciplinary measures were enacted, or the child was redirected to use the materials within their originally intended space. In accordance with the principle of developmental appropriateness (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), there exists a predetermined assessment of the success and failure of the utilization of materials and children's engagement with these materials based on their developmental stage and capabilities.

While I observed the trajectory of the red tape, I witnessed the transformed power dynamic among the children, and multiplied narratives with languages and bodies. Through this, I inquired how the red tape produces those different energies and how the intertwined relationship of two girls' bodies and materiality of language and objects change the power-laden relationships and discourses. Aligning with the literature that investigates the materiality of classroom materials as a part of an assemblage as enacting power (Ehret & Rowsell, 2021; Jones, 2013) and authority (Sherbine, 2020), and, at the same time, escaping from developmental logic (Myers, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016), I consider that the meaning of material emerges and constantly evolves in an assemblage. To expand the pre-given and fixed meaning of materials, Bennett (2010) notes,

no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that ability to make something happen. (p. 24)

In other words, the materiality of the classroom materials, such as red tape, always emerges its potential and possibility within an assemblage and has an intrinsic force to move, change, and engage with the other (im)materialities. The unplanned and undetermined emergence allows things that come together and produce actions and affordances (Yoon & Henward, 2020). The trajectory and expression of the semiotics were with the other (im)materialities, which is performative rather than fixed formation of words or objects. Following Barad's (2003) articulation of performativity as the joint relationship with the notion of discursive practices and materiality, I consider the bag-making and the red tape play as a performative and material-discursive phenomenon. Rather than understanding the semiotics with historically meaningful social and cultural aspects, the movable things embrace the constantly evolving meanings.

The whole process of the children's play enacted always conjoins with materiality, not a specific formation of the meaning of the tape or the discourses. When the pieces of red



tape were put on the bodies of the children or when the tape pieces moved from the white paper to the children's bodies and transformed into cosmetics and jewelry, the materiality of the tape transcended the boundary of its use for educational purposes. It traversed spaces, social orders, classroom disciplines, and discursive practices, surpassing the boundaries of appropriateness, validity, and developmental expectations. With this lens, the bodies' transgression became problematic and disruptive. In terms of the notion of discursive practices surrounding young children's feminine play, the two girls' hyperfeminized artifacts and performances can be interpreted in two categories.

On the one hand, they are concerned that the children are sexualized by the media or other social and cultural, adult-like experiences. On the other hand, it can seem like innocent playing, as they are too young to understand what feminine products and performances mean. Indeed, these two considerations have the same preconception of childhood innocence (Blaise, 2009). However, if the play is understood as performativity and a material phenomenon, the force of the red tape produced the intermingled relationships among Victoria and Mariya's bodies, materials, and discourses, they became performers, writers, speakers, and taking on entire identities.

Additionally, in the last part of the vignette, the children engage in a carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1981) way of play. This includes walking with swaying hips, elegantly waving their hands, carrying the paper bag in their arms, and sometimes blowing a kiss from their red-taped lips (see Figure 2). They moved around the classroom at the end of the walk and sang a popular children's song in Russian. These are power-laden behaviors and movements in a particular context. In the flow of the children's play, they do translanguaging involving Russian and Korean with material and embodied subjects in flexible and performative ways. The multiple identities and discourses that are associated with the two children's bodies, including 'an immigrant child,' 'an incapable young child,' 'the illiterate,' and 'a powerless body' were put on the floor, played off, and reconfigured. The carnivalesque and performative use of translanguaging and assembling materials were pleasurable, productive, and affective ways of doing literacies and engaging in playing on power.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This article has explored how close attention to the materiality of translanguaging can help to rethink linguistically minoritized children's language practices. Aligning with the concept of the materiality of language (MacLure, 2013), the understanding is that language transcends its role as a mere communication tool—it is deeply intertwined with the body. Language is always affected and affects the body, implying that materially engaged language encompasses embodied, non-representational, and emergent aspects. Translanguaging is a prominent language practice employed by immigrant and emergent bilingual children. While scholarly attention has often focused on translanguaging as an alternative or additional representational tool used by

linguistically minoritized children in predominantly monolingual environments, little is known about how translanguaging interacts with other materialities and what emerges from these interactions.

This study seeks to shed light on how children’s translanguaging entangles with various modes and materials, giving rise to emergent, relational, and performative forces. The objective is to challenge the prevailing monolingualism-centered and assimilatory conceptualization of language and literacy education prevalent in educational policies and practices. This conceptualization often overlooks diverse expressions and perpetuates narrow, deficit-based assumptions about children from racially, culturally, and linguistically different backgrounds. The classroom space discussed in this article embodies a monolithic educational approach, carrying the risk of neglecting varied expressions and reinforcing limited and deficit-based assumptions about such children. When the children’s bodies moved and elicited specific emotions and feelings, it infused energy, liveliness, and reconfigured power dynamics in those moments. At those moments, translanguaging ceased to be merely an isolated linguistic representation or event; instead, it facilitated semiotic and material flows in performative ways. As performativity in the posthumanist sense transcends the human and the discursive (Barad, 2003), material and discursive phenomena are not isolated performances but are mutually implicated in dynamic relations.

In conclusion, the article argues for the recognition and value of linguistically minoritized children’s translanguaging, considering its materiality and diverse relations with other modes within educational settings. As emphasized by Souto-Manning et al. (2019), language often plays a role in educational contexts in protecting social and cultural norms, practices, and values. The article continues to highlight that when immigrant children’s language practices deviate from the norms established by the school and classroom, their communicative practices can become barriers to a sense of belonging, leading to categorization and racialization. From this standpoint, the posthumanist notion of materially engaged translanguaging offers insights into the potential of translanguaging as a decolonizing and liberating approach for immigrant and emergent bilingual children. Following the trajectory of materials allows for a deeper understanding of how translanguaging generates vital forces within the children’s bodies, movements, senses, and emotions. The continual movements in the moment-to-moment experiences reveal a process of decolonization and liberation from the norms, practices, and values present in the space.

## **THE AUTHOR**

Yeojoo Yoon is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Child Development at California State University, Chico. Her scholarship and teaching focus on justice-oriented early childhood education for linguistically, culturally, and racially minoritized children. Her research examines the experiences of immigrant and emergent bilingual

children in educational settings and the possibilities of digital technology in fostering equity for marginalized children.

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