

*Research Article*

# Translanguaging, Multiliteracy, and Sociocultural Dynamics: Exploring Diasporic Identity and Belonging

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*This ethnographic study delves into the language and literacy practices of immigrant children in a public elementary school setting. The purpose of the study is to understand the role of multiliteracy in their learning, their ability to connect with the curriculum and instruction, and their sense of belonging within their peer groups, classrooms, and home countries. To explore how these children utilized their linguistic and cultural repertoires to engage in language and literacy activities in different contexts (Kwon, 2019), the study focused on 10-year-old students from various linguistic backgrounds, including Korean and Chinese students in a United States classroom. Through mapping and go-along interviews to collect data, the study reveals the children's translanguaging practices, their*

*yearning for their home country, and their sense of belonging. The findings of this study highlight the complexity of children's diasporic identity, reflected in literacy practices involving multiple languages, which implies the significance of respecting and valuing diverse forms of language and literacy. Underlining the importance of integrating translanguaging pedagogy to enhance learning experiences and foster a sense of belonging (García & Sylvan, 2011), this empirical study calls for further research on translanguaging pedagogy in diverse classrooms that will offer insights into creating inclusive learning environments that embrace diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** belonging; identity; mapping; multiliteracy; translanguaging

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At precisely 10:20 in the morning, a bustling group of students flood into the corridor, their energy palpable as they move towards their next class. Leading the way is the energetic homeroom teacher, Ms. Miller, organizing a stack of papers in her hand. Positioned at the back of the line, I observe the students engaging in spirited conversations, their voices overlapping and filling the air with excitement. As the line slowly progresses forward, a reunion unfolds in the corridor. Ms. Miller's students, vibrant and full of life, encounter their counterparts from the neighboring classroom. Laughter erupts, filling the air with joyous echoes, and high-fives are exchanged in a spirited display of camaraderie. Amidst this lively atmosphere, a female student from another class happens to pass by. As she spots Yuri, she can't contain her enthusiasm and greets her with genuine affection in Korean, calling out her name with a touch of familiarity. "야, Yuri! 무슨 class 들으러 가?" (Hey, Yuri! Which class are you heading to?) However, Yuri, though clearly aware of the person calling her, chooses to avert her gaze, allowing her head to droop slightly. With a quick pace, she swiftly follows the person in front of her, as if caught between a desire to engage and a fleeting shyness that prompts her to retreat.

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The scene above provides a glimpse into the life of Yuri, a 10-year-old Korean student who found herself in different learning environments that involved translanguaging. The observation prompted an exploration of the complex interplay between language, literacy, and identity within the context of the immigrant diaspora, raising thought-provoking questions about the influence of translanguaging in relation to the construction of identity. What roles do language and literacy play in fostering a sense of belonging or potentially alienating these students within the immigrant diaspora?

In this interconnected and diverse world, communication has become increasingly multilingual and multimodal, blurring the boundaries between languages (Blommaert, 2013; Pennycook, 2017). As a result, there is a growing recognition of the importance of a flexible approach to language learning and expression. This is reflected in the rise of translanguaging pedagogies in education, which encourage dynamic and creative use of named languages, language varieties, and other semiotic resources (García & Sylvan, 2011; Wei, 2018). Translanguaging challenges the view of languages and modes as separate entities, instead proposing an integrated continuum where multilingual speakers, including emergent bilinguals, fluidly move between different named languages, modes, and identities (Baker, 2011; Blommaert, 2013; Canagarajah, 2004; García & Wei, 2014, 2015; García, 2009). By investigating the impact of learning environments and sociocultural factors, this study seeks to shed light on the nuanced experiences of these young immigrant or bilinguals and contribute to a broader understanding of the complex relationships among language, literacy, and identity within the immigrant diaspora context.

In this study, I attempted to explore the dynamics of language, literacy practices, and identity formation of emergent bilingual children from different cultural and historical backgrounds aiming to understand the role of translanguaging in their learning, meaning-making, and sense of belonging. Immigrant children, bring a rich array of language resources and cultural knowledge reflected in their translanguaging practices (Kwon, 2022), I explore the ways in which these children, leverage these repertoires to actively participate in language and literacy activities, navigate the complexities of their multicultural identities, and negotiate their sense of belonging within their classroom setting. By examining how language and cultural repertoires intersect with translanguaging practices among immigrant children from various linguistic backgrounds, this study offers insights into the intricate processes of language and literacy acquisition as well as the broader social and cultural dimensions of education in diverse classroom contexts.

## **2. TRANSLANGUAGING AS A MULTIMODAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL FRAMEWORK**

In recent years, the concept of translanguaging has emerged as a prominent theoretical framework in language studies. Translanguaging is broadly defined as the flexible and

natural use of linguistic resources by bilingual individuals (García, 2009). It is now widely recognized as a characteristic practice that occurs along the entire bilingual continuum (Hornberger, 2003), extending beyond the boundaries of named languages and encompassing various senses and modes (Blommaert, 2013; Kress, 2010; Pennycook, 2017; Wei, 2018). Translanguaging extends beyond a mere juxtaposition of languages; it can be regarded as a dynamic social and becoming practice that enables multilingual individuals to shape their sociocultural identities while navigating various cultural, linguistic, and political repertoires (García, 2009). Through translanguaging, multilinguals actively affirm their identities and shape their language practices.

Moreover, translanguaging encompasses diverse semiotic modes, including verbal, visual, audio, and sensory aspects (Pennycook, 2017). Recognizing its multimodal nature, translanguaging acknowledges that meaning is not confined to language alone but is shaped by sociocultural circumstances. Different modes of communication are deployed within specific socio-historical contexts and carry particular associations and significance (Kress, 2010). From a multimodal social semiotic perspective, translanguaging recognizes that linguistic signs are just one facet of a broader repertoire of modal resources available to language users. These modal resources carry socio-historical and political associations, influencing how meaning is constructed and conveyed (Wei, 2018).

Translanguaging differs from the notion of code-switching in that it refers not simply to shift or a shuttle between two languages, but to the speaker's construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language, but that make up the speaker's complete language repertoire. (García & Wei, 2014, p. 22)

In this study, I consider translanguaging to be a pedagogical practice that respects and values the linguistic, cultural, and semiotic repertoires of emergent bilinguals<sup>1</sup>, extending beyond its traditional focus on English as a Second Language learners. These repertoires serve as valuable resources that support and enrich the learning of English or the dominant language within the dynamic bilingual continuum (García & Kleifgen, 2020). Translanguaging, as a theoretical framework, celebrates the flexible and dynamic language practices of bilingual individuals (García & Sylvan, 2011; Makalela, 2015; Wei, 2018). It acknowledges the fluidity of languages, modes, and identities, emphasizing the crucial role of sociocultural contexts in shaping meaning (García & Wei, 2014). To foster an inclusive and empowering approach to language education, I value and appreciate the diverse linguistic resources that emergent bilinguals bring to their learning experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> While the term “emergent bilingual” was initially coined to replace the term “English language learners” and emphasize the bilingual potential of school-age, language-minority children, I use the term more broadly in this context. Here, it encompasses individuals in the early stages of bilingualism, regardless of age or whether they are actively studying another language. I use the term for both language-majority and language-minority students, including immigrant students positioned at opposite ends of the dominant-marginalized language continuum of bilingualism.

### **3. THE DYNAMICS OF DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND BELONGING**

To delve into the intricate dynamics of identity formation and belonging within diasporic communities, this framework elucidates the interconnections between cultural-semiotic spaces, transcultural literacies, and the negotiation of identities within diverse sociocultural contexts. Identity is a complex and multifaceted concept influenced by various factors, including language, culture, and social norms (Anderson, 2020). In the context of diasporic identity, the creation of local consciousness and identity requires the presence of “the Other” or other locations, much like the discourse surrounding the creation of place (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2005). Drawing from Bakhtin’s (2010) perspective on the utilization of cultural-semiotic spaces in generating new transcultural meanings and literacies through encounters between differences, attention should be directed to the ongoing process of change that emerges from struggles across spaces (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2005). Diasporic identity is shaped by the presence of “the Other” and the encounters between different locations, highlighting the fluid and evolving nature of identity through struggles across spaces. The diaspora, rather than being tied to essentialized ethnic locations, is held together through cultural-semiotic artifacts and transcultural literacies, enabling the bridging of global and local experiences (Clifford, 1994; Hall, 2015). Within the diasporic space, intercultural communication, translation, and radical cultural creativity thrive, challenging dominant discourses and cultural stereotypes (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2005).

In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one’s own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others (Bakhtin, 2010, p. xiii).

Belonging, a crucial aspect within the context of diasporic identity, surpasses mere citizenship and encompasses participatory, cognitive, and emotional dimensions (Yuval-Davis, 2011). It is an evolving outcome of social negotiation, influenced by an individual's sense of acknowledgment and recognition within a specific nation's populace (Massey, 2005). The concept of the Other, or otherness, provides a framework to examine identity by emphasizing differences and considering spatial and historical variables (Bae, 2003; Grossberg, 1996). Belonging and otherness are not fixed categories but are fluid and context-dependent, reflecting the intricate negotiations and representations of identity within particular cultural contexts (Bae, 2003). This theoretical framework also acknowledges that immigrant children's sense of belonging, and otherness is shaped by their experiences within the classroom as a minority group. By adopting this framework, the study recognizes the importance of understanding the complex negotiations, representations, and struggles that occur within their sociocultural contexts (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2005), through exploration on

translanguaging expressed in (multi)literacy practices contribute to the formation and negotiation of diasporic identities among children.

#### **4. MULTILITERACIES AND MULTIMODAL APPROACHES IN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S CLASSROOM LITERACY PRACTICES**

This study builds upon the notion of literacy practices, encompassing people's awareness, constructions, and discourse surrounding literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). It extends the understanding of literacy to include the ability to engage with diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes beyond traditional written and spoken forms of language in today's globalized communication environments (Jewitt, 2008, p. 245). By doing so, this study recognizes that communication and meaning-making can occur through various modes, such as visual, digital, and multimodal (Pennycook, 2017), and acknowledges the need to adapt to changing communication patterns in our interconnected and technology-driven world.

The term multiliteracies coined by The New London Group (1996) calls for an inclusive approach to classroom teaching that embraces cultural, linguistic, communicative, and technological diversity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013, p. 69). The pedagogy of multiliteracies is responsive to evolving communication channels, increasing cultural diversity, and shifting the identities of children as it allows various forms of literacy. Considering the social implications of communication shifts and how individuals engage and interact with each other (Kress, 2010; Walsh, 2017), multiliteracy practices in schools aim to develop a pedagogical model that fosters effective critical engagement with students' values, identity, and power (Jewitt, 2008, p. 245).

By recognizing the inseparable link between children's everyday literacy practices and the contexts in which they occur, this study aims to establish a situated understanding of children's meaning-making in their literacy practices. Immigrant children actively participate in various activities and engage in linguistic and cultural practices that bridge local and global contexts (Kwon, 2019). In a related empirical study, Hackett and Somerville (2017) illustrated how multimodal communicative practices emerge through the use of objects, senses, affects, and sounds in specific cross-border spaces or experiences. This insight stems from the recognition that different places offer distinct experiences of sound, movement, and literacy, all of which I closely examined within each classroom site. Likewise, children's classroom literacy practices revolve around their engagement in multimodal approaches. By referring to multimodal approaches, I imply the use of signs or symbols to communicate, including language, images, sounds, gestures, and movements (Walsh, 2017, p. 22). These multimodal approaches acknowledge and leverage the diverse semiotic resources available to immigrant children in their meaning-making processes, facilitating their engagement with multiple modes of representation and communication.

## 5. METHODS

### 5.1 Comparative Ethnographic Study

With the purpose of investigating the use of translanguaging practices among immigrant children, this study adopts an ethnographic case study approach (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) and focuses on the experiences of a ten-year-old child, Yuri<sup>2</sup> and her peers, Jin and Maya. After obtaining approval from the school district board as well as consent from the children and their parents to conduct the study, I employed an ethnographic approach to explore the children's sense of belonging in their translanguaging. Considering the influence of cultural, linguistic, and historical beliefs and values on group behavior patterns in various contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), a range of qualitative data was collected, including semi-structured interviews, observations, mapping, and site documents.

### 5.2 Participants and Context

Even though this yearlong project was conducted at multiple sites, this study partially reports the academic semester of the research conducted in the United States. In Ms. Miller's 4th grade classroom at Lakewood Elementary School (pseudonyms), a public elementary school in the Northeastern region, approximately one-third of the students either came from families with first-generation immigrants or were enrolled in English as a Second Language program. Ms. Miller, the homeroom teacher, adopted a multifaceted approach to teaching that significantly influenced the language dynamics within the classroom. She predominantly conducted her lessons in English, encouraging students to engage in active discourse and writing activities that fostered English language acquisition and development (i.e., Word Study).

*Table 1.* Overview of Classroom Timetable

<b>Classroom Timetable</b>	
08:20-08:40	Morning Meeting
08:40-09:15	Writing
09:15-10:00	Daily Subject *
10:00-11:20	Math / Snack
11:20-11:40	Word Study

\* STEM / Art / Music / Library

<sup>2</sup> The names of all the places and people in this study are pseudonyms.

Rather than relying on traditional textbooks, Ms. Miller favored the use of handouts, to allow for more flexible and interactive learning experiences. Her curriculum closely followed the classroom timetable, and the subjects covered encompassed a broad range of topics, including word study, library (reading), mathematics, STEM, and art (see Table 1). Within this curriculum, Ms. Miller ensured that students were exposed to diverse content that required them to engage in meaningful language use.

Seeking a comprehensive understanding of single cases among many, anchored in lived experiences, I examined similarities and contrasts in “perspectives and situations to develop an analysis and build a theory of an ethnographic case study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). I selected cases of varying types to understand how and why similar forces resulted in different practices from Yuri’s practices. Yuri (pseudonym) was a 10-year-old female Korean student who attended Lakewood Elementary School. I chose Yuri as the focal participant for the U.S. site due to my professional experiences with the school she attended and a personal connection to her parents, which created a reciprocal bond. Yuri was born in Korea but had been moving back and forth between Korea and the United States due to her parents’ work. She considered herself Korean, stating that she was “born in Korea and [had] Korean parents and siblings.” During the parents’ interview, Yuri’s mother shared that she named her daughter an American-sounding name that would be easy to pronounce in order to help Yuri immerse herself in American life. Yuri was fluent in both Korean and English, but during the interview, she answered that she felt much more comfortable reading books in English and noticed no difference in speaking.

All the members of the classroom served as participants in this study, as all had agreed to participate, and the literacy practices of the individual participants were deeply interconnected (Dyson, 2003a). Every moment where translanguaging practices occurred was counted as data in written field notes or recorded audio files, but the majority of the data consisted of Yuri and Yuri’s close friends, Jin and Maya, who also had immigrant backgrounds. Jin and Maya, whose home language was Chinese, demonstrated translanguaging practices while interacting with Yuri and during class activities. These three were close friends who joined the school orchestra and began playing the same instrument, the violin, together. This interconnectedness among the three girls influenced Yuri’s literacy practices and contributed to the formation of a shared space within the study. Despite the participants’ differences in their home languages (i.e., Korean and Chinese), and accumulated cultural experiences, the cases of the three girls shared common themes, particularly in the negotiation of identity and literacy practices in diasporic contexts. From the main inquiry regarding how immigrant children from different linguistic backgrounds utilize their language and cultural repertoires to engage in language and literacy activities in the classroom context (Dyson, 2018), this study delves deeper into the comparison by examining cases that exhibit similar forces yet yield different practices.

## 5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place over one academic semester in one public elementary school, Ms. Miller’s classroom in the Northeastern United States. The methods and approaches used in this study were guided by the idea that each moment should share enough similarities to reveal significant differences (Bray et al., 2014) in the children’s translanguaging practices. This ethnographic case study allowed me to comprehend the diverse ways in which literacy is practiced and understood and grasp the social and political implications of these practices (Dyson, 1993, 2003b; Yoon, 2023).

To gather data that portrayed (multi)literacy practices, such as dialogues with friends, painting, singing, classmate presentations, and play (Atkinson, 2016), I conducted fieldwork using methods such as field notes, interviews, participant observations, and site records. As a former elementary school teacher in Korea and a bilingual from a non-dominant linguistic and cultural background, I consciously considered how my presence and interpretations may have influenced the actions and communication of the participants (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). “As a distinctive, researching self” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 57), I found myself “translanguaged” in the field, particularly during interviews with participants like Yuri, who could also speak both Korean and English. To engage in reflexive thinking about my positionality and to present myself transparently within the research process, I followed Geertz’s concept of thick description (1973), extensively utilizing field notes. Doing so provided a cultural context and added meaning to the actions, words, and artifacts of the children as well as to the relationships among the children, their peers, and myself in different cultural settings. After each classroom visit, I promptly transcribed my handwritten notes into more formal field notes. Following Glesne’s (2016) approach to documenting and describing data, my field notes captured the details and nuances of social relationships within the setting, “including appearance, actions, events, processes, conversations, documents, visual materials, and artifacts” (p. 91). This allowed me to focus on my perceptions and highlight what was significant or surprising in a particular social milieu, context, or setting. For this study, I mainly focused on mapping and conducting go-along interviews in addition to taking fieldnotes.

### 5.3.1 Mapping

Yuri and her classmates engaged in literacy practices in various spaces within the school environment, such as the playground, hallways, stairs, benches, classrooms (STEM, computer), and even restrooms. Each of these spaces can become its own unique realm where children feel empowered to express themselves, as spaces shape their perception and understanding of the world (Creswell, 2013). To capture the nonlinear connections between space, lived experiences, and community as a research method, I employed mapping to gain insights into children’s worldviews, what matters to them, and their social relationships (Powell, 2010). As a visual methodology, mapping provides



participants with additional avenues to convey their perceptions and ways of being (Kress, 2010; Powell, 2010). In this ethnographic study, it demonstrated how the immigrant children attempted translanguaging in drawing and how that shaped their literacy practices and the relationship between meaning-making and the co-construction of identity.

Mapping was employed as a one-time activity at each classroom site involving all classmates, including Yuri, a focal participant, to ensure ethical representation. Subsequent follow-up meetings were conducted with all focal participants to validate interpretations and gather further insights. During the mapping activity, students were asked to create a map indicating the areas in the school where they felt most comfortable (Henward & Grace, 2016). The participants used colored pencils, markers, and stickers to draw their maps on A4-sized paper. As an observer, I circulated the classroom, posing questions to clarify the elements or individuals depicted in the maps. These maps served as a starting point for follow-up interviews, enabling a deeper understanding of the children's self-awareness within the school environment. Mapping as a visual and multimodal research method strongly emphasizes the experiential nature of places and their creation (Powell, 2010, 2016).

In line with the research question regarding how immigrant children from different linguistic backgrounds utilize their language and cultural repertoires in language and literacy activities across different classroom contexts, mapping, complemented by observations and interviews, helped me investigate the role of language and identity in the children's sense of belonging. Specifically, it addressed sub-topics such as how their sense of belonging was expressed in the maps and how the children employed language to convey their understanding of the classroom where their meaning-making occurred.

### **5.3.2 Ethnographic Interviews: Go-Along Interviews**

The go-along interview method aims to understand how individuals perceive and engage with their physical and social environments in their everyday lives, emphasizing the connection between lived experiences and the sense of place (Kusenbach, 2003). In this study, I conducted go-along ethnographic interviews with the participating students and their peers. These interviews were conducted in a casual manner, resembling conversations rather than formal interviews, and each lasted less than 15 minutes. I used the Korean participant's preferred language, either Korean or English, but only spoke English with students whose home language was Chinese. This approach allowed me to navigate between insider and outsider perspectives, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the children's literacy practices within the classroom.

The go-along interviews went beyond verbal communication and encompassed various modes of expression through which the participants conveyed their lived experiences (Pink, 2009). These interviews provided insights into the reasons behind specific

literacy practices, including the participants' understanding of their identity and their individual experiences. I recorded all interviews during the participants' daily routines at random moments, including the beginning and end of the fieldwork, and later transcribed them for analysis. The analysis involved examining verbal and non-verbal expressions, situational settings, and the informants' narratives to describe, analyze, and interpret their experiences (Kim-Bossard, 2015). By employing this ethnographic interview method, I gained access to the children's expressions of literacy within their local contexts, such as the classroom or school cultures, as well as the broader connections between the children and society.

### **5.3.3 Ethnographic Analysis**

Consistent with ethnography methods, data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Atkinson et al., 2008; Pink, 2009). The analytic process involved selecting relevant documents based on emergent and theoretical criteria and employing the constant-comparison technique to explain themes, frames, and discourses. To ensure participant confidentiality and cultural sensitivity, all individuals and locations were given pseudonyms (Merriam, 2002). For the analysis of fieldwork data, including mapping, field notes, semi-structured interview transcripts with children, and site documents, I utilized ethnographic content analysis (ECA) (Altheide, 1987), which involves multiple rounds of analysis to identify and code patterns or themes (Choi et al., 2014). Focusing on contexts, ECA allowed for the identification and evaluation of relevant and meaningful materials, as well as underlying meanings, patterns, and processes (Saldaña, 2011).

To interpret the translanguaging practices that reflected the participants' meaning-making, I thoroughly documented, compared, and analyzed each piece of data from the classroom, addressing the research questions related to children's literacy practices and the reproduction of their identities through those practices. To initiate the data analysis process, I began by revisiting the interview transcripts, field notes, maps, and site documents (Emerson et al., 2011). This step involved immersing myself in the data and becoming familiar with the participants' words and impressions and the sequence of events (Merriam, 2002).

Open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) was used to identify common themes related to children's literacy practices and meaning-making in the classroom, while Microsoft Excel facilitated the storage and coding of data, allowing for easy categorization and tagging for document retrieval. In this initial round of open coding, color coding and word-based codes were applied to the data (Saldaña, 2011), and tentative ideas regarding codes, connections, patterns, and categories were developed and refined (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## 6. RESULTS

In the classroom, translanguaging served as a significant means of expressing the sense of belonging of emergent bilingual students in the general classes, allowing them to bridge language and cultural differences. It existed within an interconnected relationship with the transnational culture, history, ideologies, and relationships of immigrant children (García & Lin, 2017a; Wyman et al., 2013), contributing to their diasporic identity and sense of belonging. In this section, I outline the various ways in which Yuri and her peers engaged in translanguaging and analyze their practices from a multimodal and sociocultural perspective.

### 6.1 Pedagogical Uses of Translanguaging: Dynamics of Diasporic Identity and Belonging

*Image 1.* Library Class: Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom



In the library class, the children gather on the cozy carpet as they usually do. Yuri remains close to her two Chinese friends, Jin and Maya. The librarian captivates their attention by reading a fascinating story to the children. Matthew Swanson's (2021) tale, *Ben Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom*, unfolds in a vibrant Chinese restaurant, where the mystical fortune cookie takes center stage. As the story mentions the traditional Chinese noodle dish, lo mein, Jin and Maya exchange knowing glances and flash enthusiastic thumbs-up gestures. And they lean towards each other and whisper in Chinese and raise their hands. Their faces beam with delight as they eagerly share

their cultural knowledge, engaging their classmates in a lively discussion. They introduce other delectable Chinese noodles like chow mein and dandan, sparking a wave of excitement among the students. Laughter and conversation fill the air as everyone joyfully shares their own traditional or favorite noodle dishes. However, amidst the animated chatter conducted in English, Yuri finds herself inadvertently excluded from their conversation. (Fieldnote, November 1, 2022, Library, the United States)

Jin and Maya's translanguaging practices in the library class demonstrate the dynamic and fluid nature of language use among multilingual individuals. When the story introduced the traditional Chinese noodle dish, lo mein, Jin and Maya responded with non-verbal cues and exchanged whispered conversation in Chinese. Their use of the Chinese language and gestures served as a means to express their cultural knowledge and create a sense of connection with their cultural background (Ghiso, 2016; Song, 2016). This aligns with the concept of translanguaging as a sociocultural practice as translanguaging involves the intersection of language and culture, shaping one's identity and sense of belonging, and actively incorporating existing language resources from home or community into classroom interactions (Canagarajah, 2011, 2013). In these classroom interactions, students openly discuss the benefits of linguistic diversity under teacher guidance. This approach can serve as an initial step in helping ethnolinguistic minority learners develop positive identities, as demonstrated in this excerpt from a go-along interview with Jin and Maya:

Jin: “Well, we talked about what we can share,” they explained.

Jin: “Was it ‘我们要宣布这一点吗?’ (Shall we share this one as well?)”

Maya: (nodding) “还有这个?” (And what about this?)

Jin: “Well, I know I can speak in English as well, but, well... I don't know. As it was supposed to be to talk about Chinese foods, so I spoke in Chinese.”

Maya: “And I am Chinese (Jin: who can understand Chinese).”

Maya: “Yes.”

\* All the Chinese dialogue and interactions between Jin and Maya were interpreted by the children themselves, and the exact content of their conversations may not be entirely clear.

From the responses of Jin and Maya, their unconscious translanguaging reveals that they were aware of each other's Chinese background, which created a sense of belonging. It is also noteworthy that the topic that they cared about (i.e., Chinese traditional food), and the comfort space experienced by Jin and Maya when they spoke in their home language to discuss their cultural assets in the classroom contributed to their sense of belonging (Dyson, 2018). By utilizing their Chinese language repertoire in this context, Jin and Maya affirmed their Chinese heritage and engaged in the sharing of cultural experiences as part of their diasporic identity. Diasporic identity is not fixed but

constantly evolving through encounters between different cultural-semiotic spaces, challenging dominant discourses and cultural stereotypes (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2005). The scene that allowed students to discuss topics that did not center the dominant culture allowed immigrant students who were mainly emergent bilinguals to rethink their identity. This finding indicates that children’s translanguaging practices are deeply intertwined with their cultural upbringing and play a vital role in preserving and perpetuating their heritage (Canagarajah, 2013; Ticheloven et al., 2021). It highlights the inherent challenge of fully capturing and interpreting translanguaging practices, particularly when language use extends beyond the linguistic repertoire.

Yuri’s silence was also noticed in the scene described above. While some immigrant children may find joy in embracing their dual or multiple cultural memberships (Vertovec, 2011), others may feel that they have become or are becoming “outsiders” in both the context they come from and the context they are received in (Hornberger, 2007, p. 326). The observed translanguaging practices and the impact on Yuri’s participation provide valuable insights into the dynamics of language, culture, and identity in the classroom context. As this article regards translanguaging as not only “shifting or shuttling between two languages” (García & Wei, 2014) but also considers the moments in which the children engaged in translanguaging practices, I focused on Yuri, who kept silent during the class discussion on Chinese food. Yuri’s experience of being inadvertently excluded from the conversation between Jin and Maya highlights the complexities of translanguaging practices and their sociocultural implications (Wei & Lin, 2019). Despite being fluent in English, Yuri found herself on the periphery of the discussion conducted in Chinese among peers and in English in the whole class. This highlights the social dynamics that can arise within translanguaging contexts (Canagarajah, 2018; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). The development and choice of these distinct senses of belonging depend on several factors, including the attitudes of the people receiving them, the support systems available to help them adapt to one or possibly multiple communities (Baker & Jones, 1998; Dyson, 2018), and emotional connections to both contexts (Choi, 2017). Considering Yuri’s participation in other subjects like social classes, it was obvious that Yuri could have shared similar Asian cuisine that she was familiar with in Korea, but her silence may have contributed to her intangible translanguaging. This situation exemplifies the challenges that emergent bilingual students may face in navigating their linguistic and cultural identities within a diverse classroom setting (Kwon, 2022; Makalela, 2019).

While translanguaging pedagogy in education recognizes the importance of utilizing students’ full linguistic repertoires to enhance learning between their home language and English (García & Sylvan, 2011), this finding highlights the need to extend the scope of translanguaging beyond these two languages. Taking into consideration students’ dominant language (i.e., Chinese and Korean) alongside their home language can significantly enrich the learning process and facilitate bilingual development (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Aligning with the theoretical framework of translanguaging as a multimodal and sociocultural practice, Jin and Maya’s use of translanguaging,

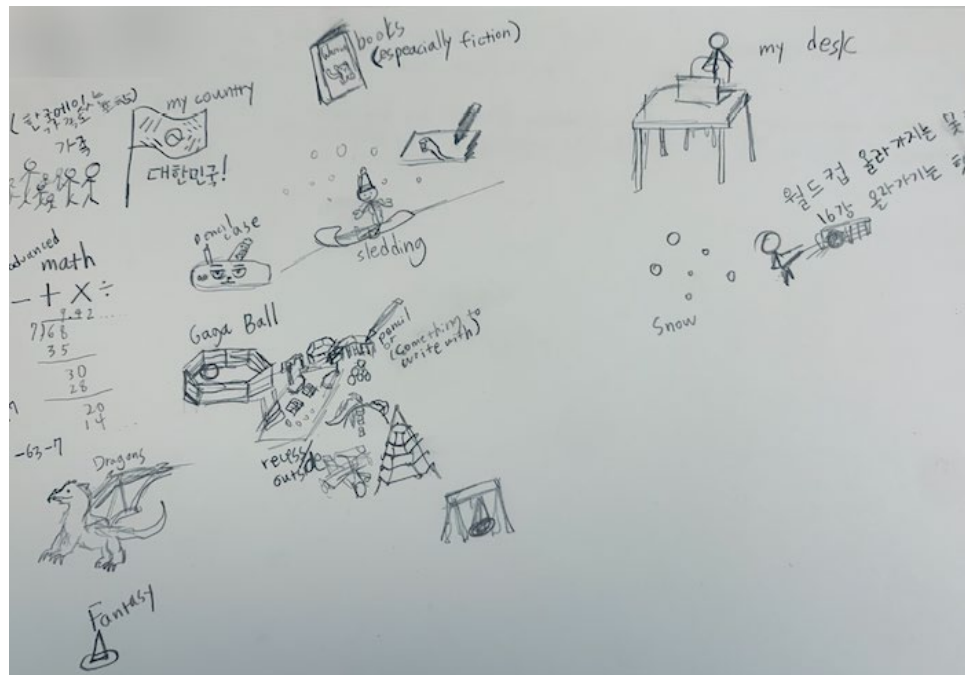
incorporating Chinese and non-verbal cues (i.e., eye contact exchange), reflects the fluidity of language and the significance of cultural knowledge in shaping their identities. Their actions demonstrate how translanguaging goes beyond a mere juxtaposition of languages, encompassing modes of communication that carry socio-historical and cultural associations. On the other hand, Yuri's silence and exclusion highlight the complexities of identity negotiation and the role of sociocultural contexts in shaping language practices. This analysis provides the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse linguistic resources and experiences that emergent bilinguals bring to their learning environments (Early et al., 2015). The concept of belonging within a diasporic identity extends beyond citizenship and involves participatory, cognitive, and emotional dimensions (Holopainen, 2020; Perry, 2012). It recognizes that the interactions and conversations in Chinese, as experienced by Jin and Maya, may hold cultural and identity-related significance for them as members of the Chinese diaspora but also provoke Yuri's longing for her own sense of belonging. This aligns with the exploration of diasporic identity and the intricate negotiations and representations of identity within specific cultural contexts (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). In terms of translanguaging practices among multilingual students and the socio-cultural dynamics within the classroom, this emphasizes the need for inclusive pedagogical approaches that honor and engage with the diverse linguistic repertoires and cultural backgrounds of students, fostering an environment that promotes meaningful interactions and a sense of belonging for all.

## **6.2 Translanguaging and Multiliteracy in Sociocultural Contexts: Unveiling Language Preferences and Belonging**

When defining literacy as the capacity to interact with culturally and linguistically diverse landscapes beyond the bounds of traditional written and spoken language(s) in contexts of worldwide communication (Yu, 2023), I refer to translanguaging practices in this study as diverse forms of literacy that encompass more than one language including “speech, writing, image, gesture, music, and others” rather than just printed or written forms of language (Kress, 2003, p. 22). According to Kress (2010) and Powell (2010, 2016), mapping is a way to understand young learners as it allows for a visual representation of their language experiences, cultural connections, and personal spaces, providing valuable insights into their identities and sense of belonging (Dyson, 2018). To gain insights, I asked the whole class to draw a space where they felt comfortable (Henward & Grace, 2016). Yuri drew things during class that she typically imagined, which brought her comfort and a sense of safety (Interview, December 20, 2022). From the mapping shown in Figure 2, Yuri went beyond the fixed physical formation of the classroom and included her imaginative symbols that brought her comfort. She also used both her home language, Korean, and English to explain her drawings. Notably, she drew her family and the national flag on the left side with the explanation in Korean,

“한국에 있는 가족도 포함” (including my family in Korea), and “대한민국!” (Republic of Korea!), in contrast to other symbols with English captions.

Image 2. Yuri’s map



Based on the map depicted above, I conducted a go-along interview with Yuri as we examined her map together. During the interview, I noticed how Yuri differentiated between two languages, English and Korean, in her translanguaging practices.

Researcher: So, Yuri, is the desk the most comfortable place in school?

Yuri: Yes, it's my own desk. There's nothing uncomfortable about it because I'm used to it. I feel comfortable and can concentrate there but often get bored in class. I just want to do something else and read books.

Researcher: And you wrote English and Korean both here [pointing to the map].

Yuri: (smiles)

Researcher: Why did you use both languages here? 특히, 여기 한국어? Especially Korean here?

Yuri: 학교는, 영어를 전부 사용하잖아요. (In school, we all use English, and we only use English.)

Researcher: 이걸요? 지금은요? (What about this? How about now?)

Yuri: 이걸 괜찮다고 생각이 들었어요. 이걸 나에 대한 얘기니까. 그리고... 지금은, 복도니까. 여긴 반 친구들도 없고. 수학 시간에도 괜찮아요. 선생님(연구자)한테 한국어를 쓰면... 애들이 다 쳐다볼까 봐. (I felt it would be okay to do this. It's about myself. And, right now, we're in the hallway... no classmates here. It's okay in math class too though. If I speak in Korean to you [Researcher], I'm afraid everyone will look at me.)

Researcher: 그럼 복도에서 이렇게 (한국어로) 대화하면 편해요? (Then is it comfortable to talk like this in the hallway in Korean?)

Yuri: (shaking her head]

(Go-Along Interview, December 20, 2022, Yuri, the United States)

For Yuri, language became one of the criteria that differentiated her from her friends, which shows the interconnectedness of language with all entities in the environment (Orellana, 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). In addition to being a tool for communication, language served as a means for hiding or revealing her identity as a Korean in the United States. Yuri regarded the Korean language as the language used by the people of Korea, and English as the language used by the people of America. She intentionally chose her language based on the space, situation, topic, and person she was speaking to. This provides insight into her understanding of being “Korean who uses Korean.” It is common to understand ethnic identity by relying on racial or national definitions that include “sharing elements of Korean identity, having Korean blood, knowing and using the Korean language, and understanding Korean culture and customs” (Kim, 2020, p. 84). In addition to this, Yuri took into consideration the topics she could talk about and secured the activities or practices she could perform. When she explained the captions that she wrote in Korean, she naturally recognized what “is about myself,” which allowed her to engage in translanguaging, portraying her comfort level of belonging in her drawings and writings. Her translanguaging practices in her mapping reveal her identity as “social, spatial, and institutional constructions ... with the power of hybrid identities” (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 237), which is an extension of the traditional definition of identity.

Yuri's explanation of her preference for speaking Korean in certain contexts, such as the hallway and math classroom, suggests a recognition of the importance of the sociocultural context in language use. Language can play a critical role for children who come from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, serving as either a conduit that enables them to engage more deeply with the wider educational community or as an obstacle that hinders their participation in the learning process (García & Lin, 2017b; Wei & Lin, 2019). This understanding resonates with the notion of translanguaging as a sociocultural practice, where language choice is influenced by social dynamics and the



desire for acceptance from peers (MacSwan, 2022), which allows us to rethink the multiple ways of understanding children’s literacy practices.

Translanguaging connects with the idea of multimodal approaches that allow more comfortable ways of expressing one’s beliefs and ideas using language and recognizes that meaning-making can occur through various modes, such as visual, digital, and sensory (Kress, 2010; Pennycook, 2017). In other words, language goes beyond the conventional forms of written and spoken words and includes the ability to engage with various modes of communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996). The data exemplifies how Yuri’s language use and preferences within the school environment align with the principles of multiliteracies and multimodal approaches. It highlights the importance of creating inclusive learning spaces that value and embrace diverse linguistic and cultural resources, allowing children to engage in meaningful literacy practices (Cope, & Kalantzis, 2013). The participants’ responses provided valuable insights into when and how children feel comfortable expressing their sense of belonging through social, emotional, and intellectual literacy practices within the classroom (Dyson, 2018) and in their translanguaging practices.

Multiliteracies in the school context aim to prepare students for a fast-changing, globalized, and culturally diverse society by incorporating various resources and viewpoints along with critical engagement (Kuby & Crawford, 2018). Yuri’s mapping and interview were part of her daily literacy practices and linked to the places where they occurred; thus, her meaning-making was situated within specific sociocultural contexts. By examining children’s translanguaging practices through multimodal approaches, we can better understand their literacy practices in terms of the signs, symbols, and modes they use to communicate their sense of belonging. Connecting a sense of belonging to translanguaging practices contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of language, identity, belonging, and literacy practices within diverse sociocultural contexts, with implications for language education, cultural inclusion, and pedagogical approaches (García & Sylvan, 2011). The diverse linguistic resources and translanguaging practices of emergent bilinguals are valuable assets that can support and enhance language learning within the bilingual continuum.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

With globalization blurring the boundaries between societies, cultures, and people, translanguaging has become increasingly prevalent in classrooms, where the use of multiple languages interweaves seamlessly within a diverse and interconnected learning environment (Orellana & García, 2014). While the number of emergent bilingual learners whose appearances, languages, and cultures differ from those of the dominant-monolingual population is increasing, so is the need to explore the translanguaging practices that take place in schools (Baker, 2011; Blommaert, 2013). To explore how multiliteracy practices embracing translanguaging contribute to the children’s meaning-

making, learning, and sense of belonging in their classrooms (Dyson, 2018), I employed an ethnographic approach based on the accumulated cultural, linguistic, and historic beliefs and values that shape a group's behavior patterns depending on their surrounding groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Children's translanguaging practices within the classroom context highlight the fluidity and dynamism of language use among bilingual children and the sociocultural factors that influence their language choices (García, 2009). The findings indicate that translanguaging occurs not only as a means of communication but also as a way for children to express their cultural identities and engage in meaningful interactions with their peers. Translanguaging allows individuals to modify their sociocultural identities and actively shape their language practices (Canagarajah, 2011), thereby affirming their multilingual identities. Moreover, the data demonstrates the importance of creating inclusive and empowering learning environments that recognize and value the diverse linguistic and cultural resources that emergent bilinguals bring to their lived experiences. The concept of multiliteracies and multimodal approaches emerges as a key pedagogical framework in translanguaging practices (García & Sylvan, 2011), emphasizing the need to go beyond traditional notions of literacy and embrace a range of modes and semiotic resources (Kress, 2010). Translanguaging promotes an inclusive and empowering approach to language education by recognizing and celebrating the fluidity of languages, modes, and identities (Wei, 2018). The use of diverse semiotic modes in translanguaging, encompassing verbal, visual, audio, and sensory aspects, actively contributes to meaning construction and communication in sociocultural contexts. This enables children to navigate and negotiate their identities and meaning-making practices through a range of expression mediums.

The approach of combining translanguaging with multiliteracy practices within sociocultural dynamics has several implications for classroom practices and language education. Firstly, educators and policymakers can recognize the rich linguistic repertoires of emergent bilinguals and understand the significance of translanguaging as a sociocultural practice. This awareness can inform the development of inclusive curricula and instructional strategies that support integrating multiple languages and modes of communication. The potential of incorporating translanguaging pedagogy into child-centered activities that consider the emergent bilingual children's backgrounds enhance learning experiences (García & Sylvan, 2011) and fosters a sense of belonging. The significance of embracing diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in creating inclusive learning environments is underscored (García & Wei, 2014), with practical implications for educators in designing curriculum and instruction. Secondly, promoting multiliteracies and multimodal approaches in classroom literacy practices can enhance children's engagement, agency, and sense of belonging. For example, in the mapping activity, by acknowledging and leveraging the diverse semiotic resources available to children, educators can create meaningful learning experiences that bridge local and global contexts, promote critical thinking, and foster cultural appreciation. Lastly, it is essential to provide professional development opportunities for educators to

develop their understanding of translanguaging practices and the pedagogical strategies that support these practices (García & Sylvan, 2011; García & Wei, 2014). By equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to embrace translanguaging and multimodal approaches, educational institutions can create more inclusive and effective learning environments for emergent bilingual students.

The dynamic and complex nature of translanguaging practices among bilingual children and the ways in which these practices shape their sociocultural identities and language learning experiences emphasize the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse linguistic and cultural resources that emergent bilingual students bring to the classroom (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Kwon et al., 2022). By rethinking the importance of creating an inclusive environment that fosters a secure space for translanguaging practices and cultivates a sense of belonging, educators can establish inclusive and empowering learning environments. These environments provide support for the development of children's language skills, critical thinking abilities, and cultural awareness. Embracing translanguaging practices and promoting inclusive pedagogies creates educational environments that empower and celebrate the linguistic and cultural diversity of students, fostering their sense of belonging in an interconnected world.

## THE AUTHOR

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