Translanguaging Practices in Composition Scholarship and Pedagogy: Issues, Evidence, and Controversies

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Abstract:
The notion of translanguaging has hitherto gained prominence in composition scholarship and pedagogy. Scholars have specifically pointed out that translanguaging pedagogy is particularly germane if it is implemented in the teaching and learning of writing in a multilingual setting. Drawing upon the plethora of published studies, these scholars have argued that translanguaging strategies can help maximize students' linguistic resources and communicative potentials. This conceptual article looks at intellectual endeavors which try to challenge the monolingual ideology and its biases, and to justify the legitimacy of mixing different linguistic codes for achieving desired communicative goals in written communication. Contemporary issues of composition scholarship and pedagogy under translanguaging vantage point of view will be addressed, and evidence of code-meshing from multilingual writers showcasing the acts of translanguaging in academic writing presented. Finally, the article discusses the controversies over the application of the notion of translanguaging in writing research and pedagogy.

Keywords*: multilingual writers, translanguaging, translanguaging pedagogy, writing scholarship and pedagogy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary geopolitics of academic writing scholarship has been characterized by the intellectual movement that encourages the practices of merging different linguistic codes for the sake of accomplishing desired communicative effects. In the most current term, this movement is known as a translanguaging practice defined as 'a practice that involves the dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties' (Li, 2018, p.15). In this perspective, language users are encouraged to practice English in a flexible way by making full use of the rich linguistic resources at their disposal, as well as by shuttling different languages creatively, so as (as the research has shown) to maximize their communicative potentials. The goal of translanguaging is 'to engage diverse multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities' (Li, 2018, p. 240) to achieve one's communicative purposes and goals.

Understandably, translanguaging orientation has been motivated mainly by the fact that we live in a globalized community typified by transnational relations, migration, diaspora, political dynamics, and information and technology. As Canagarajah (2013b) astutely observes:

> Social relations and communicative practices in the context of late modernity –featuring migration, transnational economic and production relationships, digital media, and online communication –facilitate a meshing of languages and semiotic resources (p. 2).

As a consequence of this, different languages come in contact to each other, and in such a language contact situation people from diverse nationalities and linguistic and cultural backgrounds strive to be able to communicate successfully, ensuring that what they speak and write is intelligible to their interlocutors.

Yet, in cross-language relations where different linguistic codes are embedded together during communication, one should not always share similar linguistic backgrounds in order to guarantee successful communication. Besides, people cannot be expected to communicate both orally and in written form in precisely the same way. In this respect, people of different linguistic backgrounds are not supposed to resort to an established norm to achieve what is desired in our socialization and interaction with other people. Instead, we need to envision such an act of socialization as what Pratt (1991) calls a *contact zone*, which she defines as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 33). It is this important construct that has been employed by composition scholars to challenge the English-only policy and to justify translanguaging practices in writing pedagogy –a specific form of translingual practice.

This conceptual article discusses what actually at issues in the contemporary writing scholarship and pedagogy are. Specifically, it highlights some important shifts in

orientation in both writing pedagogy and scholarship. It then proceeds to present some evidence as a way to illustrate the vibrant practices of meshing different linguistic codes. Finally, controversies over the application of translingual practice will be discussed.

2. CONTEMPORARY WRITING SCHOLARSHIP AND PEDAGOGY: WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

The English monolingualism which has been dominating the teaching of English has to date been seriously challenged (Canagarajah, 2013a; Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011). It has been argued that in the context of linguistic diversity, imposing English monolingual ideology no longer holds good. Such ideology can perpetuate "the myth of linguistic homogeneity" (Matsuda, 2006), and denies a wealth of linguistics resources that students may bring with them in communicative settings. The linguistic difference is no longer seen as a barrier or deficit, but rather as a resource to sustain in language teaching and learning.

In line with the above proposition, approaches to writing pedagogy are beginning to take a new direction, with composition scholars now affirming the importance of developing linguistic tolerance toward multilingual writers. Initiated by the visionary work of Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011), composition scholarship is beginning to take issues of language difference seriously. Once deemed a hindrance and a deficit, now language difference is considered a useful resource in writing scholarship and pedagogy. As these scholars assert, "This [translingual approach] sees a difference in a language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening (p. 303).

The shift of orientation from monolingualism to translingualism has a vital ramification for such writing constructs as competence, proficiency, and fluency in writing. All these constructs are now defined in terms of a writer's adeptness in transforming a text into new forms and meanings by creatively meshing or mixing linguistic resources available to them. Thus, they are not measured simply by a writer's prowess in adding an existing language to another language, but by the transformative capacity a writer has to make use of using varied resources –be they linguistic or non-linguistic –to produce or create a new textual realization as well as to respond to different expectations of readers' social positions and ideological perspectives (Canagarajah, 2013 b; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011). Construed in this way, the act of writing is not neutral or value-free but is loaded with the writer's ideological positioning and identity.

The notion of competence under this new orientation is akin to what Cook calls *multi-competence* (1992), which allows a writer to mesh different linguistic codes. It is noteworthy here to understand that such a perspective differs from what is commonly perceived in the much-celebrated term like multilingualism, which views

competence as occupying different compartments for each language a writer uses (Canagarajah, 2013 b), rather than as an integrated entity inherent in an individual language user.

In this sense, we can infer that the idea of translingualism is also a movement that shifts our attention away from the perspective of multilingualism to pluriversalism or "polycentrism" (Pennycook, 2014). Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011) encapsulate this shift as follows:

Traditional Multilingual Model	**Translingual Model**
Languages are static, discrete, and defined by specific forms	Languages and language boundaries are fluctuating and in constant revision
Multilinguals have discrete fluencies in more than one discrete, stable languages	Multilinguals are fluent in working across a variety of fluctuating "languages"
Fluency in each discrete than language is determined by achieving an "appropriate" target of language practice	Focus in on mutual intelligibility rather fluency; language use has potential to transform context and what is "appropriate" to them
Fluency in each discrete of language determines membership in language group	Code-switching, borrowing, and blending languages are understood as the norm
Language is linked to social identity and citizenship	All language use is an act of translation; language use values transnational connectivity
"Bilingual is imagined as two monolinguals in one person	"Bilinguals" is imagined as a unique and shifting blend of practical knowledge and language use

(Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 287)

While the multilingual model views language as static and can be labeled and easily identified in its specific form, translingual model regards language boundaries as porous, borderless, and fluctuating over time. Furthermore, in the former model multilinguals are considered to have proficiency in separated named languages, but in the latter language users are proficient in dynamically shuttling between, and crossing languages to index their identities and ideologies. Thus, in the multilingual model proficiency or fluency in using discrete and separated language is determined by whether or not language users can attain the expected goal of language practice. By contrast, translingualism does not aim at fluency and the attainment of the appropriate target of language practice; instead, it aims at mutual intelligibility

among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In this sense, language speakers have the capability to manipulate language norms and conventions to suit their own communicative needs. New norms can also emerge through such language practices as code-switching, borrowing, and blending. However, multilingual model views fluency determining membership in a language group, as one's use of discrete languages portrays one's identity and citizenship. For translingual model, language use should be understood in terms of the context of other languages–"a language always in translation" or "a language of translingual use" (Pennycook, 2008, p. 34). Finally, while the multilingual model sees bilingualism as the ability to use two separate languages in one person, translingual model treats it as the speakers' or writers' ability in blending and shifting different languages. In other words, bilingualism in the former model orientates to one's language competence, whereas in the latter model, it is a result of one's language practice.

3. EVIDENCE OF TRANSLINGUAL WRITING IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Evidence of translanguaging practices in academic writing, albeit very limited in numbers, has showcased the fact that translingualism is not uncommon even in high-stake writing (see Alwasilah, 2014, Canagarajah, 2013a, 2013b; Dardjowidjojo 2001; Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011; Smitherman, 1999). This section provides some evidence of translingual writings of multilingual scholars which were published in refereed journals, and as an anthology. The writings of these scholars are loaded with translanguaged texts (see Canagarajah, 1999 for classic evidence of the code-meshed texts; Sugiharto, 2015 for a detailed discussion of the writings of Alwasilah, 2014 and Dardjowidjojo, 2001, amongst other) where lexical items from different languages are creatively code-meshed and blended.

The classic evidence often showcased as a bold move to defy established academic writing conventions comes from the work of Geneva Smitherman (1999), an African American scholar and writer. In most of her writings, Smitherman is keen on meshing African American Vernacular English (AAVE) with Standard English (SWE). As has been the case of the writings of Dardjowidjojo and Alwasilah mentioned above, the infusion of AAVE in Smitherman's writing is deliberate in that she attempts to index her true identity as an African American writer. Consider, for example, the following statement from the article written by Smitherman (1999, p. 368) and published in a top-notched peer-reviewed journal *College Composition and Communication* (CCC):

> "As I listened to their arguments, all I could think about was the dissin and doggin I had endured during the "Students' Right" years, and I kept saying "no way".

Employing the lexemes *dissin* and *doggin* in a refereed academic journal is unthinkable, as these two words are typical AAVE (i.e. not belonging to academic language), and are not deemed appropriate for use in an academic article. Yet, the acceptance and inclusion of the article in the journal containing the meshing of AAVE with SWE indicates the fact that rather than being stigmatized as non-standard and non-academic, the creative meshing of the two words are seen as enriching the overall academic tone in the article. In his analysis of this AAVE lexical items, Canagarajah (2013a) sees a process of "lamination", where "a local framing of narrative" coexists with "the macro frame of an academic article" (p. 118). This, as he goes on to say, helps "recontextualizes the text and persuades readers …to accept the vernacular items in an academic article" (p. 118).

Other compelling instances of code-meshing practices derive from the writings of two renowned Indonesian scholars. Hailing from different ethnicities, these scholars, Dardjowidjojo and Alwasilah, performatively shuttle different languages to reveal and index their identities and cultural affiliations as multilingual writers. Consider, for example, the following code-meshed sentences:

> [1] A guru to us is a school-time parent. (S)he must, therefore, be *digugu* (trusted that what (s)he says is right) and *ditiru* (imitated)... (Dardjowidjojo, 2001, p. 315)

> [2] He himself was proclaimed by Allah Almighty as *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy for the whole universe). (Alwasilah, 2014, p. 9)

These meshing of Javanese with English in [1] and Arabic with English [2] shows the audacity of both scholars to "violate" the established English norm so as to reveal their own identities and values as non-native English writers. The goal of this ostensible violation is to achieve performative meaning (Canagarajah, 2013b), and to index the writers' ideologies and identities as multilingual writers. Also implied in this translanguaging practice are the writers' efforts to "negotiate standardize rules in light of the contexts of specific instances of writing" (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 305).

These instances of code-meshed texts show that as a high-stake writing practice, academic writing is not immune to translingual practice whereby multilingual writers exhibit their prowess in creatively shuttling and meshing different languages to achieve their rhetorical purposes in textual realization. The fluency in crossing diverse linguistic borders demonstrated by the multilingual writers above attests to the importance of exercising their linguistic practice or *procedural knowledge* (the knowledge of the how), rather than *proposition knowledge* (the knowledge of what) (Byram, 2008). In terms of code-meshing practices in literacy scholarship, propositional knowledge enables multilingual writers to creatively merge "their repertories in the…texts for voice in a manner that achieves intelligibility and

communicative success in relation to the dominant norms and expectations of specific communicative contexts (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 772).

4. TO TRANSLANGUAGE OR NOT TO TRANSLANGUAGE: AN INTELLECTUAL DIVIDE

The now celebrated notion of translanguaging has been gaining favor not only from composition scholars, but also from scholars-cum-writing teachers from diverse multilingual settings. In the specific classroom literacy practices, the idea of translanguaging practice, hence translanguaging pedagogy, has been vigorously unveiled and even encouraged to be implemented to help improve students' literacy practices (Bau Ayash, 203; Kaufhold, 2018; Milu, 2013; Young, 2013). More recently, translanguaging pedagogy has been considered to offer important values in teaching English as a lingua franca (Cenoz, 2019), has been proposed be used as "the transdisciplinary framework for language teaching and learning in a multilingual world" (Leung & Valdes 2019), and has been valued for it potential for providing "a space for creativity and criticality" (Rafi & Marie Morgan, 2021, p. 35). In essence, due to its perceived innumerable pedagogical benefits, translanguaging pedagogy has been considered as a valuable resource for the teaching of composition to multilingual students.

As an important resource for the teaching of composition across languages, translanguaging practice can help develop what Lorimer (2013) calls "rhetorical attunement", "a way of acting with language that assumes linguistic multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning to accomplish communicative ends" (p. 163). Focusing on multilingual writers' literate practice rather than their knowledge, Lorimer (2013) calls for "a practice-based understanding of literate resources", which stresses on "how multilingual writers use their languages to negotiate, create, and connect as they make meaning with others in socially and culturally infused situations" (pp. 16-163). Such a call is viable to be realized if multilingual writers are given the opportunities to create their own "translanguaging space", "a space that is created by and for Translanguaging practices, and a space where language users break down the ideologically laden dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psychological through interaction" (Li, 2018, p. 23) (see also Kaufhold, 2018).

Young (2013), as one of the ardent proponents and defenders of code-meshing practices, is fond of exhorting writing teachers to continue to practice language mixing in their writing instruction. Complying to standard English only, he further argues, is tantamount to dismissing language diversity, or in his words to "the language of a democracy" (p. 145). It is encouraging indeed for us language teachers, as well as for multilingual students to meditate on the following exhortation:

> …I continue to believe that the time is now to teach and learn code-meshing. It seems only right that we at least try. So, as has become my mantra and urging, keep code-meshing, keep code-meshing…" (Young 2103, p. 145).

However, despite these vehement pronouncements and exhortations of its values, translanguaging pedagogy as a realization of translingual practice in general has not been uncritically appraised in the field of composition. In fact, some scholars express their reservations about it, thus leading to an intellectual divide between those who feverishly promote the term in literacy pedagogy and those who encourage a critical acceptance of it. Deemed as a novel construct in the composition scholarship and pedagogy, the notion of translanguaging which vehemently campaigns for egalitarian linguistic practices and respects language differences, has been readily welcomed and accepted as a viable construct in academic writing scholarship and pedagogy. Matsuda (2014), however, warns of the feverish celebration of the term and its application in classroom teaching, as its conceptual framework is not yet fully established. He feels disturbed with both researchers' and students' eagerness with the term without fully fathoming what it is about. Despite Matsuda's acknowledgement and appreciation of translingualism as an important emergent construct in writing scholarship and pedagogy, his stance in maintaining the status quo is quite clear here. As he states:

> As exigency for scholarly works, however, the fascination for differences is not appropriate because the focus on visible and interesting examples skews the field's understanding of reality. A characterization of language users or uses based on differences alone would also mask similarities and might lead to stereotyping (p. 482).

It is apparent here that these remarks are not merely intended to remind the readers of being engrossed in the lure of translingual writing, as the title of his article suggests, but as an exhortation of staying in the established field and of critically appraising any emerging intellectual movements that have the potential to shake off the very foundation of the status quo.

Nevertheless, the apprehension of the misunderstanding and perhaps the misapplication of translingual writing does not stop here. Efforts to further clarify the term continue. In a recent open letter to *College English* editors titled "Clarifying the Relationship between L2 Writing and Translingual Writing: An Open Letter to Writing Studies Editors and Organization Leaders", Atkinson, Crusan, Matsuda, Ortmeier-Hooper, Ruecker, Simpson, and Tardy (2015), while welcoming the idea of translingual writing, exhorts both scholars and teachers in the field not to conflate and even replace the already improved version of L2 writing. Yet, the point in the letter that sparks uneasiness among the proponents of translingual writing is the writers' assertion that "writing studies and journal editors *need* to understand that job candidates professing translingual writing expertise may lack expertise in training writing teachers and developing writing curricula supportive of emerging

L2 writers in ways that are both practical and critical" (p. 385). For the proponents of translingual practice, however, such a statement can be considered a premature and hasty conclusion, as no evidence has yet been available to support it.

5. CONCLUSION

As always, every emerging intellectual movement which endeavors to challenge the status quo cannot escape a critical screening once it enters certain scholarship, with the translanguaging movement being no exception. While it is true that we need to develop a critical attitude towards the fascination and valorization of a novel conceptual framework, we should not prematurely reject it simply because it is alleged to pose a threat to the status quo. Both the proponents and opponents of translanguaging pedagogy have their own well-founded justifications which are worth pondering when writing teachers decide whether or not to practice translanguaging or code-meshing in their teaching contexts. A fetish about a novel construct needs to be balanced with both teacher's and student's comprehensive understanding of the construct; likewise, the linguistic preparedness in implementing the construct needs to be ensured as well. For instance, high linguistic proficiency is badly called for to practice code-meshing effectively in academic writing. Less proficient writers are less likely to be able blend or mix linguistic codes which can satisfy the expectations of the established discourse community. Doing so will run the risk of being ostracized by this community. Lastly, the readiness to translanguage and to mesh different linguistics code depends as well on the intuition of the writers (see Li, 2018) This, of course, has to do with the sensitivity towards writing genres which have their own governing conventions and norms. One may be tempting to code-mesh with a relatively great latitude, for example, in writing in literary genres such as short stories, poems and novels. Yet, when it comes to literacy practice in a high stake writing genre like academic writing, it surely requires adept strategies to code-mesh effectively.

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