

KE Lan's Critique

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Critique of *Translanguaging as Process and Pedagogy*

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Abstract

This paper is a critique of *Translanguaging as Process and Pedagogy: Developing the English Writing of Japanese Students in the US*. (García & Kano, 2014). The critique is composed of three parts.

The first part focuses on research methodology and design. The assessment of the research questions and their relevance to the result is one of the bones of contention. In terms of research design, it mainly concentrates on the size of the sample and variable control. This part aims to reflect on the procedure of research conduct critically to discover to what extent it achieves its desired results.

Second part critically assesses the relevant literature in the article, such as those on bilingualism and translanguaging. The literature review is assessed in terms of its comprehensibility, relevance to the topic and timeliness. While not the main focus of this critique, the second part also touches on the inflated definition of the term translanguaging and its consequence.

The third part is the centre of the critique. It starts by introducing the result of the empirical study. It then examines the relationship between empirical research and the conclusion the article draws. Such examination considers three parameters: clarity of the findings, the extent to the desired outcome and the validity of the claims.

The findings of the critique are two-fold. On the one hand, the article has made a significant intellectual contribution and has pedagogical implications, either in practical or theoretical terms. Many of its findings are already adopted as theoretical forefronts in the field of translanguaging. On the other hand, its insufficient size of sample, homogeneous methodology and lack of supportive evidence have undermined its credibility, especially when it comes to the second half of its finding, the purpose of experienced English to translanguaging.

Critique of source, research questions, design, and implementation
source

This empirical study is reliably sourced as part of paper collection, *The Multilingual Turn in Languages Education: Opportunities and Challenges*. This is a book concerning the general multilingual trend in education.

Concerning the findings, the article reveals the relationship between students' language proficiency and their purpose of translanguageing, especially when it comes to the development of written English. The article claims that students will have an improvement in their English writing if it takes into account their entire bilingual linguistic inventory in preparation. The article also claims translanguageing as a pedagogy bestows the bilingual participants with the expertise to personalise their learning strategies, hence better biliteracy practices. The most important finding is that translanguageing does help bilingual produce better texts in English.

Other factors are well-sourced as well. The participants are all bilingual students compatible with the research; the size of the sample is 10, a fair number by standards of qualitative research; the research is conducted through observations first and interviews afterwards, typical of qualitative research.

Research questions

When it comes to research questions, the article states that it intends to have a better understanding of students' "perceptions of translanguageing as pedagogy and as a learning strategy" (p.265). It is reasonable to assume that if students have reservations about bilingualism, they tend to refrain from the practices.

However, this assumption does not suffice to be causally connected with the research outcome it desires. While students' perception has to do with their personal opinions towards the hybrid use of language, the research aims to find out how much fluidity of language use helps improve students written English proficiency. Such discrepancy may boil down to a simple statement: one does not need to find translanguageing agreeable to realise it is useful.

To further substantiate the validity of research, the article also clarifies by what standards they might claim translanguageing as a pedagogy helpful. It puts forward the standard of valuable academic written English, such as critical thinking, organisation, correct use of grammar, etc.

This part, again, is where the discrepancy arises. The research is heavily invested in interviews with students on topics about whether and how they translanguage during English writing process. It does not involve evaluation of good written English. Though the researchers do make a distinction between emergent bilinguals and experienced

bilinguals, it is on the basis of their oral English proficiency and their background of education, rather than on their writing. The relevance of their preparation for the research and their desired outcome is, therefore, insufficient.

Research design and implementation

The research is designed and executed in a scientific manner. Its advancement reflects either in sample diversity or clarified procedure.

In terms of the research procedure, the authors have made some efforts to standardise the process. We can tell from its well-structured research. First, the participants are assigned bilinguals texts about similar subjects to write. Second, participants are instructed to read in the same language. Third, participants are asked to write in a different language from the one they used in reading. Furthermore, to validate its findings, the study spanned up to 21 weeks.

From the perspective of sample diversity, ten bilingual students of Japanese and English are chosen for the research. The author puts forward the concept of the bilingual continuum (García, 2009; Grosjean, 2010) to better describe the participants' language proficiency. Based on the bilingual continuum, there are emergent bilinguals, who are at the early stage of language knowledge and understanding g English as the second language. Also, there are experienced bilinguals who are more proficient in either language. The emergent/experienced dichotomy is the presupposition of the data analysis and research hypothesis. Its discussion is, therefore, time worthy.  5

While the critique does not challenge the categories, it does have an issue with the categorisation. We believe such a limited sample in the article does not suffice to represent such grandeur findings as it claims. Nor is the sampling method comprehensive enough. There could be selection bias distorting the evidence (Thomas, 2017).

Another part subject to questioning is its variable control. Despite the previous efforts of standardisation, there are other factors at play that could skew the results, which in this case, include age and the participants' characters. These variables may sometimes have an impact on participants' performance in research. As Auld et al. (2020) study, bilinguals do not translanguage at a consistent level all the time. Under certain circumstances such as stress or excitement, they will intensify their translanguageing. Therefore, to design a research environment where participants feel natural is what the research could have done better.

Critique of literature review

The comprehensiveness of the literature

In order to theorise the study, the article has done an outstanding literature review. The review goes over the development of bilingualism and the rise of translanguaging first as a bilingual pedagogy in Wales (Williams, 1994), later in a broader range of settings (Baker, 2011, Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012a, 2012b), and in the end a fluid use of language in everyday life (García, 2009, 2011, 2013; García & Sylvan, 2011). Since the article is explicitly concerning translanguaging as process and pedagogy, its assessment should be undergone on a similar basis as well.

The review is extraordinarily comprehensive, encompassing related studies spanning three decades. The review starts with introducing bilingualism. It then invites for a revisit of the current views towards language boundary, citing relevant studies to support its claims such as Pennycook (2000), De Bot et al. (2005) and Garcia herself (2009).

Such an invitation for perception renewal paves the way to the creation of a new term to capture the linguistic reality. In the second half of the review, the article shifts its focus from on general bilingual practices to a hybrid, fluid use of language, translanguaging. Nevertheless, before elaborating on the term in details, the review also encompasses other terms competing to represent cross-lingual use of languages, such as *transidiomatic practices* (Jacquemet, 2005), *polylingualism* (Jørgensen 2008), *metrolingualism* (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010) and *code meshing* (Canagarajah, 2011).

Another example of its comprehensiveness is in the definition of translanguaging. The article has demonstrated how the term has undergone a shift of definition from a bilingual alternation to more complex discursive practices of bilinguals and the pedagogy in use. Plentiful corresponding researches are provided regarding each new version of the term.

Drawbacks of definition inflation

As comprehensive and relevant as the literature review is, there is one problem remaining unresolved: the overlapping referent of different versions of translanguaging. Such confusion is characteristic of the inherent flaws of translanguaging. The term is undergoing meaning inflation that its substance changes across different users, each not necessarily committed to one other.

Even though the author decides to adopt the latest version of translanguaging, referring it to the practice that “bilingual speakers select language features from a repertoire...that fit their communicative situations (p.260)”, there are many occasions in the research where the term means precisely otherwise. On studying the bilingual use of Japanese and

English, translanguage is a hybrid use of languages. While the authors conduct interviews with participants concerning how they make use of bilingual knowledge to prepare for writing, translanguage becomes an instinct in language practice to draw on one's holistic language repertoire. When it comes to analysing the shutter between Japanese and English in the classroom, translanguage then becomes a pedagogy.

Such polysemy does not necessarily confuse if adequately harnessed. However, it is an inconvenient fact in the longer run: if even the collaborator of Garcia, the most prominent advocate of translanguage, fails to confine the term to its intended scope of meaning, how can other people accurately make use of it?

Critique of research findings

The last part revolves around the critical assessment of the article's findings. These findings have three major unresolved problems.

The first part of the critique illustrates how these findings are inconsistent with the initial research questions. In the second part, we stress that of ten participants is far from representative of the findings. The critique's last part will concentrate on the data interpretation, pointing out it has flaws, some of which could shake up the entire theory.

As one of the most influential and cited scholars in the field of translanguage, Garcia has not merely made an empirical study showcasing the application of this pedagogy, she indeed pushes forward the theoretical boundary of translanguage with the article. Previous studies have focused more on the pedagogical implications of translanguage and its transformative nature in Critical thinking speaker's self-perception and identification. Relatively few attentions have been paid to its purpose. It is then no mean feat that Garcia and Kano have managed to unveil how bilinguals at different language continuum translanguage for different purposes.

Three conclusions are drawn through the research. The first is all participants, irrespective of their positions in the bilingual continuum, "translanguage frequently" to make sense of their learning. The second conclusion reveals that emergent bilinguals most translanguage for "support" and "expansion". The third is that experienced bilinguals translanguage for a different purpose. They translanguage for "strategic expediency" and "enhancement" (p.266).

The critique does not find these three conclusions equally convincing. The intention to challenge some of these conclusions is not to prove they are wrong, but to prove that they

might not be as sure as the authors claim. Owing to the lack of supportive evidence, we have reservations regarding their generalisability.

The article concludes that bilinguals whose English proficiency is lacking tend to translanguage for support. While reading bilinguals texts, some emergent participants will shuttle back to Japanese, the L1 in the case, for reference when they cannot make sense of the English texts. Some other emergent bilinguals will employ more compartmental approach, confining Japanese to input, English to output or Japanese to thinking, English to writing. With higher L2 proficiency, participants will also translanguage for expansion, which includes annotation in L2 and lexical level translation.

However, experienced bilinguals have a different preference in their translanguage practices. The article points out that some of them will translanguage for strategic expediency. The authors put forward the term pluriliteracies (García *et al.*, 2007) to describe their recognition of fluid language use (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003).

This part is what the critique disputes the most. Our challenge to such a conclusion could be split up as two dimensions: the ambiguous interpretation of the interview and the **over-encompassing definition**  translanguageing.

The article concludes experienced bilinguals translanguage for strategic expediency and enhancement. Nevertheless, an intensive rereading seems to suggest that it is not the entire story. The interview does not display any proof that the experienced bilinguals draw on other semiotic resources in their thinking. Quite the contrary, when asked, the participants respond that they tend to think in the same language as the one used as a medium of instruction. That is, they think in English if they are taught in English. The critique, therefore, argues it is not accurate to label this situation as "translanguageing for strategic expediency" when there are no elements of translanguageing involved.

Also, during the interview, the participants responded that they would make use of the bilingual resources to facilitate their learning. They either "search in two languages" or "translate what the teacher says". The authors characterise such action as "translanguageing for enhancement". However, deep down, the participants distribute their two languages to different situations for different purposes under different circumstances. Rather than labelling it as translanguageing, it is closer to what Cummins calls "the two solitudes" (2007). The two solitudes are indicative of the fact that participants regard the boundary of the two languages as distinct. There is no evidence that participants make a fluid or hybrid use of language. It is therefore undeserving of the name of translanguageing and could be explained as translation or code-switching. Even

though the authors manage to encompass such compartmentalised use of bilingual resources under the term, they do so by inflating its definition. Furthermore, as we have discussed in the critique of literature, there is a price for the definition inflation: it will confuse, and its explanatory power will wane as no one knows to what the term refers explicitly.

Conclusion

By discovering the weakness in this empirical study, the critique argues for revisiting some of the conclusions that have been accepted as conventional wisdom, such as the claims that experienced English speakers translanguage for strategic expediency and enhancement. Even though it is not the intention of this critique to challenge the reliability of the conclusion as mentioned above, we do advocate for more supportive evidence and mix method researches to validate such a general claim truly. Most importantly, the critique concerns the meaning inflation of translanguaging and argues that its meaning should be scaled down precisely in the context.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

75/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

Scientific method / theoretical considerations

This is an excellent assignment which explores translanguaging with confidence.

You demonstrate your ability to understand key research approaches by considering the background literature effectively.

Methodology

You have succeeded in identifying key research methods. The context of the article is described clearly and reference is made to appropriate reading in the module.

Results and relevance to theory

A range of evidence is discussed with reference to good practice. Your review is supported by insights into further research but this could be analysed more systematically.

The style is coherent and reflective adopting a suitably tentative approach. A good range of additional sources are synthesized to form a clear discussion. References are complete and the conventions are applied consistently.

You might like to consider:

Whether the original meaning of translanguaging has been misinterpreted in different contexts.

PAGE 1



Comment 1

Good clear focus.

QM

Key issues

Clear identification of key issues



Comment 2

further clarification required.

PAGE 2



Comment 3

How? Can you give further details here?



Comment 4

Can you remind your audience what the exact research questions are ?

PAGE 3

QM

knowledge and understanding

Clear, relevant knowledge and understanding of the debates surrounding the CPH.



Comment 5

Do you mean timely or worthy of attention?

PAGE 4



Comment 6

Is the Williams reference detailed in Lewis, Jones and Baker, 2012 ?



Comment 7

Useful discussion.



Background reading

Evidence of wide reading



Comment 8

Also across different contexts !

PAGE 5



Critical thinking

Ability to be critical and appraise the literature to further knowledge and thinking.

PAGE 6



Comment 9

clarify

PAGE 7



Comment 10

Highly focused response which is well-structured.



Comment 11

There is no need to number references as you haven't included footnotes.

PAGE 8
