

EXPLORING THE TRANSLINGUAL APPROACH TO ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The translanguaging approach has become an increasingly popular pedagogy in writing education to respond to linguistic diversity in the past decade. It emphasizes nonstandard language varieties and encourages learners to employ all linguistic repertoire. Writing scholars and educators proposed various research from different viewpoints to investigate how the approach can affect writing pedagogy and practice. However, so far, limited attention has been given to the potential influence of translanguaging writing in China's classrooms. Exploring the young and fast-growing landscape is necessary, and adapting the translanguaging approach to the Chinese context.

To fill the gap, the purpose of this paper is to present a critical review of the literature investigating translanguaging writing in China. Hopefully, the paper can facilitate the English as a foreign language (EFL) writing instructors who plan to adopt a translanguaging approach in China.

KEYWORDS

Translanguaging approach, English as a foreign language, EFL in China

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a multilingual world, and most people speak more than one language or variation [1]. Furthermore, the emerging bilingual/multilingual speakers use the languages and variations in diverse ways through interactions. However, prescriptive language ideologies “dictate that there is one correct way of using languages and arbitrarily privilege particular linguistic practices while stigmatizing others” [2]. Building on this linguistic prescriptivism, language-minoritized groups are expected to participate in literacy practices in a standardized way. Moreover, their home languages are perceived as proof of “linguistic deficiency”. The dominant language community “disseminates their language worldwide” and “fixes the language and how it should be approached” [3]. The white gaze privileges dominant white perspectives on any linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations, identifying their language use in racialized ways [4]. Whether minoritized communities are engaging appropriately in linguistic practices is determined by the idealized whiteness rather than their actual language use. Beyond literacy practices, “language becomes a powerful semiotic resource to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and circulate discourses that contribute to one-dimensional impressions of racial minorities” [5].

This perspective pushes forward the researchers to critique the reproduction of inequality and provide insight into “the ways that Standard English is produced as a cultural emblem and how the circulation of that emblem perpetuates raciolinguistic ideologies and thereby contributes to processes of social reproduction and societal stratification” [2]. García [1] proposes the framework of heteroglossic language ideologies that linguistic practices and identities are

dynamic and interact with social relations in multilingual contexts. Paris & Alim [4] raise that “the goal of teaching and learning with the youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices”.

In addition, translanguaging was put forward to challenge monolingualism and view language differences from a new standpoint. Previous studies such as [6], [7], [8], and [9] proposed and developed a translanguaging approach to writing, aiming to preserve the fluidity of language and language varieties and facilitate writing teaching and learning. From the translanguaging perspective, what matters to writing is “what the writers are doing with language and why” rather than “whether its language is standard” [8]. It regards multiliteracy as assets rather than deficits and encourages students to consider diversified languages or variations as resources in writing.

In this context, the translanguaging approach to writing has become a trending topic, which creates a broader space for different languages in the writing curriculum. It “empowers all writers with the agency in making meaning with their full linguistic repertoires” and “calls for understanding language use as fluid, hybrid, and negotiated” [10]. Over the past decades, increasing research has been conducted around the pedagogical applications of translanguaging approach in the context of English as an Additional Language (EAL) writing. For example, see [6], [11], [12], [13], [14], and [15]. However, in the context of China, relevant research is still emerging, and more suggestions are in demand for enacting a translanguaging approach to English as a foreign language (EFL) writing practice and pedagogy. Although there was a systematic review of empirical research on translanguaging pedagogies [16], and Sun [10] analyzed what translanguaging activities have been implemented and how writing teaching and learning have been impacted, the two papers both focus on the broad context of EAL writing. Nevertheless, the adaptation of translanguaging pedagogies to different contexts, for instance, China’s EFL classrooms, remained uncovered. Therefore, this paper aims to explore how the translanguaging approach has been implemented in writing education in China, provide an overview of current research, and examine how to better support EFL students’ writing learning with a translanguaging pedagogy.

2. A BRIEF REVIEW OF DISCUSSIONS ON A TRANSLINGUAL APPROACH TO WRITING

The Conference on College Composition and Communication 1974 resolution defended “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”, and “recognized the logicity of all varieties of English, the meanings to be gained by speakers and writers in using particular varieties of English, and the right of speakers and writers to produce such meanings” [8]. This public expression encouraged other professional organizations, teachers, and researchers to develop bilingual/multilingual education and brought more possibilities to the language classroom.

Being aligned with the CCCC 1974 resolution, some researchers [8] called for a translanguaging approach that “sees difference in 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”. The translanguaging approach contrasted traditional English monolingualism expectations and uniform standards by adding heterogeneity, fluidity, and negotiability in writing and language teaching [8]. It advocated for “the actions of multilingual speakers, signers, readers, and writers—actions that include the unbounded dynamic and fluid use of multilinguals’ entire linguistic repertoire” [17].

Based on the philosophy of translanguaging, “the specific practice of mixing different language varieties or registers for rhetorical effect in writing has been branded as code-meshing” [18]. A

translingual approach is supposed to enable students to integrate any linguistic resources, including “dialects, international languages, local idioms, chat-room lingo, and the rhetorical styles of various ethnic and cultural groups in both formal and informal speech acts” [19].

Various studies have discussed the translingual approach to writing practice and instruction in diversified teaching and learning contexts with the growing interest. Canagarajah [6] conducted an ethnographic study to develop four translanguaging pedagogical strategies to help students negotiate literacies: voicing, recontextualization, interactional, and textualization. Furthermore, he encouraged students to employ their linguistic repertoire and discover their strengths and preferences in translingual practices.

Zapata & Laman [12] implemented a cross-case analysis to investigate different principles of instruction that support the translingual approach to writing in EAL elementary classrooms. They argued that it was essential for teachers to value the community’s varied languages as resources in writing teaching. Also, teachers must employ their linguistic repertoire, serving as a linguistic model and encouraging students to integrate various languages.

Turnbull [15] paid attention to the effects of weak and strong forms of translanguaging on Japanese EFL students’ academic and creative writing. The author maintained that allowing EFL students engage in translingual practices can help them organize ideas and arguments better and “score higher than those who are forced to use one language over the other”.

Barbour & Lickorish Quinn [20] drew on empirical research with a class of children of various linguistic backgrounds, facilitating multilingualism through translingual creative writing. The research result showed that translingual creative writing can create a multicultural space for students to explore different languages, break through the limit of standardized language education, encourage students to collaborate, and build an inclusive writing community.

As mentioned before, limited research on a translingual approach focuses on EFL writing in China context. Therefore, it is essential to ask how a translingual approach to writing can be implemented in EFL classrooms in China and how they have impacted EFL writing teaching and learning. This paper offers a critical review of key studies to answer the guiding questions:

- 1) How has the translingual approach been implemented in EFL writing teaching in China?
- 2) How has the translingual approach impacted EFL writing teaching and learning in China?
- 3) How to prepare teachers and students for translingual writing practices in China?

3. RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

I approach this project as an Asian female writer, an international student, a language learner, and a language educator. My understanding of translingual writing is emergent from literature reading, individual experiences, life stories of others, and discussions with my colleagues from various social and cultural backgrounds. As an EFL writer who grew up in a monolingual context and is studying in Canada, I participated in different literacy practices using the dominant language English. My different identities add more possibilities to analyzing the translingual approach from diversified horizons. Through the project, I simultaneously positioned myself as an insider and outsider, striving to various corporate perspectives to explore the translingual approach to EFL writing in China.

4. METHODS

The studies involved in this research were selected through a keyword selection. The keywords were based on the purpose of the present research. Hence, the ‘trans-’ terms include translingual [6], translanguaging [21], translingual writing [8], translanguaging writing [22], translingual pedagogy [23], and translanguaging pedagogy [24] were selected to locate relevant research. Then, Google Scholar and the online library of a large research university were employed to search for publications in a comprehensive list of databases, such as English Teaching & Learning, Computer Assisted Language Learning, TESOL Quarterly, JSTOR, and RELC Journal. In addition, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) was also searched to locate relevant studies.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Implementation of the Translingual Approach

Lalicker [25] combined the translingual approach in designing the course Multicultural Writing, which was supposed to be taught at a higher education institution in China. The themes of the writing assignment “interrogated cultural assumptions; allowed students in the translingual context to consider differences in audience and purpose... and encouraged translingual negotiation as preparation” [25] for the further course. Instead of monolingual and monocultural writing, students were encouraged to develop essays with hybridized and synthetic rhetoric.

Similarly, Hiller [26] introduced translanguaging in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing course at a Sino-US joint-venture university in China. Three components were used to incorporate translanguaging in this course: explicit discussion of translanguaging, team project that surveys about Chinese culture, and short writing assignment to extend definition of a Chinese concept [26].

Some studies also involved online tools in translingual pedagogy in enabling students to employ multiple linguistic resources. For example, see [14], which developed four writing tasks to understand how students utilized translingual resources. Students were expected to “write a draft in Chinese”, then “write a draft in English”, “use Google Translator (GT) to produce online translation,” and “use the GT text to revise the draft”.

5.2. Impact of The Translingual Approach

Li & Guo [27] mentioned that translingual writing teaching methods could help improve Chinese students’ low performance in writing and proposed that “translingual pedagogy employs two languages together, and offers students the opportunity to compare language features, which gives them awareness in developing further linguistic abilities”.

Another research [14] indicated that “translanguaging is shown to have synergistically helped students leverage their multiple linguistic resources to convey more information, express more ideas while achieving a wider use of general, academic, and idea words”. The authors [14] demonstrated that the combination of digital resources and the translingual approach enables students to employ both L1 and L2 linguistic resources widely, offering new insight on involving digital tools in the translingual pedagogy to teach writing.

Some researchers also paid attention to the impact of translanguaging in different steps in writing activities. Yang [28] investigated the effects of translanguaging in prewriting discussions with

Chinese intermediate EFL learners. The study shows that translanguaging in prewriting discussion enables students to consult more language-use, generate more ideas, and engage more in the tasks. Sun & Zhang [29] conducted a study to explore how translanguaging in online peer feedback improves second language writing performance in a Chinese university. The quantitative results uncovered that “translanguaging online peer feedback, compared to English-only online peer feedback, was significantly more conducive to the improvement of learners’ second language writing performance in the first round of online peer feedback” [29].

5.3. Preparation for the Translingual Approach

Nowadays, increasing populations “coexist with different cultural, religious, and ethnic characteristics, both in society and in the classrooms” [30]. However, few students in China “arrive from their secondary schools with the cultural preparation or sophistication to make them comfortable about traveling to ‘exotic’ locations” [25]. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt translanguaging to writing education in the context of China and well-prepared both students and teachers for the new angle for addressing writing pedagogy. As [14] indicated, “it is important to build awareness about how writers of different cultures convey meanings and to compare rhetorical differences”. However, previous research mainly focused on the implementation and impact of translingual pedagogy in writing education, further research is needed to investigate the preparation for pedagogy, such as how can engage translingual pedagogy in teacher development, how can enhance students’ awareness of linguistic diversity and translanguaging in writing, and how to combine translingual pedagogy with different levels of EFL students in China.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF A TRANSLINGUAL APPROACH TO EFL WRITING IN CHINA

Theorists of translingualism support equality and against prejudice based on a person’s language choice. Translingual activities, according to [31], provide “pedagogical possibilities for decolonizing knowledge”. Through translingual practices, students can have a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between languages and the realization that it is not a “shame” to integrate all linguistic resources to communicate coherently. Students can use Standard English to help them write in a way that follows academic or professional conventions. It is, however, only one type of the context. The instructor can introduce students to many types of writing in various circumstances and from various writer groups. Although the students come from various linguistic, cultural, and racial origins, they can interact with others through translingual practices and comprehend others’ languages and cultures. Under this background, students can approach “Chinglish” in a new way to engage Chinese language and culture with English and western culture critically and creatively. Equipping students with translanguaging in writing can “promote cultural sensitivity and understanding” of “plurality of diverse ethnic and cultural communities” [32].

A translingual approach can also include diverse linguistic materials from various interlocutors. The community students live in provides linguistic resources in the social context based on their interaction with speakers out of the class. The students’ family offers them access to language information not found in textbooks. The instructor takes on the role of a language user, bringing together various linguistic resources and actively engaging students in translingual practices.

Nevertheless, the unique linguistic background and language proficiency will impact students’ language use. Within the context of China, language policy and language education are vastly different from western educational systems. Therefore, the instructors in China should consider all these elements and decide whether to employ the approach based on contexts. Also, the

emphasis on language differences does not contradict students' needs to learn writing norms. Students must acquire the norms to achieve academic success within some fields. Lastly, the instructor needs to encourage students to use translanguaging strategies according to the context instead of requiring them to do so without considering reality.

7. CONCLUSION

A translanguaging approach has attracted burgeoning attention in the past decade. Researchers and educators have surveyed its principles, pedagogical applications, and influences from different perspectives. It has been demonstrated that the approach can develop students' literacy skills, enhance their linguistic awareness, and engage them in interaction actively. Nevertheless, we must take a critical stance to consider when, why, and how to apply a translanguaging approach to writing in EFL programs within different contexts. The instructor must strive to balance the necessity of norms and translanguaging activities. Further research on preparing teachers and students in China for translanguaging pedagogy is in demand. Also, negotiating academic conventions and code-meshing strategies in professional writing remains unclear and need further study.

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