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¿Y si usamos los dos? Attitudes towards Translanguaging in an L2 Spanish Writing Course

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Abstract
Translanguaging is a new approach to language use, bilingual acquisition, and bilingual education that sees all acquired languages (or those being acquired) as components of one bi/multilingual repertoire (García & Wei, 2014). However, discussions of specific pedagogical applications of translingualism have remained limited and speculative (Gervers, 2018; Matsuda, 2014). Hence, it is still unclear how such pedagogies would address the needs of bi/multilingual student writers. Based on the need to further understand the use of translanguaging in the classroom, the present article explores the translingual practices and attitudes of students in a Spanish undergraduate writing class. Participants were 9 undergraduate students from a university in the United States. Data collection involved an online questionnaire, individual interviews —which focused on attitudes towards translanguaging— and the student's submission of their final project, which allowed the researchers to observe whether students reflected the translanguaging practices in the project. Results from online questionnaire and interviews suggest that students can better focus on the message they want to convey without linguistic pressure that forces them to use one language only. Additionally, pairing students for collaborative writing enhanced their overall drafting development. Results from the final projects reflect that students tend to not reflect translanguaging in their final version.

Keywords: *Translanguaging; second language acquisition; attitudes.*

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1. Introduction

This study investigated student attitudes toward translanguaging throughout a multimodal writing assignment in an upper-level, second language (L2) Spanish course. More specifically, the researchers aimed to comprehend students' attitudes toward this flexible bilingual pedagogy and the possibility of translanguaging when brainstorming and drafting the written portion of their class' digital assignment.

2. Review of the Literature

Translanguaging has been defined as an approach to language use, bilingual acquisition, and bilingual education that sees all acquired languages—or language(s) in the process of being acquired—as components of one bi/multilingual repertoire (García & Wei, 2014). Speakers draw linguistic resources from various languages to communicate effectively, based on their contextual needs (Velasco & García, 2014). Traditional L2 education programs have based their curricula on subtractive bilingualism. Recently, more scholars have begun to challenge this separation and introduced translanguaging as a practice of additive bilingualism, through which educators take advantage of students' home languages to enhance their weaker language development (García & Wei, 2014; Velasco & García, 2014). These scholars defend that translanguaging promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter, helps the acquisition of the weaker language, and helps to integrate early learners with fluent speakers (Baker, 2001). In addition, it is a natural linguistic practice among heritage or minority language students through which they question hierarchies between languages, and reject the biases of language purity and national monolingualism (Allard, 2017). Creese and Blackledge (2010) address the importance of "easing the burden of guilt associated with translanguaging in educational contexts," and restate the necessity for further research in "classroom language ecologies to show how and why pedagogic bilingual practices come to be legitimated and accepted by participants" (p. 113). Furthermore, few studies have focused on translanguaging in academic writing contexts as most investigations conducted have been "product-oriented (i.e., textual interpretation) and fore[went] the exploration process needed to identify types of writing or discourse" (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401).

Language attitudes are "any affective, cognitive or conative index of evaluative reactions toward different languages or their speakers" (Kircher, 2016, p. 241). This implies that bi/multilingual speakers, depending on their attitudes towards different languages, dialects, or practices, decide which ones to employ in specific communicative contexts. Language attitudes contribute to language maintenance, language shift, or bi/multilingual practices (Kircher, 2016). Research shows that even though students translanguage in the classroom, some are not conscious of their practices and they verbally express that languages are better kept separate. Palfreyman and Al-Bataineh (2018) observed that two university students from

the United Arab Emirates resorted to their full linguistic repertoire. Despite their translingual practices, their attitudes turned out to be ambivalent, as they expressed that they preferred to keep both languages separated. Several authors have concluded that translanguaging is a tool that can facilitate, enhance and improve the target language learning experience in the classroom. Adamson and Coulson (2015) investigated undergraduate students' perceptions towards English-Japanese translanguaging at a Japanese university. Results from surveys showed that students perceived translanguaging as an effective classroom management tool as well as a useful tool for clarification that also facilitated the completion of writing assignments, especially to students who possess lower English proficiencies. Similarly, Carstens (2016) explored the use of translanguaging in an engineering undergraduate class in South Africa. Results showed that most of the students believed that translanguaging helped them understand complex topics as well as improve their knowledge of the English language. Furthermore, Moody, Chowdhury, and Eslami (2019) investigated graduate students' attitudes towards translanguaging in several languages in a university in the southwestern United States and concluded that students perceived translanguaging as a tool for learning an additional language. They inferred that the fact that students perceived translanguaging positively should make instructors consider allowing and encouraging its use, in a way that would stop subscribing to ideologies of linguistic separation.

3. Methodology

Data were collected from the upper-level *Spanish Writing Literacies in Context* course at a large university in the southwest of the United States. This course was facilitated in a context of translingual practices where the instructor made use of English and Spanish. By drafting texts that then were included in a multimodal assignment, students used translanguaging in new digital scenarios. They wrote a 500-word collaborative draft describing the multilingual signs they found around town and the opinions regarding those signs of people that they interviewed at those locations. This served as the written portion later included in their digital project. The sample of participants consisted of five males and four females between the ages of 21 and early 40s, making up a total of N=9 participants, participants were assigned a three letter identification code, to ensure their anonnymity. Six of them considered themselves Caucasian, three Hispanic or Latino, and one, African American. Only two students reported themselves to be native speakers of Spanish. One of them learned Spanish at home and learned English in school, he is therefore considered a Spanish heritage speaker (Valdés, 2001). The other one was a native speaker of Spanish, grew up in Venezuela, and moved to the United State at the age of nine. Data were collected through an online survey in *Google Forms* and individual semi-structured interviews administered after the multimodal project was completed and graded by the instructor. The survey included a mixture of background

and attitude questions. Over the span of two weeks, one of the researchers interviewed individually with each participant. The interview dug deeper into the survey's inquiries.

4. Results

This section presents (1) the results of one question from the online survey and personal interviews that investigated students' attitudes towards translanguaging in the classroom and (2) the results of two questions regarding translanguaging at two specific points of the writing process for a multimodal project, i.e., brainstorming and drafting. Quantitative and qualitative data are presented together to provide a thorough overview.

4.1. Do you feel comfortable translanguaging in the classroom?

Half of the students (55.5%) declared they felt comfortable. One felt always comfortable "because it is something normal" and the rest felt comfortable most of the time. One participant's response in the interview was insightful: "I like having the option, it makes me feel comfortable. It helped me not freak out with all the sentence structures". One participant felt neither uncomfortable nor comfortable ("I'm practicing [it] to get more comfortable"), and as for the remaining three participants (33.3%), they felt uncomfortable most of the time. One participant elaborated: "I speak Spanish at home, everywhere else is English, so when I try to mix them up, it bothers me, it is weird". However, in his interview, he mentioned that it sounded natural to him in the classroom, that it is an advantage that he could use both: "In my personal life, no. But in the classroom, yes. It helps me express myself better, express exactly what I want to say". Some attitudes seemed to be conflicting. One of the follow-up questions asked during the interview was whether the participants thought translanguaging might prevent people from learning. The participant QLT, Spanish as L2 speaker asserted that having the opportunity to use translanguaging might be beneficial in the classroom, but that, in the end, it depends on the individual to use it as a tool to learn and not to only use English: "Having the opportunity to switch back and forth can be beneficial but it depends on the individual if they're gonna use it in the right way cause I know a lot of times sometimes I use a lot of English as a crutch and now I am regretting it because I don't know Spanish as well as I should". In addition, the heritage speaker (QGR) expressed that: "I think English use should be limited; they don't learn the Spanish that they need to. Like if they did 50/50% English and Spanish, I think that would be helpful").

4.2. Translanguaging has been useful as I brainstorm during my drafting process Translanguaging has been useful while drafting the written portion of the story maps

For sake of brevity, as some of the students expressed that they sometimes do both simultaneously and as very similar results were obtained, we consider these two questions together and present the results for two of the four pairs. Only one student strongly disagreed

in both and wrote: "I try to think in Spanish when I do my Spanish homework" and regarding drafting: "the same as above". This participant's partner in the written project was not part of the study.

4.3. Pair 1 (QGR, Spanish native speaker & LAF, Spanish L2 learner)

Their draft and final version of the project contained both Spanish and English. QGR stated in the survey that translanguaging "helps to use two languages to see which one will portray the message better" and had a more positive attitude toward Spanish when he stated that there are words in Spanish that can't be translated to English. His perspective was confirmed in the interview when he mentioned that translanguaging helps to improve the message because: "Spanish gives you more ways to express many things". QGR also mentioned that translanguaging "helped drive the narrative", when one reads the draft "it makes sense" and that transitions were logical: "It's logical, it's not that we use one paragraph in English and another in Spanish, it depends on [languages] we speak [in the interviews]". LAF supported this idea of trying to be faithful to the original language in which each of the interviews for the project took place: "We tried to be purposeful. Depending on the languages we used in the interviews if we're interviewing someone in English, we will write it in English" and while drafting "I don't really draft, like a lot of people draft in English and then translate it and I don't. So, I just switched depending on who we were talking to or what location we were at". Regarding their collaborative work, she said: "[Translanguaging] made me feel comfortable. Sometimes when I am writing, it is hard to go back and forth, but my partner was really fluent, so it made me learn more".

4.4. Pair 2 (CTT, Spanish heritage speaker & EXZ, Spanish L2 learner)

These participants wrote their draft and final version of their project in Spanish. EXZ stated preference for using both English and Spanish, CTT shared a preference for sole Spanish use. When asked in the interviews about the usefulness of translanguaging during the drafting and brainstorming process, CTT shared that it helped him when drafting. Conversely, EXZ stated that she always brainstorms in English, her native language. Both participants shared that translanguaging was useful to first brainstorm in English but acknowledged having tranlanguaged differently. CTT translanguaged by using words in English and words in Spanish, while EXZ wrote everything in English and then translated it into Spanish. An important idea that emerged in the interview was that EXZ believed that working with someone with a higher proficiency complimented her shortcomings.

5. Discussion

5.1. RQ1: What are the students' attitudes towards the implementation of a flexible bilingual pedagogy in an L2 Spanish writing course?

Positive: Overall, students were positive in their answers to the questions in the survey and the interviews. They felt comfortable translanguaging in the classroom. Over half of the students had favorable attitudes towards a flexible linguistic pedagogy, materialized in the use of both Spanish and English for communicative purposes in the classroom. One of the main reasons for this to be so was a better understanding of complex topics, a finding highlighted in Carstens (2016) and Baker (2001). Our findings also corroborate Moddy et al. (2019), who concluded that translanguaging was perceived positively. Similarly, the role of the instructor was also seen as positive in instances when the students said something in English and the instructor repeated it in Spanish. This procedure helped the students get their point across and, at the same time, they perceived that they learned more vocabulary. When using both languages, one participant declared that she learned more of the "why" of language use. This suggests that a deeper understanding of how the L2 functions is, in fact, explicitly noted by students in the classroom. It is important to note as well that this was seen as something specific to the classroom since the same participant stated that in a context of study abroad, to better improve the L2, full immersion is needed, but that in the classroom: "I need translanguaging for sure". In general, self-proclaimed students with lower proficiency levels of Spanish elected to use much more translanguaging than those who are heritage, native, or very advanced speakers, as this linguistic practice made them feel more comfortable and eased anxiety when speaking and presenting in front of the instructor and their peers. Additionally, they saw translanguaging as support to rely on when feeling unsure of how to express themselves only in their L2. At the same time, the heritage speaker in the study confirmed that translanguaging helped him equally when he was unsure of specific words in any of the two languages. The native speaker stated that it is an advantage to be able to use both languages in the classroom—as opposed to the out of classroom contexts—since both repertoires allow to express ideas more accurately when one language is considered to be more helpful than the other in specific instances.

Negative: Ideas expressed during interviews confirmed how positive and negative attitudes can be intertwined. As in Palfreyman and Al-Bataineh (2018) students' attitudes turned out to be rather ambivalent, as some of them would prefer to keep both languages separated. The most conflicting attitudes were seen in the native speaker and two high proficiency Spanish learners as they expressed feeling "almost never comfortable" translanguaging in the classroom, according to the survey. The three of them confirmed their views during the interviews stating that this is due to the difficulty of switching back and forth from one language to the other. This might be related to the recurring idea that to improve the use of

language, the classroom needs to be conducted in Spanish as much as possible to "get as much practice out of it", because if not, as two of these participants concluded in the interviews, not doing so might prevent people from learning. These are somehow mixed results and opinions since, even if these three students did not feel comfortable translanguaging in the classroom, they understood how it could be useful in certain situations or even specific assignments.

5.2. RQ2: What are the student's attitudes towards the possibility of translanguaging when composing the writing portion of a multimodal assignment?

Positive: Like RQ1, students generally showed positive attitudes towards the possibility of translanguaging during the writing process. The consensus was that the use of translanguaging in the brainstorming and drafting was helpful to seven out of the nine participants as it helped them to express their ideas more clearly. Translanguaging in this sense was used by the participants to assist them with translation as they wrote and drafted. As one of the pairs shared, they wrote their draft in English and translated it into Spanish. The member with lower proficiency declared to always brainstorm in English in Spanish classes as writing only in the target language is "hard". On the other hand, she admitted that her partner supported her in the writing process by providing a more informal linguistic repertoire to the text, whereas she provided the formal aspect to it. We see this as part of the scaffolding provided by the collaborative assignment. This justification for translanguaging as a facilitator to the completion of writing assignments—especially to students who possess lower proficiencies—is supported by Adamson and Coulson (2015). From these positive attitudes, we can infer that the participants of this study also perceived translanguaging as an effective tool for drafting and brainstorming and collaboration.

Negative: Overall, the participants expressed the sole use of Spanish to be best when writing for an assignment in a Spanish class. Additional results that stood out related to two of the nine participants' survey opinions where they selected the *strange* and *very strange* options to describe translanguaging usage throughout the assignment. This, however, conflicts with their actuated elective usage of translanguaging in their pairs. This allowed us to infer that, although a small portion of the reported negative attitudes, translanguaging was ultimately used in every pair's assignments throughout their drafting, and brainstorming processes. These negative attitudes relate to Gervers' (2018) insight that translanguaging may not always be an effective pedagogical approach for some students.

6. Conclusions

Findings suggest a positive opinion of translanguaging when used by the instructor and in the brainstorming and drafting processes. Allowing students to be in control of the language in the L2 classroom promotes a sense of agency and decision-making that is usually covered

by negative attitudes. By helping learners to use translanguaging more freely, they can better focus on the message they want to convey without linguistic pressure. According to our findings, this is especially helpful for those students still developing their language skills. Furthermore, this study brings a new perspective by analyzing attitudes toward translanguaging when working in a written aspect of a multimodal assignment in pairs. When students with different proficiency levels are paired up, the more proficient individuals can help scaffold their partner's progress by monitoring their work in the brainstorming and writing process. Participants who worked with a native and a heritage speaker underlined the usefulness of this process and how they complemented each other. This study calls for new pedagogical approaches, the development of new multimodal writing tasks that allow for accepted translanguaging texts, and ways to change the factors that limit its use in academic settings.

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