

# TRANSLANGUAGING AND TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Lessons from the  
CUNY-NYSIEB Project

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## DIFFERENT PLACES, DIFFERENT ISSUES

Teacher education reimagined through the CUNY-NYSIEB experience

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Sarah Hesson, and Cristian R. Solorza*

### Introduction

The four authors of this piece started working with CUNY-NYSIEB (City University of New York-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals) when they were doctoral students at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York. Since then, we have become faculty members in different institutions and in different locations. Solorza and Woodley are faculty in teacher education programs in New York City in two different private universities. Cioè-Peña is in a public university in neighboring New Jersey. Finally, Hesson is faculty at a public college in Rhode Island. In this chapter, we explore four teacher education spaces where the work of CUNY-NYSIEB has uniquely shaped our experiences and that of our students. In each of these contexts, CUNY-NYSIEB and translanguaging pedagogies have been used to reimagine aspects of learning and teaching to serve the needs of specific learners and their teachers.

Because each of the institutions faces different challenges, we describe below how we have built on what we learned about translanguaging in the CUNY-NYSIEB project to address different issues that emerged from different local contexts. Cioè-Peña looks at how she uses the lessons she learned in CUNY-NYSIEB to work with mostly White teacher candidates who will be teaching racialized bilingual students, especially in special education programs. Solorza addresses how he uses translanguaging theory to reimagine language policies and structures of dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs in the city. In a major private university, Woodley engages translanguaging in the education of many of her international TESOL teacher candidates. Hesson turns her attention to ensuring that teacher education in Rhode Island assumes a social

justice vision facilitated through a translanguaging lens. A focus on educational equity through the use of translanguaging pedagogies defines our work across varied contexts and diverse student populations.

Because our work is now produced in different spaces, we write in our own individual voices, echoing and yet going beyond the voices we heard as part of the CUNY-NYSIEB team. These are our individual journeys following, negotiating, and yet expanding the path that we entered when we joined CUNY-NYSIEB.

### **Reimagining places, spaces, and possibilities: Cioè-Peña and teaching students with disabilities**

As an adjunct instructor in the CUNY system while I was studying for my doctorate, I, María Cioè-Peña, worked with racially and linguistically diverse teaching candidates who were preparing to work with, and in, multilingual communities. As such, the opportunities to inject my work with translanguaging were more apparent.

When I started as assistant professor in a public university in Northern New Jersey, Montclair State University, I found myself working with students who in many ways represented the polar opposite of my CUNY students: Mostly White, suburban and monolingual. Additionally, these teaching candidates were primarily preparing to work in special education settings where they would be tasked with responding to needs rooted in disability labels. As a result, the translanguaging stance and the space for translanguaging became less visible and I was left wondering where and how translanguaging would fit now—not just in these students' teaching and learning experiences but also in my own practice and research.

It was not the prospective teachers' identity markers that created this tension but rather the spaces in which they would work and types of learners that they would teach. When White, monolingual teachers in NYC would ask about where and how translanguaging spaces would fit in their practice, my response was centered on the needs of the children: Translanguaging is not just about making space for language, it is about making space for children (Cioè-Peña, 2015). Thus, a translanguaging approach fits alongside our desires for equity and justice for students and their families (Cioè-Peña & Snell, 2015). After some reflection, I realized that geography did not alter the trueness of those ideas and values. It was this understanding of the political nature of translanguaging that allowed me to reimagine how to incorporate it into my practice (Flores, 2014; Kleyn & García, 2019).

While it would have been easier to lean on the fact that emergent multilingual students can be found in almost every school, it is not the perceived pathology, categorization or assumed needs for remediation of a child that should drive the use of translanguaging. Instead, we should call on the understanding that when we allow children to use their full linguistic repertoire, we allow children to present us with

their fullest selves. Armed with this belief, I have been able to use the rich resources that CUNY-NYSIEB developed in order to help teachers uncover the place for language in their classrooms. Part of this reimaging has meant working with colleagues in disabilities studies in education to conceive an intersectional framework which looks at translanguaging through the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The philosophical grounding of UDL is the belief that as educators we are always looking for ways to increase access, to maximize the ways in which our students connect to, develop and reflect learning (Berquist, 2017; Nelson & Ralabate, 2017). These values are very similar to the translanguaging focus on intentionality, on strength-based teaching and learning, and on holistic teaching (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). It was my time in CUNY-NYSIEB that allowed me to see this inclusivity. It was my time at CUNY-NYSIEB that allowed me to see the need for translanguaging spaces and practices in all classrooms, not just those created with emergent bilinguals in mind.

Although for a brief moment I questioned how I would continue the work of CUNY-NYSIEB outside of NYC, I now realize that the need for the philosophy that CUNY-NYSIEB espoused and the pedagogical practices that it developed is not geographically bound. The work of translanguaging and of CUNY-NYSIEB has not only liberated language in the classroom, it has created a space in which to imagine the possibilities.

### **Reimaging the learning and teaching of “international” students: Woodley extending translanguaging to teachers beyond the United States**

The work of CUNY-NYSIEB is a cornerstone of my syllabi and classes at New York University where I teach. The vast majority of our TESOL and Bilingual Education prospective teachers are students on F1 visas from China. The university refers to these students as “international students,” yet this term can be problematic, erasing the transnational and complex realities of so many students with various citizenship and immigration statuses. As a teacher-educator, I, Heather Woodley, strive to support these prospective teachers in unique ways considering many of them are seeking New York state teaching certification and would like to work with learners in NYC public schools.

Translanguaging offers a powerful lens to work with this group of students from China who are at the same time bilingual learners and simultaneously learning about teaching bilingual learners both in China and in the United States. Although prek-12 classrooms are becoming increasingly linguistically diverse and schools are finding ways to disrupt traditional monolingual notions of schooling, international students are facing increased complexities in higher education. Within the 83% White, and predominately middle-class teaching force, our international preservice teachers are unique in their cultural, linguistic and racial

positioning (Picower, 2012). Because of their “international” status, these students face a lack of access to financial aid and paid work opportunities, as well as language and cultural bias from professors, classmates, and administrators. We have witnessed professors admonishing these students for using their home languages in learning and social spaces. These attacks on languages are attacks on students’ identity and self (Anzaldúa, 1987). Translanguaging and the work of CUNY-NYSIEB seek to counter this narrative. I have explicitly created space for home language use in our own graduate-level TESOL education classrooms. For me, this is a new level of “you belong here” and “this space is for you” so as to include our international students. Whether it be giving them opportunities to turn-and-talk so that they can do so using Chinese or encouraging their use of Chinese in independent research, I implore these graduate students to use all their linguistic repertoire. In this way, they experience learning from a multilingual perspective, and I give them the space to make personal linguistic choices in their learning.

The resources created by the CUNY-NYSIEB team have proved valuable for our international students to reimagine what it means to be educators of emergent bilinguals. Translanguaging allows them to challenge notions of how “best” to learn and to critically consider their own English education growing up in China. Many of these students come to their education classes with the notion that English-only is the ideal path because “that’s what I was given in China.” We deconstruct this notion intentionally. I push them to think about, “How was your Mandarin used or positioned outside your classroom? Where was the power in languages? What did English mean to you?” After these reflections, students are faced with understanding that everyone experiences language and learning in very different ways.

Prior to coming to the US for their studies, these “international” students from China had never reflected on their own language oppression. They had never felt that Mandarin would be considered “less than” or an academic barrier. Introducing the experiences of bilinguals narrated and seen through a translanguaging lens has meant that they begin to see their own students and their own learning differently. Furthermore, CUNY-NYSIEB publications and videos provide these prospective teachers with concrete ways to not only support their students’ academic and linguistic growth, but to address the power structures of language they find in their new context (see Chapter 7, this volume).

### **Reimagining dual language bilingual education: Solorza negotiates**

Translanguaging theory disrupts how bilingual educators conceptualize language and pedagogy in DLBE classrooms (see also Chapters 8 and 14, this volume). Students must be able to access their entire linguistic repertoires as they

learn new content and language. I, Cristian R. Solorza, as a teacher-educator, have experienced how taking up translanguaging theory and including translanguaging pedagogical practices in two monolingually designed spaces create ideological and structural challenges for DLBE educators. First, strict language allocation policies prevent students from using their full linguistic repertoires freely by requiring them to perform monolingually. Second, standards-based curricula restrict language production to content-aligned phrases, vocabulary, and standardized language varieties. Translanguaging theory pushes us to think beyond current models of bilingual education to reimagine DLBE language allocation policies and curricula.

The Dual Language Bilingual Education & TESOL programs at Bank Street College help prepare teachers to enter public and private school bilingual education settings. The addition of translanguaging in our curricula called for programmatic changes. As program director, I was able to help revise the course sequence and readings, develop multi-model assignments, and establish a translanguaging stance in our pedagogies. With the support of CUNY-NYSIEB, four Bank Street graduates and I were also able to write a guide that provides a theoretical framework for envisioning translanguaging in DLBE, practical examples to help translate theory into practice, and two sample units of study (see Solorza, Aponte, Leverenz, Becker, & Frias, 2019).

Even with a strong translanguaging focus in the program, teachers still experience difficulty accepting students' use of language features that they consider *informal, social, and/or non-standard* as academic resources in classrooms. I believe academia creates this bias and teacher education faculty must make significant pedagogical shifts to model how we embrace students' full linguistic repertoires in academic settings.

In 2015, the entire college engaged in developing their racial literacy through workshops, monthly inquiry groups, reading discussions, and student-led assemblies. Bank Street's focus on race has helped the faculty explore raciolinguistic issues as they pertain to classroom participation and writing (Drago-Severson & Blum-Destafano, 2017; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Grinberg, 2005; Love, 2019; Oluo, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017; Pollock, 2008; Rankine, 2014; Shalaby, 2017; Steele, 2010; Zeus & Broderick, 2011). We are now exploring decolonizing pedagogies in hopes of making structural changes that will better align to our educational philosophies.

Translanguaging theory embodies a social justice liberatory project that requires personal and institutional shifts. I have learned that this work goes beyond using translanguaging strategies as instructional scaffolds. It demands that we critically confront our biases as well as question existing hegemonic structures in schools and academia. Translanguaging not only pushes us to think beyond current models of bilingual education and TESOL, but it calls for a

reimagining of higher education institutions that must also honor graduate students' full linguistic repertoires.

### **Reimagining a program and vision: Hesson in small Rhode Island**

One of the most rewarding aspects of my work in the TESOL program at Rhode Island College has been the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues to develop a new vision for the program grounded in educational equity and linguistic justice for emergent bilingual students. As a faculty leader, I, Sarah Hesson, have witnessed the reverberations of this vision in the teaching philosophies and practices of our candidates, as well as in school practices and policy discourse among stakeholders statewide.

In the context of developing a vision for our teacher preparation program, we define linguistic justice around the following four tenets. First, all bilingual children have the right to learn bilingually. Second, all language practices are equally valuable. Third, welcoming students' home language practices into school is critical to disrupting unequal power dynamics. Fourth, using students' entire linguistic repertoires is an essential component to providing an equitable education. Grounded in the tenets outlined above, our vision promotes bilingualism for all bilingual students and communities, encourages active self-reflection and criticality in teacher candidates, and works to recognize, challenge, and reimagine systems of power.

In aligning our teacher preparation program, research, and advocacy work with our vision, we have grappled with the question of how ideological change occurs, both within systems (e.g., TESOL program, local public schools) as well as for individuals (e.g., teacher candidates). How can we engage with teacher candidates, colleagues, administrators, and policymakers to consider and prioritize how bilingual children learn best? How can we discuss broader issues such as racism, discrimination, and poverty with stakeholders in ways that will challenge current pedagogical practices as well as "what 'counts' as educational policy" (Anyon, 2005). The vision of the CUNY-NYSIEB project and the tangible resources it has produced have proven invaluable in creating significant change within and beyond our program.

First, we infused the concepts of dynamic bilingualism and translanguaging throughout our ESL and Bilingual Education certification sequences. Our approach to these concepts aligns to the two principles and practices of the CUNY-NYSIEB project: (1) a multilingual ecology for the whole school, and (2) bilingualism as a resource in education (see Chapter 3, this volume). In our foundational language acquisition course, candidates first explore these concepts theoretically, then use them to analyze their schools' linguistic landscapes. In a sociocultural foundations course, candidates study one of the bilingual

communities they serve, including interviewing community members to better understand the community and their language practices. In methods and assessment classes, candidates learn and implement translanguaging pedagogy. Finally, candidates incorporate translanguaging in their field experiences, as well as articulate their own teaching philosophy regarding bilingualism, family and community partnership, and a vision for social justice. Dynamic bilingualism and translanguaging pedagogy are woven throughout the curriculum, giving candidates many opportunities to understand and take ownership of the concepts.

Second, my colleagues and I have had the opportunity to share the core principles of the CUNY-NYSIEB project through professional development, research, and advocacy in the state. In professional development, I have worked with groups of General Education, Special Education, and ESL teachers in districts throughout the state on utilizing students' home language practices in all educational settings. In research, my colleague Rachel Toncelli worked with a practicing ESL teacher to analyze and improve the multilingual ecology of the public high school where she worked. Alongside emergent bilingual high school students, they replaced English-only signage throughout the school with multilingual signs that included culturally significant images of the students' choosing. Students reported feeling an increased sense of belonging, and pride that their families would be able to better navigate the school building as a result.

In advocacy, I had the opportunity to participate in a panel discussion with US Congressman Jim Langevin, in which I used the term "emergent bilingual" to highlight the emerging multilingual proficiency of students learning English. In turn, Congressman Langevin used the term in addressing Congress<sup>1</sup>; many stakeholders in the state have adopted it as well. These examples are not exhaustive but offer a window into the impact of the CUNY-NYSIEB project here in Rhode Island, and the potential for change in a small state context.

The CUNY-NYSIEB project offers many useful resources for schools, districts, and teacher preparation programs, but the most valuable resource is its underlying vision. In such dehumanizing times, particularly for communities of color and immigrant communities, the vision of the CUNY-NYSIEB project offers an entry point into an educational philosophy and pedagogy that is both humanizing and liberatory.

## Conclusion

From participants in CUNY-NYSIEB to faculty at universities, we are, and continue to be, uniquely and powerfully shaped by the legacy of CUNY-NYSIEB and translanguaging pedagogies. While our students come from diverse racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the thread of equity ties our realities together as a common goal, particularly as we reimagine what it means

to be a teacher-educator through a translanguaging lens. This connection to issues of educational justice runs deeply through all areas of our work, impacting the personal experiences of prospective teachers, the lives of bilingual youth in local schools, and the structures of programs and schooling itself. Disrupting monolingual ideologies, empowering bilingual teachers and communities, and creating new and innovative programmatic structures in teacher education are just some of the legacies of CUNY-NYSIEB that can be seen in vibrant new spaces of teacher education beyond New York (see Teacher Box 16.1 for a US example, and Teacher Boxes 16.1, 17.1, and 18.1 for international examples).

## Notes

- 1 The term “foreign” is used here only with a juridical connotation, since in Italy, as regards the acknowledgement of citizenship, the so-called *jus sanguinis* is still in force.
- 2 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrIZJBINZOE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0Bope-W0hKlqEzTFa6Ijfc3ZfApP\\_ZMsLnXTrf-oDqkc-p-DavRgVpKw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrIZJBINZOE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0Bope-W0hKlqEzTFa6Ijfc3ZfApP_ZMsLnXTrf-oDqkc-p-DavRgVpKw)

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**BOX 17.1 TEACHER/RESEARCHER**

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*and*

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**Università per Stranieri di Siena, Italy**

**“L’AltRoparlante” project**

**Integrating translanguaging practices in Italian schools**

The Italian project L’AltRoparlante has drawn inspiration from the CUNY-NYSIEB initiative in theoretical and practical aspects. In 2017/2018, there were 841,719 “foreign”<sup>2</sup> students within the Italian school system, 61% of whom were born and, in most cases, had grown up in Italy. This number accounts for 9.7% of the total number of students, although the number varies by areas. Most “foreign” students are in primary schools.

Italian dominating pedagogy leans toward the whole child approach. That is, priority tends to be given to the need to create learning environments which do not only promote the development of academic skills, but also emphasize the role of social and emotional competences for the individual well-being of students. And yet, Italian schools have not been effective in multilingual repertoires in the schools, despite recent local efforts to promote bi/multilingualism, biliteracy, and language awareness.

Translanguaging as a pedagogical praxis has also gained an increasing attention in Italian research in the past few years. Hence, a few projects inspired by translanguaging pedagogy have been carried out at a local as well as national level. “L’AltRoparlante,” conducted since 2016 within an inter-regional network of multilingual schools with percentages of emergent bilinguals between 20% and 70% is one of these. The first two schools involved are the “Martiri della Benedicta” school in Serravalle Scrivia (Piedmont) and the “Collodi” school in Cerreto Guidi (Tuscany). Moreover, since 2017 the “Marco Polo” in Prato (Tuscany) has been integrated in the network, and since 2018 the “Bertolotti” school in Gavardo (Lombardy) has joined. Since 2019, a fifth institute, the “Gasparini” school in Novi di Modena (Emilia Romagna) has taken part in the project. At the moment, the project has involved more than 700 pupils and 70 teachers, mainly belonging to primary schools, but also to kindergartens and middle schools.

The name of the project “L’AltRoparlante” is the result of putting together two Italian words: “altro,” which means “the other” (understanding the “otherness” as a resource and as an added value), and “altoparlante,” which means “loudspeaker.” The main goal of the project, is in fact, to give high voice to all

the languages and varieties spoken in Italian schools, besides standard Italian. Through "L'AltRoparlante," we aim to legitimize the multilingual repertoires of the students, trying to activate dynamics of empowerment and to prevent youth marginalization and language hierarchization phenomena. In order to pursue this aim, we try to draw on translanguaging pedagogy, integrating and combining it with the European perspective on plurilingualism.

As regards the phases of articulation of the project, we follow the steps of transformative action-research. First, in each school we established a close contact with the Headmasters and with all the teachers. After that, we delivered seminars and workshops in order to provide professional development about bilingualism and its advantages, multilingual education and translanguaging as a pedagogical praxis. Moreover, before starting the fieldwork, we met the parents of the pupils involved, in order to explain the purposes of the project and to investigate micro-level family language policies. The fieldwork, which is usually carried out during the curricular teaching time, consists of a preliminary phase of ethnolinguistic investigation in the different classes, aimed at collecting detailed information about collective and individual multilingual repertoires, as well as specific perceptual and emotional patterns toward language plurality. Afterwards, with teachers we design translanguaging-based pedagogical activities. At first, we attempt to transform the schoolscape and we involve parents in moments of bi/multilingual storytelling. At an advanced level of implementation, we plan and conduct more complex activities. We work on oral, written or multimodal translinguistic texts, also content-related ones, in order to let students develop language awareness-related skills, foster biliteracy and fully legitimize their whole linguistic repertoires. Finally, with the help of the teachers, every year we organize final open meetings, addressed to parents, cultural mediators, teachers and headmasters from other schools, and local authorities, with the purpose of disseminating the main results obtained through the application of translanguaging pedagogy.

Besides the educational dimension, we have gathered and analyzed different data, including parental sociolinguistic questionnaires, teacher and children interviews, as well as focus groups, video-recordings of classrooms using translanguaging-based activities, and student language portraits.

The project L'AltRoparlante has greatly transformed teaching practices and school-home relations. All the schools now display a much more ecological multilingual schoolscape, which is not only symbolic, but a concrete trace of the new educational perspective adopted. Teachers have rediscovered the potentiality of their challenging contexts, usually perceived as troubling and marginalized, but now considered ways of creating more equal learning opportunities. For instance, teachers are working on peer-coaching

professional development. Parents have been invited to participate in translanguaging-based activities, rediscovering the great contributions they can bring to their children's education, regardless of their linguistic competences. The corpus of video recordings shows examples of dynamic translinguistic interaction during curricular teaching time and of deconstruction of linguistic compartmentalization in favor of more flexible multilingual practices.

The following example shows a teacher from Prato, Sandra Martini, guiding her students in filling in a questionnaire based on multilingual wh-questions concerning a migration story they have read in class:

Docente: Allora, rileggiamo tutta la scheda, pronti? Ognuno lo legge nella lingua...ognuno si senta libero di dirlo, ok? ... "Dove?"  
 S1: Where?  
 S2: Ila ayn?  
 S3: Nălă  
 S4: Sad?  
 D: Ku?  
 S6: Donde?  
 S7: In una nave in mezzo al mare!  
 S8: Yí sōu zài dà hăishàng de chuán!

Teacher: [Italian] So, let's read again the sheet, are you ready? Each one reads it in the language...each one feels free to say it, ok? "Where?"  
 S1: [English] Where?  
 S2: [Arabic]: Where?  
 S3: [Chinese] Where?  
 S4: [Georgian] Where?  
 T: [Albanian] Where?  
 S6: [Spanish] Where?  
 S7: [Italian] On a boat in the middle of the sea!  
 S8: [Chinese]: On a boat in the middle of the sea!

The analysis of focus groups conducted with students reveals dynamics of empowerment of immigrant minority pupils, in terms of identity affirmation and competence enhancement. Many students expressed feelings of pride and liberation which contributed to increase their motivation toward school and to develop a deeper awareness regarding their language rights, as the following emergent bilingual child from Ecuador, attending Serralle School, underlines:

N: Io quando l'ho letta [la poesia] mi sono ricordata prima di tutto del mio paese, quando sono andata in Ecuador e poi mi è piaciuto leggerla perché ho fatto capire agli altri che anche la mia lingua è importante come tutte le altre. Non è che solo l'italiano e l'inglese sono importanti, e tutte le altre non sono importanti. Quindi se io sono nata española, lei è nata albanese e lui italiano, un'altra indiana ... non importa perché siamo tutti uguali.

N: When I read it [a poem], I remembered, first of all, my country, when I went to Ecuador and I liked to read it because I made the others understand that also my language is important like all the others. It is not true that only Italian and English are important, and all the other languages are not important. So, even if I was born española, she was born Albanian and he was born Italian, another one Indian...it doesn't matter because we are all the same.

Italian students were able to revalue dialectal varieties and regional languages and to cultivate a sense of appreciation and legitimation of multilingualism in class, overcoming stereotypical cultural and language ideologies. All the children, learning from each other, had and still have the opportunity to reflect on metalinguistic aspects and to learn through their peers' languages, broadening their semiotic boundaries. In 2018 L'AltRoparlante was awarded the European Language Label. Our website can be found at <http://altoparlante.unistrasi.it/>