Journal for Language Teaching **57(2) 2023, 24 pages**
https://doi.org/10.56285/jltVol57iss2a6142

Learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English L2 texts

Mampoi Irene Mabena
University of Johannesburg, South Africa
E-mail: mampoim@uj.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Language is the mediator of two critical aspects of a child's education: identity and knowledge. Through language, learners can make sense of who they are and make sense of the world around them. However, the teaching of English as a second language in several schools in South Africa is such that a learner's identity, best described in their own indigenous languages, is not mirrored in the classroom, and in its place, a monolingual system (English-only) becomes central. Their acquired linguistic repertoire as multilingual learners is considered a hindrance to learning, not a resource. This paper assesses learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English texts. It further seeks to take the debate about the paradox of translanguaging forward to determine if translanguaging is a unitary, differentiated system, or both. Exploring data in the form of class observations and interviews, the study reveals that translanguaging as a teaching strategy for reading English L2 texts is well-received by learners as a practical and valuable pedagogical approach that can potentially improve English L2 performance. The results further establish the existence of both the unitary and the differentiated systems of translanguaging. In the end, the study's recommendations for transforming multilingual classrooms are discussed.

Keywords: reading; multilingual learners; English L2; ESL, translanguaging

CITATION
Mabena, M.I. 2023. Learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English L2 texts. *Journal for Language Teaching* 57(2): Article 6142.

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

1. Introduction

Language is the mediator of two crucial aspects of a child's education: identity and knowledge. Through language, learners can make sense of who they are and make sense of the world around them, hence the importance of being taught in the languages that they understand. Some South African schools comprise learners who are multilingual speakers of various indigenous languages. The language in education policy recognizes this multilingualism; it creates opportunities for multilingual education and literacies in the primary and tertiary education sectors (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,1996). However, the practice on the ground, as determined by the school governing bodies, who are given powers to prescribe what languages should be used in schools (based on the dominant languages used in the area), shows a linear, sequential, and one-language domination that mirrors colonial language-in-education practices. A similar situation is observed in countries such as Switzerland, where multilingualism is restricted to official and prestigious languages despite the linguistic diversity and increasing heterogeneity of its students (Becker 2023).

In some schools, the hegemony of English is still maintained; English remains the medium of instruction from grade four onwards. This way, the learner's identity, which is best reflected in their language, is divorced from the learners' knowledge acquisition. In its place, a monolingual system becomes central. Learners' home languages are not perceived as a pedagogical tool that aids learning but as a hindrance or a problem to overcome (Mkhize 2016; Sahr 2020). These monoglossic classroom practices that give no regard to the acquired linguistic repertoires that a multilingual child carries into the classroom environment are among many factors that negatively impact classroom performance and put more learners at an educational disadvantage (Probyn 2019; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour 2019). This paper, therefore, aims to explore learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English L2 texts. The paper further contributes to the current translanguaging debate on whether there is a unitary system, as argued by Otheguy et al. (2018), or a differentiated system of translanguaging among multilingual speakers (MacSwan 2017).

Translanguaging as a pedagogical tool

Translanguaging is one of the pedagogical strategies that research finds to assist in the current multilingual classroom situation (Makalela 2015b; Lewis et al. 2012; Cenoz & Santos 2020). The term translanguaging refers to a planned and systematic use of learners' home language with the classroom language (English) to foster learning and teaching (Childs 2016). It builds on what learners already know and utilises their linguistic repertoire for teaching and learning. This educational pedagogy recognises and appreciates a learner as a multilingual being whose

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

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acquired home language is an educational resource that needs to be tapped into for a deepened comprehension of classroom content and the cultivation of a high sense of self (Lewis et al. 2012). Unlike the monolingual approach that treats languages as autonomous entities, translanguaging opposes the idea of putting languages in solitary confinement as suggested by socially named languages but advocates for interconnectivity and interdependence of languages in the meaning-making process (Maseko & Mkhize 2021). Translanguaging mainly involves leveraging a child's identity (their home language and lived experiences) for epistemological access. It opens the previously sealed-off spaces for problem-solving in the classroom. Garcia (2020) broadly defines translanguaging; she not only describes it as a linguistic resource but also relates the term to all other cultural practices and lived experiences that learners often tap into to make meaning of a particular phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, this will be a working definition that will explain the findings.

As informed by research for decades, there has been advocacy for translanguaging as a pedagogical practice for multilingual learners (Baker 2011; Champlin 2016; Li 2017; Makalela 2015; Probyn 2015; Li & Lin 2019). Baker (2011) points out three educational advantages to translanguaging: promotion of a more profound and fuller understanding of the subject matter, development of the weaker language, and facilitation of home-school links and cooperation. These benefits are further confirmed in the research that earlier scholars conducted. For instance, Champlin (2016) affirms that translanguaging helps bilingual learners maximise their communicative potential, while in the learning of science subjects, it is found to be an effective teaching and learning tool that aids learners' comprehension of science content (Probyn 2015). It is viewed as an essential pedagogical tool that deepens the learning of content and affirms learners' identity (Makalela 2015). Li and Lin (2019) and Yafele (2021) conclude that translanguaging is an effective pedagogical practice in various educational contexts where the language of learning and teaching differs from the learners' home languages. They provide evidence that students have favourable responses to the translanguaging approach, affirming their sense of self.

The efficacy of translanguaging is further observed in reading literacy classes. It is a resource that affords learners the leverage to comprehend the reading texts they come across in the classroom. Its effectiveness in reading for comprehension is affirmed in a study conducted with first-year university students who struggled with comprehension of academic reading material (Hungwe 2019; Yafele 2021). Hungwe (2019) and Yafele (2021) found translanguaging and paraphrasing valuable tools to gauge the comprehension of the text. Makalela (2015) and Garcia (2020) also confirm the efficacy of translanguaging in classroom reading tasks. Makalela (2015) studied two case studies of translanguaging: one in the institution of higher learning and another in the intermediate phase (primary school). The findings provide evidence

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

that English reading proficiency skills are enhanced through using learners' home language in the same lesson.

Similarly, Garcia (2020) makes a robust argument that reading neither depends on the language of the reading text nor the concept of a named language. Instead, reading is about assembling all the meaning-making resources and acting on them to comprehend the reading text. It goes beyond the language of the text. She argues that learners 'read themselves. They leverage their meaning-making resources (linguistic and verbal, visuals, gestures, body language, lived experiences) and all of themselves as they engage with the text' (Garcia 2020). This implies that reading is a social practice that ignites learners to see themselves reflected in reading. For instance, a multilingual learner reading a text written in English considers the language of the text as just a prop and makes meaning by utilizing their make-up, his being a multilingual speaker, to comprehend it. In the case study she conducted with three learners in different grades, Garcia (2020) observed learners' disruption of the monoglossic language of the text by bringing their whole self into the text, yielding a desirable outcome for these learners who were initially classified as having a reading deficiency and had a challenge understanding History textbooks written in advanced English. Entering the translanguaging space enabled them to emerge as competent readers.

As shown above, translanguaging as a pedagogical approach that enhances comprehension and affirms learners' identity has been well established worldwide. However, research has thinly covered the reception of translanguaging at the reading level, particularly in the senior grades. The senior phase in South Africa refers to grades 7, 8, and 9, the three grades following primary school (DBE 2011a). This paper, therefore, explores learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English L2 texts. The paper further contributes to the current translanguaging debate on whether there is a unitary system, as argued by Otheguy et al. (2018), or a differentiated system of translanguaging among multilingual speakers (MacSwan 2017).

The unitary system views communication among multilingual speakers as seamless and fluid (Otheguy et al. 2018). On the other hand, the differentiated approach represents discourses that seem to match the boundaries of the named languages, where the discourse reflects the dominant use of the language of instruction. Otheguy et al. (2018) assert that multilingualism, which translates into translanguaging, is a cognitive terrain that is not fenced into different areas suggested by the socially named languages. In other words, this is a seamless approach that cannot be categorised based on socially named languages. They posit that speakers' internal language system is a unitary one through which multilingual speakers assemble linguistic resources to make meaning. On the contrary, MacSwan (2017) argues against this position and claims there is a dual correspondence between the speakers' internal and external language. Based on dual correspondence theory, bilinguals possess two linguistic systems

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

whose boundaries align with those of the socially named languages. However, Makalela (2019) finds both the unitary and the differentiated systems of translanguaging as he observes translanguaging practices among teachers and foundation phase learners. The paper aims to establish the type of translanguaging system portrayed by teachers and learners in the senior phase. This paper, therefore, addresses the following objectives:

1. To assess learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English L2 texts
2. To determine if multilingual speakers in the senior phase reflect the unitary or the differentiated system of translanguaging or both.

The paper, therefore, seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do learners receive translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy for reading English L2 texts?
2. Do multilingual speakers in the senior phase reflect the unitary or the differentiated system of translanguaging, or both?

2. Ubuntu translanguaging model

This study is informed by the Ubuntu translanguaging model proposed by Makalela (2016). The model is informed by African philosophical principles, cultural values, and linguistic realities. It reveals a contradiction between Euro-colonial notions of separating languages into distinct languages and the African approach to multilingualism, where the boundary between languages is blurry (Werner 2019). It uses the phrase *discontinuation continuation* to describe the constant disruption of language and literacy boundaries and the simultaneous re-creation of new ones. Makalela (2022:184) further calls 'discontinuation continuation' fluid mobility that is not restricted by the boundaries of named languages. This means that everyday speech for multilingual speakers involves cross boundaries of named languages and disrupted features of one language that are constantly replaced with features of other languages in the process of making meaning of the world. As teachers and learners communicate across languages without showing any clear boundaries, they *discontinue* the orderliness of named languages (a monolingual practice that is traditionally found in conventional classrooms) and recreate a new order (*continuation*) where there are blurred boundaries between languages. The emphasis is that the translingual classroom focuses more on what people do with the language (to make meaning) rather than what languages look like.

The model of Ubuntu translanguaging (Makalela 2016) is of the view that translanguaging fits better with the African experience of acquiring multiple languages before entering school. Central to the theory are the four tenets of Ubuntu translanguaging: Ubuntu African value

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

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system, *I am because you are; you are because I am*, abbreviated as 'I x we". The binding of 'I' with 'we' by a multiplication sign suggests a complex relationship between these entities that look separate, yet tied together by a sense of co-existence. The framework asserts that languages represent a human nature of belonging together instead of being separate entities. Similar to ubuntu philosophical values, where people co-exist, languages overlap with one another. Other principles relate to the notion of incompleteness and interdependence, which posit that languages are incomplete without other languages and that speakers cannot fully understand their surroundings without using multiple languages. The theory further shows the complexity of information flow where vertical (teacher to student) and horizontal (student to student) communicative events occur. Furthermore, Ubuntu translanguaging reflects the internal reality of multilingual learners for whom their languages co-exist. Informed by the tenets of ubuntu translanguaging, the paper will interpret the results on the role of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach to reading English L2 texts. The theory will further help determine if multilingual speakers in the senior phase reflect the unitary or the differentiated system of translanguaging or both.

3. Methods

Context

Data was obtained from a school in Soweto, Johannesburg, a multilingual area where almost all indigenous languages, as well as English and Afrikaans, are fluidly spoken among the residents. The school had recently adopted translanguaging as a teaching strategy, and some teachers in this school had the privilege to participate in the training sessions (organized by the Hub for Multilingual Education and Literacies) on how to plan and teach a lesson using translanguaging as a teaching strategy. According to the school's policy, Sepedi, Sesotho, IsiXhosa, and English are the official school languages. However, due to the multilingual nature of students, other indigenous languages, such as Isizulu and isiNdebele, are spoken along with the school's official languages during learners' classroom and social interactions.

Research approach

The research approach for this study was qualitative; the research questions guiding the paper were explorative in nature. The guiding questions aimed to comprehend, describe, and interpret meanings expressed in participants' responses on learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a reading strategy and to comprehend whether the translanguaging approach used reflects the unitary or differentiated approach or both. The qualitative design allowed the researcher to interpret classroom interactions in the context where a pedagogy such as translanguaging is used.

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Population and sampling

The population for this study comprised learners from different socio-economic statuses. The purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to select the population relevant to the study's objectives. The study purposively selected the school that had recently adopted translanguaging as one of the teaching approaches. The school had some of its teachers trained by the Hub for Multilingual Education and Literacies (Makalela 2019). The hub engaged in-service teachers in an intensive induction where they were trained to demonstrate their simultaneous use of more than one language and sustain it throughout the three phases of the lesson: pre-activity, during, and post-activity (Makalela, 2019). The study participants were 25 grade 9 multilingual learners (aged between 13 and 15) and their English teacher. Their metadata is shown below:

Table 1: Learners from whom data was collected

No. of Leaners	Grade	Age	Ethnicity	Languages
25	9	13-15	Sotho	Sesotho
			Pedi	Sepedi
			Xhosa	Xhosa
				English
				Zulu

Table 2: Research participant-The teacher

Profession	Sex	Ethnicity	Languages
Teacher	Female	Mosotho	Sesotho
			Sepedi
			Xhosa
			English
			Zulu

This group of learners and their teacher was chosen because the study targeted a senior phase class (grades 7 to 9) taught by a teacher who has recently been trained on how to implement translanguaging in class. The newly trained teacher would quickly identify the reception of

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translanguaging as they would have recently transitioned from the conventional monolingual approach to the multilingual one. The grade 9 stream chosen comprised at-risk learners (9C) who needed intervention from teachers to successfully be promoted to the next class. This would require all kinds of intervention, including new teaching strategies. The school has a culture of grouping streams of learners in each class according to their academic performance. For example, grade 9A consisted of very well-performing students, 9B had average-performing learners, and 9C mainly consisted of at-risk learners. The rationale for the choice of at-risk learners was that the teachers who were trained to use translanguaging pedagogy were specifically teaching this class.

Data collection instruments

Observations

One of the tools used for data collection was observations. The researcher took a non-participant position and observed translingual classes where translanguaging was enacted. The researcher observed as the teacher and her learners shifted, alternated, and juxtaposed the language of input and output during the reading lesson. Each lesson was based on a reading comprehension text that learners had to read and thereafter respond to the questions. The questions that followed the reading were meant to assess the extent to which the text was understood. Using a cellphone camera, the researcher video-recorded every lesson and made a collection of field notes for each session. The notes were a combination of core occurrences in class and the researcher's impression as these unfolded. Five reading comprehension lessons were observed for a period of three months to ascertain learners' responses to the new teaching approach.

Interviews

The interviews between the researcher, the teacher, and three learners who were randomly selected, followed after the classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted twice in the classroom during recess and they lasted for 15 minutes with the learners and around 20 to 30 minutes with the teacher. This was done after the second reading lesson and after the fifth lesson to establish if participants still held similar views regarding learners' reception of translanguaging in their reading lessons. The interview questions for learners revolved around their general feelings toward the newly adopted teaching approach, the impact it has on reading texts, and whether they would prefer future reading lessons to be taught in a similar manner. The teacher's interview questions centred around any new developments regarding learners' conduct in class since the advent of the new reading approach. The response to these questions determined learners' acceptance of translanguaging as a strategy for reading. This interview tool complemented the class observation tool used earlier. The researcher was able to engage further with the learners and their teacher on their experiences with

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translanguaging as a pedagogical approach. Each learner participant was individually interviewed, but the interview occurred in the presence of their teacher to help them feel at ease. These sessions were also recorded, and some notes were taken; however, the only responses noted down were those that pointed to the general views and comments they held regarding the new multilingual approach, as these determined whether the approach was well received or not. The interview sessions mirrored a translingual approach; the researcher and the participants utilised their linguistic repertoires as they reflected on the lessons.

Data analysis

Regarding data analysis, the video recordings based on the classroom discourse data and the interview session were analysed using a universal approach that combines both deductive and inductive procedures. This means that the researcher had a frame of expectations from the data but was also open to receiving new structures that emerged from the data. Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. Transcripts for observation and interview data were transcribed and translated by the researcher. The recordings and transcriptions were then submitted to two language specialists in the Languages and Applied Linguistics Department at the University of Johannesburg, who voluntarily offered to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. The verified transcripts were then submitted to the research participants to further confirm the precision of the transcripts. The transcription process was then followed by the repetitive reading of data for a thorough comprehension of the content, context, and other features of the data. The next step involved data coding, and this was manually done based on the primary question guiding the study. A coloured pencil was used to highlight the patterns that emerged. These patterns were sorted and collated according to their potential themes. The identified themes were accompanied by the relevant extracts based on the transcriptions. The data analysis and interpretation were informed by the literature on translanguaging as well as the theoretical tenets proposed by the Ubuntu translanguaging model. These became significant in producing a reliable knowledge construction on the matter being investigated.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted after the ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg had approved the study in terms of ethical clearance. The Gauteng Department of Education further granted the permission to conduct the study. Prior to the interviews, participants signed consent forms to show their willingness to participate in the study. Learner participants had their consent forms signed by their parents after a letter was issued to them explaining the purpose of the study. In the letter, parents were advised that they had the right not to grant their children permission to participate in the study should they feel uncomfortable. The consent forms were further extended to randomly selected learners for the interviews. Despite the parents' consent, learners were still allowed to make an informed decision regarding their participation in the study. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the

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participants' real names and the school where the data was collected were not mentioned (Yin 2018). The teacher was named 'teacher' while learners were referred to as 'learner 1', 'learner 2', etc.

4. Results and discussions

This paper intended to assess learners' reception of translanguaging as a strategy for reading in the senior phase and to determine if multilingual speakers in the senior phase reflect the unitary or the differentiated system of translanguaging. Their reception was measured by their class participation, their reaction to explanations done via translanguaging, their responses to content-based questions, their willingness to complete assigned tasks, and their general confession about their preference for the new methodology. The unitary or differentiated system was determined by how translanguaging was mirrored every time it was utilised by the teacher and the learners. The next section presents the findings based on the class observations and scheduled interviews. The names that appear in the extract are pseudonyms. The findings are categorized based on each data collection tool used.

Observation schedule

Setting off a multilingual tone

The data reveals a teacher who habitually sets a conducive translanguaging space and tone from the beginning of the lesson, and learners welcome this approach. Each of the five lessons observed commenced by creating a translingual space, serving as a reminder to learners that the lesson is conducted through the translanguaging approach. She greets the learners in English and their home languages, as prototypically illustrated in excerpt one below:

EXCERPT 1

> **Teacher:** Good morning, Molweni, Thobela, Dumelang
>
> **Learners (showing excitement; in chorus):** Good morning, *ma'am, ewe, molo, thobela, dumelang* (the classroom buzzes with greetings in different languages).

In the first line of the excerpt, the teacher greets in English, and the other three languages that represent the learners in the classroom. Learners' response in the second line is similar to that of the teacher as they greet the teacher back using the same language she greeted them with. As revealed by the teacher during the interview session, this form of greeting differs from their previous monolingual greetings (before translanguaging was put into practice), where a teacher used to greet in English and received a response in the same language. The way the greeting occurs in the translingual classroom reveals one aspect that reflects learners' cultural practices

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and lived experiences: The translingual tone that the teacher begins the lesson with seems to make learners happy and relaxed and feel they have brought themselves into a class. This is evidenced by their excited response to the teacher's greeting. Makalela (2019) affirms that setting a translingual tone at the beginning of the lesson opens up a space for learners to re-live their home experiences in the classroom, providing a fertile ground for effective learning and teaching. The teacher is modelling a translanguaging discourse; she begins the utterance in English, then moves across to isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Sesotho. The learners also respond to the greeting by mirroring the socially named languages back home. From the onset of the classroom activities, these socially named languages are disrupted, a process referred to as *discontinuation continuation*, where the monolingual orderliness is disrupted, and recreation of a new order that conveys multilingualism is created (Makalela 2016). The teacher accommodates the learners' home languages, creating a comfortable learning space and setting up an appropriate tone for the multilingual learners, a space to see themselves mirrored in the lesson. The learners' reactions and responses seem to welcome the translanguaging approach to teaching and learning.

Repetition

The study results show the teacher's determination to ensure learners' comprehension of the reading text (which learners were assigned to read at home to prepare for further discussion in class the next day) by requesting that a response uttered in English be repeated in learners' home languages. Excerpt 2 below is prototypical.

EXCERPT 2

Teacher: Thank you, Thabo; who can repeat what Thabo said in Sepedi, Sesotho, isiXhosa, or any other language we know so that it is clear to everyone?

Learner 1: Yes, ma'am, (speaks isiZulu) *lesi siqephu sikhuluma ngomfana ohlala phakathi kwezingwenya eSoweto. Izingwenya ezisendabeni zibhekise kubantu ababulala abanye, izindlu ezishisiwe, nokuphanga* (The passage is about a boy who lives among crocodiles in Soweto. The crocodiles in the story are the people who kill others, the houses that are burned down, and robbery)

Learner 2: Kana crocodile ke eng ka Sesotho, ma'am? (What is a crocodile in Sesotho, ma'am?)

Teacher: Ke Kwena

Learner 2 (and other learners): Oh yaaa!

Teacher: Is everyone clear about what the passage is about?

Learners: (In the chorus, excited) Yes, ma'am, very clear!

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

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In Excerpt 2, the teacher requests learners to repeat a response uttered in English, and she reasons that it should be 'clear to everyone.' She seems to understand that the learners' response regarding the reading text can be clearer if another response is given in any language they speak. She invites learners to repeat the answer in Sepedi, Sesotho, isiXhosa, or any other language they know. A learner who responds uses isiZulu, one of the most popular languages in the area. It can be understood from the extract that the teacher becomes fully content when the answers provided in English are repeated in learners' home languages. She believes that learning has not yet occurred until the lesson mirrors who the learners are; until they see themselves in the lesson (as multilingual speakers). The learner who asked what a crocodile is in Sesotho was able to understand the text even better as he could then relate the word to his own language. The learner's question also assisted other learners who did not know what crocodile meant. Their response to the teacher's naming of the crocodile in Sesotho was 'oh yaaa,' which shows they now comprehend better what is being discussed. Learners' excitement as they respond and ask clarity-seeking questions in their home language indicates that they are receiving the translanguaging approach well and seem to understand the content better. The tenet *I am because you are, and you are because we are,* (of the translanguaging model) resonates with the activities in this class. There is a reliance on multiple languages for text comprehension. English alone is incomplete without other languages known to learners. The classroom clearly represents Ubuntu's notion of belonging together instead of being separate, a vivid mirror of who the learners are. A closer look at the learner's response shows that the answer is in isiZulu. The learner answers in isiZulu despite being an isiXhoza home language speaker and knowing that the classroom comprises isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Sesotho speakers. Nonetheless, there is no demand from the teacher or other learners to use the language they understand. This is because, as people who belong together (ubuntu notion), they have acquired multiple languages before entering school; hence they do not see the boundaries of languages or the solitary confinements in which languages have been placed by society (Baker 2011). Just as they belong together, so are their languages; hence they understand and speak the named languages used in their community even though they are not their 'mother tongue.' Enabling content comprehension by enacting translanguaging is found in the scholarship of multilingual education. Translanguaging experiences in class provide a fertile ground for comprehension of content (Canagarajah 2011).

Interdependence

Another theme shown in data is interdependence. Learners were made to source knowledge from one another using any language that forms part of their linguistic repertoire. This practice is common for learners; they live in communities where people find their complete sense in others and where languages behave the same way as their users (depending on one another).

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Learners were requested to source knowledge and learn from one another by forming groups and using their home languages. This approach aligns with the tenet *I am because you are, and you are because we are.* Excerpt three below illustrates:

EXCERPT 3

> **Teacher:** Now, back to the text, as the boy thinks of a skinned cat, the dead man, and his brother in prison, he begins to chant a song he knows. *Ke kopa le dule ka di group tsa lona, then le bale pina ena le utlwisise, ha le qeta le e ngole ka di home language tsa lona ebe le mpinela yona.*(Sesotho) (Please sit in groups, read this song and ensure you understand it, then rewrite the song using any of your home languages, then sing the song for me)
>
> **Learners:** (excitedly move around to join their groups and start reading and writing a song).

As Excerpt 3 shows, the teacher focuses on the central issue to assign the students; she instructs learners to work in groups and rewrite the song (originally in English) that the boy in the text was chanting. They are required to write the song in their preferred home languages. The teacher begins the instruction in English and ends it in Sesotho. The Sesotho part is the one that tells them exactly what they should do as they form groups. The learners respond to the instruction by moving around excitedly to join their groups and start writing. Working in groups and rewriting the English song into learners' indigenous language and actually singing the song is merging entities that mirror the lived experiences of a learner, which is what translanguaging advocates. The multilingual communities (where learners reside) would typically disrupt the language boundaries of named languages and alternate these in the meaning-making process. Learners also live in a plural society where helping one another is a norm, so being asked to sit in groups and work mirrors who they really are; the notion of 'I' x 'We' can here be translated as 'I learn because you learn'. The translanguaging model, therefore, provides opportunities to solve new problems and reinforce learning by the creation of groups instead of individual learning (Makalela 2022). Further, being asked to be innovative and come up with a tune for a song resembles their very nature as the teacher commented, *'I know they love singing, they always imitate these famous artists. I know this will make them like the passage even more*.' This form of classroom interaction enables multilingual learners to see a text written in English as just a prop that invites them to make meaning by utilizing their make-up to comprehend the text. Translanguaging and all its affordances ignite learners to 'read themselves' into the reading text (Garcia 2020:558). Learners present a pleasant reaction to the new approach to teaching and learning.

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

Alignment

The data further reveals that to help learners comprehend the reading text and its metaphoric expressions; the teacher allows the use of translanguaging to ask questions that align the occurrences in the text with learners' home experiences, thus mirroring the lesson to deepen comprehension. The following excerpt is prototypical:

EXCERPT 4

> **Teacher*:*** Why are the murderers and evil occurrences in the text called crocodiles?
>
> **Learner**: Iyoo, ma'am, *Di crocodile di kotsi ho tshwana le babolai* (Crocodiles are dangerous; just like the murderers)
>
> **Teacher**: now, I want you to think of your home area. Are there crocodiles? What kind?
>
> **Learner***:* Corona, ma'am, and gender-based violence. Corona kills people, and girls' rape is a lot
>
> **All Learners**: (all in agreement with the learner's response) Hmm

In Excerpt 4, the teacher asks the learners to state why the evil occurrences in the story are metaphorically called crocodiles. The learner responds that crocodiles are as dangerous as murderers. The teacher requests them to think of crocodiles found in their home areas, and learners mention coronavirus and gender-based violence as the main crocodiles in their communities. As the teacher requests learners to reflect on their home experiences, she goes beyond the reading text and allows learners to bring their whole selves into the reading to comprehend it (one of the characteristics of translanguaging). She assists in deepening comprehension as learners can relate well to what is happening in the text with their day-to-day experiences. Bringing their funds of knowledge into the classroom serves as a reminder to learners of how valuable their lived experiences are in class. This boosts their sense of self and makes them appreciate the teacher's translingual approach as it enhances content comprehension. Garcia (2020) correctly asserts that reading neither depends on the language of the reading text nor the concept of a named language. Instead, the act of reading is about translanguaging; assembling all the meaning-making resources, and acting on them for comprehension of the reading text. Based on their reaction and response to the teacher's instructions, and their understanding of the content, it can be established that learners have well received the translanguaging approach.

Text comprehension

The study further shows good performance in activities that learners were instructed to do. This is shown in the answers they give to the teacher's questions during class discussions. The

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teacher conducted a follow-up lesson after she asked learners to sit in groups, read the song in the text, and rewrite it in any of their home languages. The classroom discussions were held after the groups had presented their given task in class. Excerpt 5 below demonstrates this.

EXCERPT 5

Teacher: I want us to list the most important points that are found in the song. What message is communicated by this song?

(Almost all learners raise their hands, but learner 8 is chosen to answer)

Learner 8: The song says, Asinakufunda xa siziva singakhuselekanga (isiXhosa) (we cannot learn when we feel unsafe)

Teacher: Yes, the environment must be safe for any learning to take place. E reng hape?, emong? (Sesotho) (What else does it say? Another learner?)

Learner 7: Hape e re dula re tŝhoŝetŝwa (Sepedi) (again, it says we are always threatened)

Teacher: Correct, we are always scared of what might happen to us. Anyone else?

Learner 10: The last lines of the song are a request. The song asks for protection from the evil men; kukho isikhalo sokuyeka izinto ezimbi kwindawo (isiXhosa) (there is a cry to stop evil things in our community)

Teacher: Excellent. Ke thabile, kea bona lea utlwisisa (I am happy, I see you understand)

In Excerpt 5 above, learners are asked comprehension questions based on the reading exercise they were previously requested to do in groups. The majority of the learners seem willing to participate as almost every learner raises their hands. Those who respond give accurate answers to the teacher's questions, which affirms their comprehension of the section of the text they were assigned to do. The group work, as well as the liberty to use their linguistic repertoire to interpret the reading task, yielded good results for the learners. The notion of incompleteness and interdependences, as asserted by the Ubuntu translanguaging model, has worked in their favour. The group work enabled the articulation of various explanations which aided with comprehension, while the use of their linguistic repertoire removed the linguistic barrier of being unable to express themselves due to their incompetence in English, the language of the text, and the language of teaching and learning. This yielded a better comprehension of the given reading task.

Learners' appreciation of translanguaging

The data further indicates that learners show appreciation for the new translanguaging approach the teacher has adopted. This is reflected in the third reading comprehension lesson that was observed. The teacher gave copies of the text to learners and discussed aspects such as the title

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of the text and key terms, which were done through translanguaging. Their appreciation of the translanguaging strategy is shown in Except 6 below.

EXCERPT 6

Teacher: Please read the rest of the text and summarise it in your own words for me

Learner 11: Ma'am, are we allowed to discuss it in groups first?

Teacher: Is it what the class wants?

Learners (chorus): Yes

Learner 6: Na re sa dumelelwa go ŝomiŝa polelo efe goba efe? (Sepedi) Are we still allowed to use any language to explain the text?

Teacher: So many demands, ke yona ntho eo class e batlang? (Sesotho) (Is that what the class wants?)

Learners (chorus): Yes

Teacher: well then, do whatever can assist you with understanding) You can draw, use cue cards, whatever. But the final product that each must finally submit should be in English.

Learners (chorus): Yes, ma'am. (They gather in groups to discuss the text)

As shown above, the learners are given an individual reading task. They are requested to read and summarise the text in their own words. Two aspects of their conversation with the teacher indicate their appreciation of the translanguaging strategy introduced to them: They request permission to work in groups and utilise their acquired linguistic repertoire (any other language they know) as happened in the previous lessons. This implies that the learners found the previous reading lessons that enacted the use of the translanguaging strategy useful and effective. This finding affirms the effectiveness of assembling all the meaning-making resources and acting on them to comprehend the reading text (Garcia, 2020). As Garcia (2020) correctly puts it, enacting translanguaging for comprehension of reading texts means going beyond the language of the text as well as utilising cultural practices and lived experiences (in this case, group discussions) to enable content comprehension.

Interviews

The interviews with the teacher and learners after the lessons were observed were meant to further interrogate learners' reception of translanguaging and to find out if what was observed in class is a true portrayal of how they feel about the approach. The discussion centred on the following theme:

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Teacher's overview of learners' reception of the translanguaging approach

The interview data derived from the teacher reveals the importance of a lesson that mirrors learners' lived experiences, their indigenous languages, and day-to-day cultural practices. It further shows learners' reception of this approach as shown in the following excerpt:

EXCERPT 7

Researcher*:* You have been teaching English the conventional way for a long time now, but you recently adopted the new approach of using learners' indigenous languages and cultural practices as a resource. *O ka reng ka mokgwa o motjha wa ho ruta*? (What is your comment on this new approach?)

Teacher: *Hei ke qala ho bona hore re ne re entse bana dimumu, ha re ba ruta ka sekgowa feela* (I have just realised how we had turned children into introverts by teaching them in English only). With translanguaging, they now answer and ask questions in class which helps them comprehend the text better. When I explain certain English words in their language, I can tell by their 'ooh; oh yaaa' utterances that they now understand.

Researcher: O nahana ba Thabile ke mokgwa o wa ho ruta? (Do you think they are happy with this new approach)

Teacher: Judging from their sudden active involvement in class, one can tell they are happy.

In Excerpt 7 the researcher inquires more about the translanguaging approach and wants to find out if there is any benefit attained from the translanguaging approach as opposed to the monolingual one. The teacher mentions two benefits to translanguaging: learners are no longer introverts; they ask and answer questions and understand some of the English words better. Judging from the 'ooh' and 'oh yaaa!' moments, one can tell that content comprehension is attained. From the teacher's comments, it can be inferred that translanguaging as a pedagogical approach and as a mirror through which learners look at themselves is an effective teaching strategy that not only enhances content comprehension of English texts but also removes the language barriers that hinder learners from asking and answering questions in class. Such a change would make learners appreciate the translanguaging approach. This seemingly disorderly and 'untidy' approach appears to be one of the effective pedagogical approaches for multilingual learners. Garcia (2009) compares it to an all-terrain car that has wheels that extend, contract, flex, and stretch depending on how irregular and uneven the ground is. The implication is that translanguaging is an irregular approach that seems disruptive to the

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conventional approach to teaching, but in the end, it yields desirable results in learners' performance.

Learners' reception of translanguaging

Learners were also interviewed to attain an understanding of how they received the translanguaging approach. In their responses to the question of whether they perceive translanguaging to be an effective way to receive knowledge, they said:

EXCERPT 8

> **Learner 1**: Before ma'am allowed us to use our home languages, I could not speak much in class because I do not speak English very well and was afraid other learners would laugh at me.
>
> **Learner 2**: *Ke rata tsela eo ma'am are rutang ka yona matsatsing ana. Ke utlwisisa comprehension text hantle ho feta pele.Hape ke utlwa classing ho le monate* (I like the way ma'am is teaching us these days; I understand comprehension texts better. The class is also very interesting.
>
> **Learner 3:** English is hard, *ha ke utlwisise hantle, empa ho hlalosa mantswe a mang a sekgowa ka puo ya heso ho etsa hore ke utloisise hantle.* (English is hard; I do not understand it that well; explaining difficult words in my **language** makes me understand what we are reading.

As shown above, learners seem to have received the translanguaging approach well. They state that they understand English comprehension texts better than they did when the lessons were purely monolingual; they can ask and respond to questions, an exercise they could not do due to the language barrier, and they also find lessons interesting since the implementation of translanguaging. As they enquire more about the content being taught, comprehension of the subject matter is enhanced. This feedback provided by the learners confirms how well they have received translanguaging as a teaching approach. The finding resonates with earlier studies that have found translanguaging as a resource that affords learners the leverage to comprehend academic reading material. (Hungwe 2019; Yafele 2021).

The study results show that learners' reception of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach is positive. The lesson was characterized by classroom activities that mirrored learners' lived experiences, one of which was the language they used at home. Unlike the monolingual/monoglossic practices still prevalent in many schools in South Africa (Yafele 2021), participants in the study disrupted this practice by adopting translanguaging and all its affordances. From the beginning of the lesson, the teacher set a tone and created a multilingual atmosphere through the multilingual greeting she used. The teacher ensured that the lesson was well comprehended and learners' sense of being reaffirmed by bringing learners' linguistic

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repertoires and multimodalities into the reading text. The reading mirrored the learners' lived experiences, such as the use of multiple languages, reliance on one another (Ubuntu), and creativity. It aligned home experiences with the lesson of the text, and learners appear to have received this pedagogical approach with open arms. The African value system of Ubuntu (I am because you are, and you are because we are, abbreviated as 'I x we), the notion of languages being incomplete without other languages, and the interdependence of people and their languages are visibly represented in the findings of this paper. The lesson created opportunities for learners to assemble their meaning-making resources, both linguistic and multimodal, to see and read themselves into the reading text. The ubuntu principle of 'I am because you are' and its extended application of 'one language is because another is' and 'I learn because you learn' are all applicable in this paper.

Unitary or differentiated system of translanguaging?

This paper further drives the debate in the field of translanguaging on whether there is a unitary (Otheguy et al. 2018) or differentiated system among multilingual speakers (MacSwan 2017). The results of the study affirm the existence of both systems. The unitary discourse practice is embedded throughout the lesson. Both the teacher and the learners seamlessly utilised the socially named languages as they discussed the content of the reading text. The boundaries of the socially named languages seemed invisible as the class interchangeably used all their linguistic repertoires and linguistically moved across from one named language to the other. From the greetings at the beginning of the lesson, the main discussion of the reading text, and the task that learners were asked to do, the monoglossic space was disrupted as translanguaging took dominance. The unitary discourse was, therefore, significantly observed in this class. However, a closer look at the data shows instances where dual correspondence (MacSwan 2017) occurs; the boundaries of the named languages seem noticeable. The teacher's discourse, in particular, was mainly in English; her questions and instructions were mainly in English. Although other languages were used, English discourse seemed to dominate the teacher's utterances. It can, therefore, be concluded that both the unitary and differentiated systems of translanguaging exist.

The concurrence of both the unitary and differentiated systems, as shown by the findings, affirms what ubuntu translanguaging offers: the theoretical approach mediates the translanguaging paradox in two ways: firstly, it talks about socially named and recognized languages; the Euro-colonial notion of separating languages into distinct languages. In this paper, this was mainly reflected in the teacher's discourse, which was largely in English and regarded in the paper as the differentiated system of translanguaging. Secondly, the differentiation in the teacher's discourse is resolved by the 'discontinuation continuation'(observed in learners' discourse), which ubuntu translanguaging describes as fluid and porous mobility that is not restricted by the boundaries of named languages. Learners constantly disrupted features of one language (English) and replaced them with features of their

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home languages in the process of meaning-making. In a nutshell, the differentiated and unitary systems of translanguaging are consistent with what the Ubuntu translanguaging model offers. This paper therefore concludes that ubuntu translanguaging interpretation suggests both unitary and differentiated systems at the same time; it is not either or the other, but both. The finding concurs with Makalela's (2019) observation that both the unitary and the differentiated systems exist in South African classrooms that practice translanguaging as a pedagogical tool.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper aimed to assess learners' reception of translanguaging pedagogy as a learning strategy for reading English L2 texts and to determine if multilingual speakers in the senior phase reflect the unitary or the differentiated system of translanguaging or both. The results of the study pointed out that learners have well received the newly introduced pedagogy. Their conduct in class changed for the better; they effectively interacted with the English text as they leveraged their linguistic repertoires and multimodalities, which reflect who the learners are. The use of their home languages aided with comprehension of the English text, and they were able to ask and respond to questions, which assisted further with comprehension of content. The monolingual text was transformed to suit the multilingual nature of learners and their ways of knowing and being. Translanguaging as a pedagogical approach transforms South African multilingual classrooms and provides opportunities for educators to break the false monolingual mirrors that multilingual learners are made to look at themselves as they reach school. It reassures learners of the significance of their identity in the classroom. The approach adopts the true mirror of who they are (multilingual speakers of indigenous languages) and utilises such for the acquisition of new knowledge. The study concludes that translanguaging as a mirror through which learners see themselves is an effective and valuable strategy appreciated by its recipients.

This paper recommends that the school governing bodies (SGBs) reconsider the language choice for their schools and accommodate learners' home languages to be used along with the classroom language to enhance learners' class participation and enable comprehension of the content and enable learners to ask and respond to questions posed in class. The study recommends that initiatives such as the one taken by the Hub for Multilingual Education and Literacies to engage in-service teachers in an intensive induction to appropriate and plan translanguaging in their classrooms should spread to all schools, and SGB should accommodate this approach because it seems to be of benefit to learners. Teachers should be capacitated on using translanguaging and its multimodalities in the classroom so that teaching and learning run smoothly without hindrance. It is time to cease marginalizing and alienating African languages in multilingual classrooms; African languages are a resource for epistemic access, not a problem to be overcome.

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mampoi Irene Mabena

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Email: mampoim@uj.ac.za **ORCID**: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1651-0833

Dr Mampoi Irene Mabena is a linguist, researcher, lecturer, and course coordinator at the University of Johannesburg, English Department. She is the recurring winner of the Best Paper Award for the 2022 and 2023 NIHSS conferences and the winner of SAHUDA best conference paper for 2023. Her research interests include multilingual education and Societal use of language. Her most recent article publication is "Sesotho figurative language: Ineffective conversational strategy in commissions of enquiry" (2022, Routledge; Taylor and Francis Group), and a book review of "Not eleven languages: Translanguaging and South African multilingualism in concert (2023, Routledge; Taylor and Francis Group).

ISSN: 0259-9570 | eISSN: 2958-9320

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