

Changes in teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging

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Teachers have different views toward translanguaging, which is a pedagogical approach that has garnered significant attention over the last decade. This study investigates the changes in attitudes towards translanguaging of four teachers doing a master's degree program in Kazakhstan through autoethnography. The findings revealed that the teachers' present attitudes were formed either during their teaching practice or while studying at graduate school. Some participants' attitudes were negative when they were teaching, and they mainly associated translanguaging with low language competence and a deficient level of education. However, after a year of studying, the participants changed their attitudes into one that was more positive since they understood the value and benefits of translanguaging. The study suggests that the MA program has the potential to be a good platform for the development of teachers' plurilingual competence and their appreciation of student plurilingualism.

Keywords: translanguaging, teacher attitudes, teacher beliefs, teacher positions, plurilingual competence

Introduction

Scholarly attention towards translanguaging has increased since there has been a growing need for teaching approaches that leverage learners' whole linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging is seen as a lens with a descriptive, theoretical, and pedagogical aspects, which could be a progressive tool for use in dismantling the pedagogical approaches that require the use of English only (Tian et al., 2020, p. 1). Specifically, scholars use translanguaging to refer to multimodal and multidiscursive practices of bilingual communication (Garcia, 2009), a pedagogical strategy in multilingual education that leverages students' whole linguistic repertoire (Baker, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010) and a theoretical concept that goes beyond the artificial boundaries of language (Wei, 2018). The success of learners' language development partially depends on the strategic and effective use of translanguaging by teachers (Wei, 2011). In their turn, teachers' views and beliefs about language has considerably defined the language policy in classrooms. As the concept itself is an emerging one in the Kazakhstani education system (Garrett, 2013; McMillan & Rivers, 2011), there is room for the research of multilingual practices and plurilingual competence of individuals. While Kazakhstani teachers' attitudes toward translanguaging have been explored (Alzhanova, 2020; Amaniyazova, 2020; Goodman & Tastanbek, 2020; Tastanbek, 2019), it is yet to be researched how teachers adjust their views when they start teaching, which includes encountering students and their plurilingual differences. Finally, how successful MA in Multilingual Education is as a program that includes elements of teacher education when it comes to reconfiguring teachers' attitudes to multilingual and plurilingual practices remains unclear.

Specifically, the program was chosen because, according to Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (n.d.), it "focuses on the development of teaching, curriculum development, assessment, policy analysis, and research skills in the areas of educational language policy in general, and language teaching in particular." Therefore, this study was aimed at exploring whether there are changes in teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging, and thus the following research questions were posed:

1. How have teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging changed after having teaching experience?
2. How have teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging changed after enrollment to an MA in Multilingual education program?

Literature review

Translanguaging in pedagogy, a concept our study builds on, is an umbrella term for practices that include switching codes both intra- and intersententially, coining new words or, in short, the flexible employment of the home and the target languages in different modes and discourses (Allard, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). It may be used for scaffolding, identity affirmation and interpersonal communication (Makalela, 2015). Concerning this multidiscursive practice in classrooms, Macaro (2014) identified three positions held by foreign language (FL) teachers: the virtual, the maximal and the optimal positions. The positions defined by Macaro were used as a framework in the study conducted by Doiz and Lasagabaster (2017), who found that most university instructors' hold the maximal position toward translanguaging. The use of those positions for the theoretical framework is further justified by a body of literature.

The virtual position

According to Macaro (2014), teachers with the virtual position do not see any value in translanguaging as they think the best way to learn English is by using only English. The assumption about the negative consequences of mixing languages may lead to teachers' unfavorable attitudes towards translanguaging depicted in classroom practices. The strategies employed by FL teachers with the virtual position might range from maximizing the use of target language or minimizing the extent of students' native language use to disallowing first language (L1) practices in the process of acquiring a new language. Thus, the 20th Century is regarded as the era of "anti-L1 attitude" (Cook, 2001, Avoid using the L1 in the classroom section, para. 4). Adoption of a monolingual approach implies ignoring learners' plurilingual competences (Moore & Gajo, 2009) and prescribing certain standards to be reached. The increasing incidences of the multilingual approach have not superseded the monoglossic view of translanguaging. Some teachers tend to refuse to tolerate the use of L1 in FL classrooms being driven by a feeling of guilt (Cook, 2001; Creese & Blackledge, 2010), a strong belief in native-like fluency being the desired outcome (Cummins, 2009), and the absence of competence in students' L1 (McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

The Maximal Position

Teachers' maximal position could be described as them being unfamiliar with translanguaging strategies, but still resorting to them nonetheless (Macaro, 2014). Despite the growing demand for the holistic view of bilingual education and an acknowledgment of the potential of students' multilingual resources in learning a target language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011), numerous teachers continue resisting these new views (Allard, 2017). However, use of translanguaging has been documented in classes based on naturally occurring situations such as explanation of the content, translational activities, peer and group work for gaining an understanding of the content in the target language (Coste et al., 2009). Thus, the teachers in the two studies (Allard, 2017; Coste et al., 2009) admit the importance of translanguaging in learning a target language, but still do not know how to strategize the flexible use of the languages of the students in the class to reach expected learning outcomes. As a result, teachers' unawareness of translanguaging pedagogy occasionally leads to a cautious use of students' L1 and less effective teaching (Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri,

2015). The empirical studies conducted by Allard (2017), Coste et al. (2009) and Escobar and Dillard-Paltrineri (2015) revealed teachers' inability to harness students' multilingual resources in effective language acquisition that led to ambiguous attitudes towards language mixing in language classes.

The Optimal Position

In EFL classrooms some teachers tend to use L1 "to some degree purposefully, without feelings of regret" to enhance knowledge and understanding of students about particular aspects of topics (Amani, 2013, p. 4). Such an attitude of teachers where L1 is strategically used in English FL classrooms are classified by Macaro as an optimal position (2014). Another researcher, Cook (2001), suggests a few examples that could be equivalent to the optimal position. One of them is a "New Concurrent Method" (Cook, 2001, p.412) where teachers use L1 to praise or rebuke a student during the lesson, and to explicate significant conceptions and ideas. In other words, teachers can allow their students to rely on L1, which leads to translanguaging when using a new vocabulary, but when students gradually obtain the vocabulary, teachers decrease the level of L1 use in the classroom. The second one is the "Community Language Learning" approach where students' L1 comes out as the "initiator of meaning and attaches the L1 to the target language" (Cook, 2001, p.412). In other words, the L1 is used to deepen the learning and to add to knowledge (Petty, 2009). Teachers with an optimal position value students' "plurilingual asset" (Moore & Gajo, 2009, p. 149) and see it as a facilitator of learning. It implies translanguaging is harnessed in the classroom and valued as a pedagogical tool when an optimal position is adopted.

The above-mentioned positions developed by Macaro (2014) are on the continuum of varying degrees of support toward translanguaging. Hence, they allow for the accurate tracking of the direction of attitudinal changes if used as a theoretical framework in this study.

Factors behind changes in attitude toward translanguaging

Even if one originally held a virtual or a maximal position, this can shift to an optimal one or vice versa under certain circumstances. Firstly, plurilingual students are recognized as factors for changes in the participating tutor's "teaching and how he plans for his students" (Woodley & Brown, 2016, p.

91). Teacher's attitude to translanguaging is then shaped by classroom language ecology or student linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging is also discussed from an ecological perspective in Allard's (2017) work: students in an unsupportive environment rejected teacher translanguaging making the teachers less likely to regard translanguaging as an efficient tool for pedagogical and interpersonal purposes.

Still, another factor, teacher education, adds another layer to pedagogic translanguaging by providing teachers with a theoretical and a pedagogical underpinning (Makalela, 2015). Pre-service and in-service teacher education might explicitly or implicitly develop teachers' multilingualism and plural self-meaning, thus giving form to their view of translanguaging as argued by Makalela (2015). For instance, the teacher in Woodley and Brown's (2016) study credits working with The City University of New York-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals for enlightening him on how to scaffold and connect students to content. Indeed, teacher education at all stages form teachers' attitude to various concepts including translanguaging, and makes them linguistically responsive (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Macaro (2014) implies that learning about multilingualism (e.g., translanguaging) helps pre-service teachers reconstruct their views, which makes teacher education as powerful a factor as student linguistic diversity.

As the literature reveals, teaching experiences and teacher education affect attitudinal changes. Consequently, this study's questions were developed to see if those factors influence teachers' attitudes toward translanguaging in the educational settings of Kazakhstan.

Methodology

This research project was inspired by the lived experiences of the participants. To accurately capture the changes in their attitude towards the central phenomenon that is translanguaging, autoethnography was chosen. Autoethnography is a methodological approach that allows the authors to conduct a self-critical reflection on certain topics (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). At the time that this research was being conducted, the four members (P1, P2, P3 and P4) of the research group were MA students in Multilingual Education with teaching backgrounds. The researchers attempted to deepen their understanding of the central phenomenon by reflecting on their teaching and MA study experiences, interpreting

gathered data, and trying to find similar and different discourses. Thus, the researchers tried to gain insight into the studied topic through self-studying since they are representatives of the targeted population (Chang, 2008).

Data were collected through open-ended written interviews. This made it possible for participants to take their time and think about their past and present beliefs, and then provide full and honest responses. Therefore, this instrument enabled our research group to gain a deeper understanding about changes in teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging, which represents the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Besides, such bilingual education scholars as Makalela (2015) and Palmer et al. (2014) also used interviews to gain the results of their research. The interview questions were based on the theoretical framework of Macaro (2014) and the findings of previous empirical studies. The interview was conducted via an electronic format, and the researchers typed their answers in an online document on Google Docs. Then, the data were coded, and those codes were categorized into themes. Firstly, the participants' attitudes towards translanguaging before their enrollment in the program were analyzed; similar and different patterns were sought for and different patterns were explained. Secondly, the gathered data on researchers' attitudes after the enrollment were interpreted. Then, these two groups of analyzed data were compared to see the possible changes in participants' attitudes (Creswell, 2014).

Findings and Discussion

The collected data were analyzed with Macaro's (2014) three positionings in mind. Before the analysis, the data were organized into two main stages- past and present experiences- that shaped the participants' attitudes. Each stage includes codes that were inferred from the interviews. This helped us to track the change in their attitudes towards translanguaging as a result of gaining teaching experience and enrollment to the Master's program.

Theme 1. Virtual position

The gathered data shows that P1 and P4 took a virtual position (Macaro, 2014) before starting the Multilingual education program. P1 was convinced that mixing languages was a feature commonly found in "weak" (The interviewees' words are further given in quotations marks) people. A similar observation was shared by P4 who used to associate

“pure” language practices with “intelligent and literate personality”. They held a strong belief in adhering to the monolingual approach as the only way to achieve foreign language teaching and learning goals similar to the study participants of Doiz and Lasagabaster (2017) and Yessenova (2016). P1 admits that the negative attitude of the society towards mixing languages, one form of which is commonly known as “shala Kazakh” (Akanova, 2017), shaped her perception which resulted in her idealizing L1/L2-free EFL classes with L1 and L2 being either Kazakh and Russian or Russian and Kazakh. During their years at school, P1 and P4’s expectations of English (L3) only classes encountered the reality of EFL teachers’ extensive and spontaneous translanguaging practices which strengthened their negative attitudes towards translanguaging and resulted in their association of code mixing with un-professionalism:

P1: “I used to think that it would be more beneficial for me if my English teachers employed that approach [monolingual]. So, I decided I would become the teacher whom I really needed as a schoolgirl”.

P4: “As a school learner I was always irritated by English teachers whose rare use of English in the class made English classes seem less English but more classes of translation practices with some focus on grammar learning too”.

Years later, both P1 and P4’s monoglossic views were consolidated by the guidelines and recommendations of their instructors in higher education. One could say that they were modeled to use English only to teach English as they saw their own instructors apply that method of teaching (de Mejía & Hélot, 2015). Therefore, they had decisive goals and principles when starting their teaching careers. However, they faced a different reality when they tried to establish English-only environments in practice, and it did not succeed due to the high level of students’ L1/L2 use and their low English language competence. The complete banning of the Kazakh or Russian languages by P1 and P4 resulted in a deterioration of their students’ engagement level, which caused them to switch from the virtual to the maximal position:

P1: “They [students] don’t speak at all when they are forbidden to speak Kazakh or Russian due to their extremely low proficiency in the target language”.

P2: “Seeing students’ anxiety for learning and loss of attention, flexibility in the use of L1 was inevitable, although it was undesirable practice for me”.

The strategies employed by P1 and P4 ranged from the translation of every phrase to scaffolding only at a beginner level, and then gradually maximizing the target language. These translanguaging practices were more intuitive rather than strategic, hence the translanguaging practices were regarded to be a recourse or as a last resort. Although the employed pedagogic strategies might have been based on the teachers’ teaching experience, intuition and good will, the teachers’ limited knowledge of effective translanguaging pedagogy might have been detrimental to learner’s learning outcomes (Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri, 2015).

Theme 2. Maximal position

Features of teachers’ maximal positioning were displayed in P2 and P3’s as being predominant during the stage of learning language, whilst two other participants admitted the necessity of translanguaging practices only during the first years of their teaching experience. P2 and P3 had experienced a monolingual vision of English language teaching (ELT) as learners, but were aware of the use of the mother tongue as an aid in ELT for beginners, describing their attitudes to translanguaging as “tolerant”:

P2: “[I] used to tell something in English slowly and clearly, then I tell the same thing in L1 right away so that I could be sure that everybody understood me. ...I think that the English-only part can be started after learning at least the basic level of English”.

P3: “[I] relied upon Kazakh or Russian mainly to scaffold and check for comprehension. ... I used less of them as they got better at English”.

This clearly illustrates a developed maximal positioning at the initial stage of teaching practice. Despite witnessing a dominance of monoglossic beliefs in teaching circles, P2 and P3’s high awareness of the benefits of translanguaging benefits equipped them with the strategies in classroom language allocation.

Unlike P2 and P3 who used translanguaging from the beginning, P1 and P4 only gradually realized the potential of translanguaging during their first years of teaching (Makalela, 2015). Nevertheless, the interviewees acknowledged their vision of English

only classes as an ideal and ultimate goal for language acquisition:

P1: “Imagine every language you know to be different colors, which is pretty fascinating when they are kept separately. Now, imagine that you are mixing all those beautiful colors in a pot. Eventually, you will get unpleasant something strange and unpleasant in color... I remember dreaming about the days when we (I and my students) would use English only”.

P4: “my view of how English should be taught [was shaped] upon recommendations and guidelines of my university faculty... I became a total supporter of English only language policy at classrooms”.

Such a belief that the use of native languages should decrease as the English language proficiency increases goes against what is advocated by scholars such as Garcia (2009), Goodman and Tastanbek (2020) and Celic and Seltzer (2013) who believe that translanguaging is more than just a scaffolding approach.

At the same time, both P1 and P4 encountered challenges in the face of schoolchildren’s anxiety in learning language and had to adopt the use of L1 for the accommodation of their learners’ needs. While P4 had established a translanguaging practice as a part of providing instructions to their students, P1 admitted to having a bitter “feeling of guilt” in the acceptance of students’ L1 use.

Overall, the importance of translanguaging practices for “scaffolding” and “meaning-making” influenced all participants’ shift away from a one-language only approach under school and language situations (Allard, 2017). However, all of these four participants indicated a deficiency of professional knowledge and experience in harnessing translanguaging strategies.

Theme 3. Optimal/Transitional position

While Macaro (2014) describes a teacher’s optimal position as one where they are capable of building on translanguaging for communicating and learning and while avoiding unprincipled and impromptu translanguaging, the findings of this study illustrate that the four participants have yet to fully transition to hold this position. More specifically, the positions of the participants fall between the maximal and optimal positions. As it was inferred from the

data, they all value translanguaging as a pedagogic tool after having become acquainted with multilingual education within their master’s program. In other words, as said by Makalela (2015), the program that covers some modules of teacher education changes teachers’ attitudes to multilingualism. Hence, a master’s program can succeed in providing theoretical knowledge of translanguaging and transforming its students to be linguistically responsive (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). The students’ becoming linguistically responsive could also be attributed to the fact that although assignments are required to be in English, the in-class discussions among students are not restricted to the English language, meaning that they can employ their whole linguistic repertoire. However, they still have not discovered ways to purposefully and efficiently employ translanguaging techniques as revealed by P1 and P3.

P1: “However, I feel I still don’t have a clear understanding of how to use it properly due to a lack of knowledge and experience”.

P3: “I’m still figuring out how to translanguage and let translanguaging strategically. Learning is a long journey, isn’t it?”

On the other hand, P2 and P4 are not in the process of deepening their knowledge on the strategic use of translanguaging since they are not involved in teaching or are not planning to be involved in the immediate future, unlike P1 and P3. Accordingly, the practices of all four participants seem to fit that of the maximal position holder. Another theme that emerged from the data analysis contrasts the findings in the study of Woodley and Brown (2016), where the teacher learned to use translanguaging to scaffold and deliver content. Indeed, the answers of P1 and P4 reveal this phenomenon of finding themselves at a transitioning position as being related to them being mostly exposed to mostly literature about translanguaging as opposed to not studying and practicing translanguaging as a teaching approach; hence, having overall limited knowledge of translanguaging:

P1: I found out that mixing the codes is called translanguaging only after the enrollment.

P4: Acquaintance with theoretical and empirical studies on the concept raised my awareness of languages and its multiple practices within and beyond classroom context.

After having learnt more about translanguaging, P3 has incorporated this practice into their teaching:

P3's students are now encouraged to use their whole linguistic repertoire and enact their plurilingualism (Moore & Gajo, 2009). The other participants also showed interest in expanding their understanding of translanguaging. On the whole, the Master of Arts in Multilingual Education program all four participants are enrolled in has taught them to valorize themselves and their students as plurilingual individuals as well as justify the use of translanguaging in teaching, which they have been doing since before joining the program. In other words, if in the past they viewed translanguaging as a recourse, now translanguaging to them is a resource.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic study built on the framework of Macaro (2014) to respond to the following question: "Do teachers' attitudes to translanguaging change?". In this regard, the answer was "Yes". Indeed, teachers' attitude to the named practice changes under specific circumstances. Firstly, if their initial position, as shaped by their socially imposed views and secondary education experiences, was virtual and their students' practices and competencies did not match their expectations, their position shifted to maximal. Students' linguistic diversity and repertoire changed the practices of their teachers, yet translanguaging was still seen as recourse, not resource. Secondly, the teachers' enrollment in the MA program had a strong effect since it reinforced their beliefs that translanguaging is a valuable pedagogic tool or even engendered a reevaluation of their whole perception of translanguaging and multilingualism at large. However, since the program is not a teacher education program, participants felt they lacked a holistic knowledge of pedagogic

translanguaging and placed themselves between maximal and optimal positions. This means that despite being theoretically armed, teachers need more practical training and methodological support to harness translanguaging into their teaching.

The implication for Kazakhstan would be that teacher education programs should incorporate both theoretical and practical elements of multilingual education, where pre-service and in-service teachers would find enough resources to support their teaching practices. For instance, translanguaging pedagogy could be used in teacher education programs for improving both receptive and productive language competences. With a strong methodology provided, teachers could value themselves and their students as plurilingual individuals by acknowledging idiosyncratic and common features of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as leveraging students' plurilingual assets. Although the study tried to answer the questions on behalf of a whole program and numerous cohorts, the findings cannot be generalized, given the number of participants. In addition, the researchers, who were at the same time the study participants, might have reported their experiences slightly differently from reality despite their attempt to be as objective as possible. It is for the reason that they designed the whole study, and hence were aware of the theoretical framework and other details. It is for this reason that taking into consideration the limitations of this research, a more thorough and larger-scale study could be conducted in the future. Regardless of the above-mentioned shortcomings, the study shed light on how teachers' attitudes to translanguaging change and how students and (teacher) education are powerful tools in positioning oneself towards translanguaging.

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