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From Monolingualism to Translanguaging: The Evolution of Theoretical Perspectives on Second and Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

The field of second and foreign language education has undergone profound transformations over the past century, reflected in its gradual shift from monolingualism, through bilingualism and ultimately to translanguaging. This evolution has not only reshaped theoretical understandings of language, learning and pedagogy but has also significantly influenced pedagogical practices across diverse educational contexts. Concurrently, it has sparked sustained scholarly debate regarding effective approaches to teaching and learning a second or foreign language in increasingly diverse and plurilingual communities. Against this backdrop, this paper critically examines the historical and conceptual transition from monolingualism and bilingualism to translanguaging, with the aim of providing a critical understanding of the theoretical evolution of perspectives on second and foreign language teaching and learning. In doing so, it highlights how evolving conceptualisations of language, culminating in translanguaging, have redefined pedagogical priorities, challenged traditional assumptions about language separation, and opened new possibilities for encouraging more inclusive, equitable and responsive learning environments.

Introduction

Throughout the history of second and foreign language (L2/FL) education, the inclusion or exclusion of learners' first language (L1) has been a matter of ongoing controversy (Auerbach, 1993; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). This field, by and large, has been characterised by the prevalence of two major approaches: the monolingual and the bilingual approaches. The former, on the one hand, advocates the exclusive use of the target language (TL) in the classroom, based on the assumption that maximum exposure promotes more effective learning. As a result, it discourages or prohibits the use of learners' L1 during instruction. The latter, on the other hand, has re-examined the long-held monolingual perspective, recognising the pedagogical value of learners' L1 as a resource that can support comprehension, scaffold learning and facilitate L2/FL development.

Moving beyond the monolingual–bilingual dichotomy, an evolving and increasingly influential perspective has gained prominence. This perspective, known as translanguaging, challenges traditional assumptions regarding language segregation and calls for more flexible and dynamic language practices in educational settings (García & Wei, 2014; Lasagabaster & García, 2014; Wei, 2022; Wei & García, 2022). Rather than viewing languages as distinct

entities, it conceptualises learners' linguistic resources as an integrated and dynamic repertoire from which they strategically draw to make meaning and communicate effectively. As such, translanguaging embraces linguistic diversity by drawing on learners' entire linguistic repertoires, including their L1, in the classroom, thereby offering a more inclusive and realistic understanding of language use.

Against this background, this paper traces the evolution of language teaching paradigms in L2/FL education, from monolingual and bilingual approaches to the more recent paradigm of translanguaging. Understanding this evolution is essential for appreciating the theoretical, pedagogical and ideological shifts that have shaped contemporary language education. To this end, this paper examines the historical development and pedagogical assumptions underlying each paradigm, highlighting the major transformations in the conceptualisation of language within L2/FL teaching and learning. Particular attention is devoted to the transition from monolingual and bilingual approaches to translanguaging. By providing a historical and critical overview of this evolution, this paper seeks to deepen understanding of the emergence and significance of translanguaging within the broader evolution of language teaching paradigms.

1. Monolingual Approach

The monolingual approach is a long-standing paradigm in language teaching that advocates the exclusive use of the TL in instruction. Rooted in the belief that maximum exposure to the TL facilitates language acquisition, the monolingual approach has exerted a significant influence on language teaching theory and practice for many decades. Accordingly, this section provides a concise historical overview of this approach and examines the principal arguments advanced in support of using the TL exclusively.

1.1 Historical Background

The United States has historically been characterised by successive waves of immigration, which resulted in growing linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, the latter was widely perceived as a threat to national identity and unity. These concerns contributed to the emergence of the Americanization Movement, which intensified anti-foreign sentiment towards new immigrants (Auerbach, 1993). This ideology also influenced English language teaching by encouraging the adoption of English-only policies and reinforcing the belief that learners' L1 should be excluded from classroom instruction.

English-only programmes became increasingly widespread in the United States, particularly during the early 20th century. These programmes promoted the use of English as the sole medium of instruction. This policy was driven primarily by political rather than pedagogical considerations (Crawford, 1991; Daniels, 1990). English became closely associated with patriotism. As Baron (1990, as cited in Auerbach, 1993, p. 3) observed, "speaking good English was equated with being a good American." Furthermore, American children were encouraged to take an oath of language loyalty (Auerbach, 1993). The influence of this English-only ideology extended beyond the United States. Drawing on the report of the 1961 Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language, held at Makerere University in Uganda, Phillipson (1992) identified five influential tenets underpinning English language teaching:

- Exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction;
- Native speakers as the ideal teachers of English;
- Early introduction of English instruction;
- Increased exposure to English through instruction;
- Avoidance of learners' L1 or other languages.

Phillipson (1992) subsequently referred to the previous tenets as the monolingual fallacy, the native-speaker fallacy, the early-start fallacy, the maximum-exposure fallacy and the subtractive fallacy, respectively. The monolingual approach prevailed throughout much of the 20th century and exerted a profound influence on language teaching methodologies, including the Direct Method and the Audiolingual Method. The belief that learners' L1 should be excluded from the L2 classroom remained widely accepted for decades. In this regard, Cook

(2001) argued that "an anti-L1 attitude was clearly a mainstream element in 20th-century language teaching methodology" (p. 405).

Many scholars advocated the anti-L1 stance. Turnbull (2001), for instance, argued that the use of the TL should be maximised in L2 learning. Other scholars claimed that teachers who resort to their learners' L1 may be "inadequate pedagogues" (Chambers, 1992), although little empirical evidence has been provided to support this claim. Thus, the monolingual approach to L2/FL teaching promotes the exclusive use of the TL in the classroom and, consequently, the exclusion of learners' L1.

1.2 Arguments for Exclusive TL Use

Proponents of the monolingual approach have advanced three principal arguments in support of their position. The first is based on the claim that L2 learning should resemble L1 acquisition. The second stems from the perspective of language compartmentalisation. The third rests on the belief that increased exposure to the TL enhances L2 learning. Each of these arguments is discussed in detail below.

1.2.1 Arguments from L1 Acquisition. The first theoretical justification for the adoption of the monolingual approach in the L2 classroom stems from the belief that the process of acquiring the TL should be similar to that of the L1 (Krashen, 1981). In this respect, Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) stated, "Since the first language is the only language present during L1 acquisition, the second or target language should be the only language present or available when a second or additional language is acquired" (p. 3). To put it differently, learners should acquire the TL in the same way as they acquire their L1.

1.2.2 Arguments from Language Compartmentalisation. Another further argument in favour of the monolingual ideology is based on the segregation of languages. The philosophy behind advocating this view originates from the idea that successful L2 learning is strongly linked with the ability of learners to keep TL separate from L1 and regard the two language systems as two different entities. Proponents of the monolingual approach highlight the significance of language compartmentalisation in L2/FL learning. Larsen-Freeman (2000) conceded that "the native language and the target language have separate linguistic systems; they should be kept apart so that the students' native language interferes as little as possible with the students' attempt to acquire the target language" (p.42).

The compartmentalisation of L1 and L2 helps prevent language interference, which can hinder successful L2 learning (Cook, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In congruence with the perspective supporting the separation of languages, Harbord (1992) contended that overreliance on L1 gives learners the impression that literal translation (i.e., word-for-word translation) is always feasible between languages, which is not the case. To avoid L1 interference, various researchers have recommended the exclusive use of and exposure to the L2 (Ellis, 1984; Lee, 2013; Lightbown, 2001; MacDonald, 1993).

1.2.3 Arguments from L2 Exposure. Avoiding L1 use in the L2 classroom is the basic premise of the monolingual approach. To attain this aim, it is of the utmost importance to maximise learners' exposure to the TL. L2/FL learners should be provided with opportunities to practise the language in real-life situations. According to Cook (2001), this can be achieved by promoting a social atmosphere where learners can talk about "the weather, the world, yesterday's game or whatever they are interested in" (p. 409). Teachers who encourage L1 use in the classroom, however, deprive their learners of the opportunity to use the TL meaningfully. On this account, the use of the latter as the sole medium of classroom interaction has been regarded as apposite by advocates of the monolingual approach.

To successfully learn the L2/FL, exposure to the TL has been claimed to play a crucial role. Similarly, Auerbach (1993) argued that "the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalize it and begin to think in English" (p. 5). This belief in maximising L2 exposure stems largely from the limited opportunities learners have to use the TL outside the classroom. Consequently, proponents of

the monolingual approach recommend providing learners with ample opportunities to use and be exposed to the TL rather than other languages (Ford, 2009; Littlewood & Yu, 2011).

2. Bilingual Approach

The monolingual approach has widely impacted educational policy not only in the US but also in other countries where linguistic diversity has been the norm. Despite its widespread acceptance, this approach has been subject to criticism (Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2001; Crump, 2013; Phillipson, 1992; Prodromou, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 2000), thereby giving rise to another influential approach to L2 teaching, known as the bilingual approach. Therefore, this section highlights the shortcomings of the monolingual approach and stresses the rationale for adopting a perspective that supports the pedagogical use of learners' L1 in teaching and learning.

2.1 Revival of L1 Use in the L2 Classroom

Proponents of the bilingual approach reject the total exclusion of learners' L1 from the L2 classroom. Although the pedagogical use of learners' L1 is not a new idea, its revival has gained considerable momentum in response to the limitations of the monolingual approach. In this respect, Atkinson (1987) opined that the role of the L1 in the monolingual classroom has been neglected. Similarly, Cook (2001) claimed that "it is time to open a door that has been firmly shut in language teaching for over 100 years, namely the systematic use of the first language (L1) in the second language classroom" (p. 403). To support this view, Bourne (2001) asserted that bilingual learners inevitably bring their prior linguistic knowledge into the classroom.

According to Cook (2001), the L1 is always present in L2 learners' minds, implying that every activity undertaken in the classroom is influenced by their L1, regardless of its degree of visibility. Furthermore, he stated that "the maximal provision of L2 input does not deny L1 a role in learning and teaching. Having a large amount of meaningful L2 use . . . does not preclude using the L1" (p. 410). Cook's argument suggests that the value of abundant L2 input does not logically entail the exclusion of learners' L1. Consequently, although the monolingual approach highlighted the importance of creating a learning environment that maximises exposure to the TL, learners' L1 still plays an essential role in the teaching and learning process.

The monolingual perspective, which is grounded in the view that L2 learning should resemble L1 acquisition, remains limited because it overlooks the fundamental differences between the two processes. Singleton (1989) posited that L2 learners are characterised by greater short-term memory capacity, cognitive maturity, and social development. Additionally, Cook (2001) stated that:

> The comparison of L1 and L2 acquisition is a vast question. . . . By definition, the L1 monolingual child does not have another language; it is the one element that teaching could never duplicate. . . . The argument for avoiding the L1 based on L1 acquisition is not in itself convincing. It seems tantamount to suggesting that, since babies do not play golf, we should not teach golf to adults. (p. 406)

Cook underscored the distinction between L2 and L1 acquisition. He maintained that it is unrealistic to expect L2 learners to replicate the experience of monolingual children because L1 acquisition occurs without prior knowledge of another language. He further argued that L1 acquisition cannot provide a convincing justification for excluding learners' L1.

Another criticism of the monolingual approach concerns its assumption that native-speaker competence should serve as the benchmark for L2 proficiency. In the same line of thought, Towell and Hawkins (1994) opined that "very few L2 learners appear to be fully successful in the way that native speakers are" (p. 14). Thus, it is not appropriate to equate the experience of L2 learning with that of the L1. Building on this argument, Cook (1997) maintained that L2 learners, unlike L1 learners, seek to achieve competence in two languages. This implies that success in L2 learning should be evaluated according to the standards of successful L2 users rather than those of native speakers.

As stated earlier, advocates of the monolingual approach support their position by arguing that learners' languages should be compartmentalised to facilitate TL learning. Nonetheless,

research has shown that L1 and L2 are not readily separable, as they are closely interconnected in the mind of the L2 user (Beauvillain & Grainger, 1987; Cook, 1997, 2001; LoCastro, 1987; Obler, 1982). Stern (1992), similarly, considered the L1-L2 relationship as an indubitable fact. This view is consistent with that of Deller and Rinvolucri (2002, p. 4), who metaphorically described the learner's L1 as "the womb from which the second language is born", thus emphasising the inseparable relationship between the two languages. On the contrary, the judicious inclusion of learners' L1 can support L2 teaching and learning.

2.2 Empirical Evidence

A growing body of research has supported the theoretical and empirical rationale for including learners' L1 in TL learning, whereas arguments for its exclusion have been shown to rest on assumptions that were originally advanced without sufficient empirical support (Auerbach, 1993; Brooks-Lewis, 2009). Numerous studies have demonstrated the pedagogical benefits of learners' L1 in the L2 classroom (Atkinson, 1987, 1993; Beauvillain & Grainger, 1987; Bourne, 2001; Butzkamm, 2003; Cook, 1997, 2001; Deller & Rinvolucri, 2002; Nation, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). The judicious use of the L1 does not adversely affect L2 learning; rather, it enhances learners' overall learning experience. Atkinson (1987), for example, argued that L1 aids in translating vocabulary, giving instructions, checking comprehension and developing useful strategies. Research has also indicated that learners' reliance on the L1 gradually decreases as their proficiency in the TL increases (Prodromou, 2002). By excluding their L1, nonetheless, they will be deprived of their right to use one of the most invaluable assets in L2 learning (Butzkamm, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Reviewing the available evidence, Macaro (2005) concluded that previous studies did not support the complete exclusion of learners' L1 from the L2 classroom. Consistent with this conclusion, Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) found that most primary and secondary English teachers and learners in Kuwait had favourable attitudes towards the use of Arabic in English classes. Their findings also showed that 71% of teachers used the L1 to explain vocabulary, while 66% relied on it to address difficult questions and explain grammatical points. Moreover, Sharma (2006) provided further empirical evidence in support of the inclusion of L1 in L2 learning through an examination of the attitudes of teachers and learners towards the use of Nepali in English classrooms. The findings revealed that the judicious use of Nepali was supported for several reasons, particularly explaining grammar rules, clarifying the meaning of difficult words, establishing a close relationship between teachers and learners and saving time. Thus, the findings of previous studies provide empirical support for the view that judicious L1 use can facilitate L2 learning without undermining learners' exposure to the TL.

3. Translanguaging

While the bilingual perspective marked a significant departure from monolingual ideology by recognising the value of learners' L1, it generally continued to conceptualise languages as separate and autonomous systems to be used within clearly defined boundaries. More recently, advances in research on bilingualism and multilingualism have contributed to the emergence of translanguaging as a perspective that challenges traditional assumptions about language separation by viewing multilinguals' linguistic resources as an integrated repertoire. From this perspective, multilinguals' linguistic practices are understood as fluid, dynamic and interconnected. The origins, definitions and educational implications of translanguaging are discussed below.

3.1 Origins

Understanding the origins of translanguaging provides important insights into its historical emergence and subsequent development. The sociopolitical history of Wales played a pivotal role in its emergence, as it developed within the context of Welsh bilingual education. Historically, English enjoyed greater political, social and educational prestige than Welsh, and the relationship between the two languages was frequently portrayed as conflictual. According to Lewis et al. (2012), this relationship was characterised by notions of language struggle,

suppression, oppression, the dominance of English and the endangerment of Welsh. However, the revitalisation of the latter during the late 20th century gradually transformed this relationship by fostering more complementary bilingual practices, thereby creating favourable conditions for the emergence of translanguaging. This changing educational context coincided with a broader shift in perspectives on bilingualism.

After decades of being associated with mental confusion, negative transfer and language contamination, bilingualism gradually was recognised for its cognitive, communicative and cultural benefits. In this respect, Lewis et al. (2012) stated that "bilingualism moved in the 20th century from being viewed . . . as a disadvantage to an advantage, from causing mental confusion to the benefits of dual language capability, from solitudes to synergies" (p. 643). This reconceptualisation was further reflected in the notions of additive bilingualism, which emphasises maintaining and valuing the L1 while acquiring an L2 (García, 2009; Lambert, 1973), and holistic bilingualism, which views bilinguals as integrated language users rather than the equivalent of two monolingual speakers (Grosjean, 2008, 2010). Such developments provided an important conceptual foundation for translanguaging in education.

From the 1990s onwards, translanguaging has moved beyond its traditional association with English and Welsh and gained international popularity in education. Its development was further promoted by influential publications, particularly Baker's *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2001, 2011) and García's *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century* (2009). More recently, growing linguistic diversity resulting from the spread of bilingualism and multilingualism has contributed to the widespread recognition of translanguaging as a significant theoretical and pedagogical perspective in language education.

3.2 Definitions

Translanguaging is a relatively recent and evolving concept that has received much attention from researchers in the field of bilingual education worldwide. Various terms have been used to refer to the concept, namely *trawsieithu* (Williams, 1994), *translanguaging* (Baker, 2003), *metrolingualism* (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), *code meshing* (Canagarajah, 2011) and *translanguaging space* (Wei, 2011). Originally, translanguaging was used by the eminent figure in the field of bilingual education, Cen Williams, who coined the term to refer to a pedagogical practice in which learners alternate languages within the same lesson for both receptive and productive tasks (García & Wei, 2014). Williams (1996) stated that translanguaging occurs when learners "receive information through the medium of one language (e.g., English) and use it . . . through the medium of the other language (e.g., Welsh)" (p.64). In the same vein, Hornberger and Link (2012) defined the term as "the purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes" (p. 262). Translanguaging thus implies the planned and systematic inclusion of two languages within the same lesson for teaching and learning, enabling learners to have input in one language and produce the output in another (Baker, 2003, 2011; Williams, 1994, 1996).

Baker (2011) defined translanguaging as "the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages." (Translanguaging and Transliteracy, para. 2). In the same line of thought, García (2009) used the concept to refer to "the multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds" (Translanguaging, para. 1). Translanguaging is, therefore, a strategy that bilingual speakers use to make sense of the newly received information and to enhance learning by referring to all the linguistic repertoire they have at their disposal. In this sense, learners use their previously learnt languages and experiences to reinforce their understanding of the TL. More than that, translanguaging helps enhance the bilingual learner's abilities in both the L1 and TL (Williams, 2002, as cited in Lewis et al., 2012).

In a lecture titled *Trans-ing Language and Cognition: Debates and Directions of Translanguaging Research*, Wei (2020) highlighted the transcending nature of translanguaging, stating that the prefix *trans* refers to the quality of transcending the traditional

linguistic, cognitive and semiotic boundaries, while the suffix *ing* spotlights the continuous and adaptive nature of translanguaging. In other words, translanguaging is an ongoing process that involves using various resources to maintain communication. It is also situation-based, for it requires taking into account the context, audience and goal of the conversation. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2021), the meaning of the prefix *trans* has two basic elements, 'across' and 'beyond', and it seems that the original concept of translanguaging coined by Williams is closer to the 'across' meaning, while for García and Wei (2014) it goes 'beyond'.

3.3 Educational Implications

Translanguaging has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in multilingual educational settings. A growing body of research has highlighted the pedagogical value of translanguaging across diverse contexts (Akbar & Taqi, 2020; Deroo & Ponzio, 2019; Duarte, 2019; Fürstenau et al., 2020; García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Ting & Jintang, 2020; Wei, 2017). Among the early contributions, Baker (2001) identified four major educational benefits of translanguaging. He argued that it may enhance learners' understanding, strengthen their competence in their less proficient language, encourage collaboration between schools and families and support content learning and L2 development. Taken together, these benefits suggest important implications for language teaching, particularly by encouraging more flexible, inclusive and multilingual pedagogical practices.

Another important educational implication concerns translanguaging's potential to enhance learners' TL competence by drawing on their pre-existing linguistic knowledge (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). From this perspective, translanguaging can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for supporting multilingual learners' linguistic and academic development (MacSwan, 2017; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). Thus, embracing multilingualism in the classroom by enabling learners to draw on both the TL and their previously learned languages challenges the language-separation policy in instruction. This pedagogical orientation, hence, encourages a reconsideration of monolingual ideologies in language education and supports a shift towards more multilingual-oriented teaching practices. Moving beyond strictly monolingual approaches to L2/FL teaching may create more favourable conditions for both learners and teachers (Baker, 2011; García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Velasco & García, 2014). Moreover, translanguaging has been found to foster learners' affective, cognitive and social engagement, lending further support to its meaningful integration into language classroom practice (Kucukali & Koçbaş, 2021). Overall, the foregoing evidence supports the view that learners' existing linguistic resources should be regarded not as obstacles to language learning but as pedagogical assets that can be meaningfully incorporated into classroom practice.

Conclusion

This paper has traced the historical progression of theoretical perspectives in L2/FL education, from monolingualism and bilingualism to the emergence of translanguaging as a more recent multilingual perspective. The review has shown that earlier approaches were largely grounded in views of language separation, in which the TL was privileged, and learners' L1 was frequently excluded from classroom practice. The bilingual perspective marked an important shift by recognising the pedagogical value of learners' L1 in supporting TL teaching and learning.

Translanguaging has challenged long-standing dichotomies by conceptualising language as an integrated and dynamic repertoire rather than as a set of separate systems. This reconceptualisation reflects broader developments in L2/FL education, particularly the growing recognition of multilingual realities in educational contexts. By valuing learners' full linguistic resources as pedagogical assets, translanguaging offers a more inclusive and flexible framework for understanding language teaching and learning.

Ultimately, this historical trajectory reflects not only shifts in theoretical and pedagogical perspectives but also the evolving conceptualisation of language within L2/FL teaching and learning. This conceptual evolution marks a clear departure from monolingual assumptions

regarding the role of learners' L1 in the classroom, reflecting a growing recognition of the pedagogical value of learners' linguistic resources. In doing so, it supports more inclusive, equitable and responsive approaches to L2/FL teaching and learning.

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