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TESOL Translanguaged in NYS: Alternative Perspectives

Ofelia García[i]

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

This article uses a translanguaging lens to offer counter-narratives to the conventional constructions surrounding English language learners, English language acquisition, bilingualism, and language education. By using a translanguaging lens, the perspective of emergent bilinguals is brought to the forefront, offering a new approach to their education, and especially to the field of TESOL. Through this framework, five principles are proposed: English is not a system of structures, "native" English speakers are neither the norm nor the objective, learning English is not linear and does not result in English monolingualism, bilinguals are not simply speakers of a first and second language, and the teaching of English cannot be enacted in total separation from other language practices. The focus then shifts from the English language to the language practices of emergent bilinguals, thereby giving them agency and more responsibility and transforming the role of the ESL teacher. *Keywords:* bilingual education, counter-narratives, dynamic bilingualism, emergent bilinguals, ESL, language acquisition, social justice, TESOL, translanguaging

As a new TESOL journal for New York State (NYS) comes into existence, the state is developing a Bilingual Common Core Initiative that responds to the varied linguistic and learning needs of the emergent bilingual students in NYS while upholding the rigor of the Common Core State Standards. The TESOL profession itself is undergoing changes, as it responds to global forces that have extended English beyond the traditional English-speaking countries and has brought to NYS students from all over the world with different educational and linguistic profiles.

The TESOL profession formed in the mid 1960s, as the United States was in the midst of civil rights struggles and the world was just awakening to its ethno-linguistic diversity and its history of colonial oppression. Because the Immigration and Nationality Act, which lifted the rigid quotas imposed by the National Origins Act of 1924, was not passed until 1965, students who spoke languages other than English in New York State were then mostly Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, U.S. citizens by birth (for this history, see García, 2011a). In that climate, bilingual education, with ESL components, offered an effective program to educate Spanish-speaking emergent bilinguals.[1] In naming itself the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) profession and not merely the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) profession, the early advocates of TESOL recognized the home languages of students and their emergent bilingualism. The TESOL profession worked diligently with the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE) during those early years, but as the TESOL organization and NABE matured, their paths diverged.

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[1]I use "emergent bilingual" and not "English language learner"—or, as the federal government calls them, "Limited English Proficient"—to indicate what these students have, instead of what they lack, as well as to remind us that whether these students are taught bilingually or not, they will become bilingual. For more on this, see García (2009b) and García and Kleifgen (2010).

Whereas bilingual education became focused on the national scene and its struggles over reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), TESOL grew internationally, fueled by the greater interest in learning English as a neoliberal economy took hold. The result has been a rift between the two professions, whose former bond is only now beginning to be salvaged.

Today, the ethno-linguistic profile of New York State students who are emergent bilinguals is highly diverse. In addition, the academic tasks demanded of students who are emergent bilinguals are now more rigorous, fueled by New York State's adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Currently, the bilingual education profession is struggling to transform traditional bilingual education structures, conceptions of language, and bilingualism that does not conform to the greater language heterogeneity in our midst. Likewise, the TESOL profession is also extending beyond its sole focus on the teaching of English as a system of language structures. Now, more than ever, the use of dynamic bilingualism in education, and its enactment in what I have termed "translanguaging" (García, 2009a), is an important aspect of educating emergent bilinguals in New York State, whether in bilingual or ESL programs. The divide between bilingual education and TESOL is finally merging.

It is the shift of TESOL from merely teaching English to translanguaging English for a mature TESOL profession that is the subject of this paper. I adopt a translanguaging lens, which allows us to think about language, bilingualism, and learning from the perspective of minoritized emergent bilingual students themselves and not simply from the perspective of what state public schools, responding to wishes of nation-states, tell us about these topics. I start by considering the concept of translanguaging, reviewing how it has emerged, and discussing how it connects to other related concepts. Using the translanguaging lens, I then provide counterarguments to some of the constructions about English language speakers, English language acquisition and learning, bilingualism, and language education that have been responsible for much of the school failure of minoritized students. I end by considering what the shift to translanguaging English might mean for TESOL.

Translanguaging

The term translanguaging was coined in Welsh (*trawsieithu*) by Cen Williams (1994). In its original use, it referred to a pedagogical practice in which students were asked to alternate languages for receptive or productive use; for example, students might be asked to read in English and write in Welsh and vice versa (Baker, 2011). Since then, the term has been extended by many scholars (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009a, 2011b, 2013; García & Sylvan, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012a, 2012b), but García and Li Wei (2014) provide the theoretical grounding for translanguaging in society and classrooms. I have used the term to refer to the flexible use of linguistic resources by bilinguals in order to make sense of their worlds, while applying it mostly to classrooms because of its potential in liberating the voices of language-minoritized students (García, 2009a; García & Kleifgen, 2010).

In this text, translanguaging is not used to refer to two separate languages or even the shift of one language or code to the other (for simple questions and answers on translanguaging for educators, see my introduction to Celic and Seltzer, 2012). Rather, translanguaging is rooted in the principle that bilingual speakers select language features from a repertoire and "soft assemble" their language practices in ways that fit their communicative situations (García, 2009a, 2013, forthcoming); that is, bilinguals call upon different social *features* in a seamless and complex network of multiple semiotic signs, as they adapt their language practices to suit the immediate task. Translanguaging, as a soft-assembled mechanism, emerges with enaction; each action is locally situated and unique to satisfy contextual constraints, and creates an interdependence among all components (Kloss & Van Orden, 2009; Turvey & Carello, 1981). Therefore, translanguaging in education can be defined as a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include *all* the language practices of students in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge, and give

voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality. What is needed in today's globalized world is the ability to engage in fluid language practices and to soft-assemble features that can "travel" across geographic spaces to enable us to participate fully as global citizens.

Translanguaging is related to other fluid languaging practices that scholars have called by different terms, conveying slightly different meanings. Jørgensen (2008) refers to the combination of features that are not discrete and complete "languages" in themselves as *polylingualism*. Jacquemet (2005) speaks of *transidiomatic practices* to refer to the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different communicative codes, existing simultaneously in a range of local and distant communicative channels. Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) refer to fluid practices in urban contexts as *metrolingualism,* rejecting the fact that there are discrete languages or codes. Canagarajah (2011) uses *codemeshing* to refer to the shuttle between repertoires in writing for rhetorical effectiveness, and speaks about *translingual practices* (Caragarajah, 2013). But what makes translanguaging different from these other fluid languaging practices is that it is *transformative*—i.e., it attempts to wipe out the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others. Thus, translanguaging could be a mechanism for social justice, debunking misconstructions about English, its speakers, learning English, bilingualism, and teaching English in a way that we as TESOL educators have long held dear. In the next section I consider these misconstructions by providing a different vision that is made possible through adopting a translanguaging lens.

Counter-Narratives about English, Its Speakers, Learning English, Bilingualism, and Teaching English

The education of emergent bilinguals in the United States today suffers from five major misconstructions about English, its speakers, the learning of English, bilingualism, and the teaching of English, which can be counter-narrated through a translanguaging lens as follows:

1. English is not a system of structures.
2. "Native" English speakers are neither the norm nor the objective fact.
3. Learning English does not proceed from scratch, is not linear, and does not result in English monolingualism.
4. Bilinguals are not simply speakers of a first and a second language.
5. The teaching of English cannot be enacted in total separation from other language practices.

I will develop these counter-narratives to deconstruct some of the myths with which we have been operating in educating emergent bilinguals in New York State.

English is not a system of structures. At least since the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralism has considered language a self-standing integrated system of forms and meanings in which elements maintain themselves in relation to each other. This structuralist interpretation of language has been questioned by scholars working within a post-structuralist framework, who focus on *language as practice* (see Blommaert, 2010; Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2010). Form and meaning are not auto-sufficient, but arise in and through social practice, as linguistic practices get used repeatedly in local contexts for meaning-making. Language is a series of social practices and actions embedded in a web of social relations that orient and manipulate social domains of interaction. Pennycook (2010, p. 9) explains:

A focus on language practices moves the focus from language as an autonomous system that preexists its use, and competence as an internal capacity that accounts for language production, towards an understanding of language as a product of the *embodied social practices* that bring it about [italics added].

These post-structuralist positions of applied linguists are reflections of new epistemologies evolving from the postmodern globalization of our times. In 1973, the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela suggested that language is an ongoing process that exists only as *languaging*. They explain:

It is by *languaging* that the act of knowing, in the behavioral coordination, which is language, brings forth a world. We work out our lives in a *mutual linguistic coupling,* not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others [italics added] (1998, pp. 234–235).

For Maturana and Varela, *autopoietic languaging* refers to simultaneously being and to doing language as it brings us forth as individuals at the same time that it continuously constitutes us differently as we interact with others.

A. L. Becker (1995), writing about translation, further posits that language is not simply a code or a system of rules or structures; rather, *languaging* shapes our experiences, stores them, retrieves them, and communicates them in an open-ended process. Languaging both shapes and is shaped by context. Becker explains: "All languaging is what in Java is called *jarwa dhosok,* taking old language (*jarw*a) and pushing (*dhosok*) it into new contexts" (p. 185). To learn a new way of languaging is not just to learn a new code, Becker says; it is to enter another history of interactions and cultural practices and to learn "a new way of being in the world" (p. 227).

English is not a system of language structures; rather, languaging through what is called English is practicing a new way of being in the world. This understanding of what English is and is not has enormous implications for our conceptualization of English speakers, the next counter-narrative that I propose.

"Native" English speakers are neither the norm nor the objective fact. U.S. schools function as if English is natural and the only norm to be used in education. It is important to recognize, however, that monolinguals are not the norm in the world. Although estimates are difficult to make, well over half of the world's population is bilingual or monolingual (Grosjean, 1982). In New York State, 30% of the population speaks languages other than English at home (U.S. Census, 2011). Spanish speakers make up 15% of New York State's population, 10% speak other Indo-European languages, 5% speak Asian and Pacific Islands languages, and 2% speak other languages (U.S. Census, 2011). The most numerous languages in New York State besides English and Spanish are Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Hindi/Urdu, Karen, Korean, and Russian (see Funk, 2012).

In the second language acquisition literature, the "native" speaker is always held as the ideal. But the notion of who is a "native" speaker has been questioned in the fluidity of today's global world (Bonfiglio, 2010; Kramsch, 2009). Often, "native" has become indexical of being white. Bonfiglio (2010), for example, recounts how in response to a newspaper ad for "native English teachers" in Singapore, many Asian candidates came forward. The next day, the ad appeared corrected: "native speaking Caucasian English teachers" needed. By "native" we usually mean white middle class educated speakers, not recognizing that the "nativeness" of the language practices of the poor and racially different may differ from those who are more powerful in society. Furthermore, this monolithic concept of "native English" also excludes the "native English" spoken by many bilinguals in New York State. In other words, the ideology of the existence of a monolithic "native" English creates an order of indexicality (Blommaert, 2010) that favors the language practices of white prestigious monolingual speakers. Thus, the other "native" practices are reduced to being "corrupted," "stigmatized," "deficient," or "needing remediation." In this way, the English language is used as an instrument of hegemony that centers power in the white prestigious class that governs. As many have argued, there is not a "native English standard"; there is, of course, a constructed English standard that is used and validated in schools. As a social construction, a native English standard needs to be recognized as such; being a "native English speaker" is not simply being monolingual or speaking a certain way. At the same time, learning English does not happen in a vacuum, is not linear, and does not culminate in English monolingualism. This is the misconstruction addressed by the counter-narrative in the next section.

Learning English does not proceed from scratch, is not linear, and does not result in English monolingualism. The learning of English has often focused on an end point: the ultimate attainment of a "native English standard." When students have not achieved this, they are said to have a "fossilized

interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972)—that is, their language system is said to be permanently deficient. Rarely has the teaching of English paid attention to the resources students bring to the dynamic process through which language practices emerge. This focus on what students lack results in the naming of these students as "Limited English Proficient" by the federal government and "English language learners" in New York State. In contrast, these students are much more than just blank slates that are subsequently filled with English structures. They bring knowledge, imagination, and sophisticated language practices to classrooms. In addition, they do not forget what they already know in order to take up English. These students are emergent bilinguals with full capacities. Their new language practices do not surface from scratch, but emerge in interrelationship with previously established language practices.

If the English language is not, as we have seen, simply a system of structures, it follows that it is not possible just to add up structures in linear fashion in order to learn. Instead, English learning emerges as a flexible continuum, as students take up practices in interrelationship with others. The result is never an end point at which students "have" English; rather, emergent bilinguals "do" language and languaging in ways that include practices identified as "English" in order to negotiate communicative situations and meet academic expectations. Emergent bilinguals are not simply in a stage of "incomplete acquisition." They are developing the complex adaptive linguistic resources that will make them successful communicators and students in the United States; those resources will always include, at times, practices that may be associated with "English," as well as practices that may be associated with the "other language." Emergent bilingual students' dynamic bilingualism is thus always in full sight as they language. The next section questions the misconstructions about bilingualism held by schools that have served to alienate the complex language practices of emergent bilingual students from English learning and provides an alternative narrative.

Bilinguals are not simply speakers of a first and a second language. Bilingualism in schools is often understood as being either subtractive or additive. Subtractive bilingualism refers to the idea that emergent bilingual students enter school with a "first language," and as a "second language" is imposed, students lose their "first" language. Additive bilingualism, on the other hand, refers to the idea that a "second language" can be added to a "first language," resulting in a person who is a balanced bilingual. The views about languaging that I have been developing in this text lead us to reject the idea of "first" and "second" language, as well as balanced bilingualism.

Although most bilinguals may be able to identify which language they learned "first" and which language they learned "second," the assignment of a "first" and "second" language to bilinguals is as much a theoretical impossibility as is the concept of being a balanced bilingual. As previously stated, new language practices emerge in interrelationship with old ones, and these language practices are always dynamically enacted.

Many have argued that bilingualism can be better seen as *dynamic* (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2005; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Herdina and Jessner (2002) have proposed a dynamic model of multilingualism based on Dynamic Systems Theory, which posits that there are no separate language systems and that bi/multilingualism produces a change in the systems involved, as well as in the degree of metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness of the speaker (Jessner, 2006). In contrasting *dynamic bilingualism* to a subtractive or additive perspective, I go beyond the perspective of language systems and refer to the multiple and complex way in which the language practices of bilinguals interact to form a complex language repertoire (García, 2009a). I have used the image of a banyan tree to suggest that language practices emerge and develop in intertwined ways.

As bilingualism emerges, the identification of language practices belonging to one or another "language" has to be questioned. Seen from the perspective of emergent bilinguals (and not from nation-states' definitions of what is one or another language), bilinguals *translanguage,* disrupting conventional ideas of what languages are, as well as the languages that bilinguals have. Bilinguals are clearly not two monolinguals in one (Grosjean, 1982). They use their complex language repertoire to fulfill the communicative needs that emerge from the different landscapes and speakers through which they shuttle

back and forth. I have used the image of the all-terrain vehicle to suggest that bilinguals use their complex language practices selectively as they adapt to the ridges and craters of communication in different languagescapes (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

A much more fluid understanding of the language practices of bilinguals has to emerge from whatever assigns a "native/first/heritage" language to the home and a "second" language to the school. Traditionally, bilingual use has been understood as following a diglossic compartmentalization, with one language spoken at home, and another one spoken in school. But the translanguaging lens we have adopted makes clear that the language practices of bilinguals are transglossic (García, 2009a, 2013), and that their full repertoire of practices is used in homes, and often "invisibly" in schools. The fact that many U.S. schools attempt to keep English as their sole language does not mean that emergent bilingual students aren't using their full language repertoire in making meaning of the lessons, even when they are delivered in English.

It is also often said that bilingual communities are interested in maintaining their "heritage" languages. Although it is true that bilingual communities are anxious to sustain their complex language practices for a U.S. life in the 21st century, there is no interest in maintaining the static language structures of a language that is just "heritage," a language of the past (for a critique of the use of "heritage," see García, 2005; García, Zakharia, and Otcu, 2013). Instead, the community is indeed interested in *sustaining* their diverse language practices for a future in a global context, and as U.S. citizens (García, 2011b). Just as the language practices of emergent bilinguals are fluid, their identities are multiple; and yet, emergent bilinguals are squarely grounded in the United States. These translanguaging practices index flexible multiple identities of American children, not of the Other. If indeed complex translanguaging characterizes the ways in which emergent bilinguals enact their knowledge, discourse, and identities, then the structures of language and education programs and their pedagogies have to respond to this greater fluidity. This is the misconstruction addressed in the final counter-narrative.

The teaching of English cannot be enacted in total separation from other language practices. Traditionally, the teaching of English as a second language and English language arts has taken place in English only. But as the complex translanguaging practices of bilinguals are made more evident, structures and pedagogies that artificially separate languages have to be abandoned (Cummins, 2007). Instead, translanguaging in English teaching might be a better way to think of how to advance the ways in which emergent bilinguals are able to meet rigorous Common Core State Standards—which, despite advances, are still fundamentally focused on using the English language as a structure. The language-separation approach that is used in both ESL (targeting English only) and bilingual education (targeting English and the other language separately) has to be abandoned.

Monolingual education cannot be sustained in a state where one-third of the children speak a language other than English. Instead, all teachers must adopt translanguaging strategies in their pedagogy. Bilingual education cannot be either transitional or "dual." Despite the more fluid use of two languages in transitional bilingual education, the language other than English is diminished and eventually banned. In dual language bilingual education, the two languages are strictly separated, not allowed to "contaminate" each other. Thus, many dual language bilingual programs do not provide emergent bilinguals with a truly bilingual experience in which all their language resources can be used to make meaning and engage with difficult and rigorous texts. Despite the separate structures, it would be important for teachers in dual language bilingual programs to leverage the children's entire language repertoire in making meaning, and to develop the children's metacognition and sense of self-regulation as they translanguage.

ESL classrooms, whether self-contained (as structured immersion or Sheltered English), pull-out, or push-in, must also make room for students' translanguaging. Oral discussions that include all students' language practices enable their class participation, deep and reflexive thinking, and rigorous cognitive engagement with texts. The reading of difficult text is facilitated when students can access background material about the content of the text in other languages. Engagement with writing English texts is also

facilitated when students can discuss, read, and write first drafts that may include other language practices besides those that are in English (see Fu, 2003). Thus, translanguaging is an important tool for use in the ESL classroom.

A translanguaging lens enables us to understand the teaching of English to emergent bilinguals in new ways. Focusing on translanguaging practices enables us to shed notions of system structures that can be linearly taught, of the proper usage of natives, of the value of monolingualism, of bilingualism as simply double monolingualism, and of the teaching of English without considering the entire language and semiotic repertoire of students.

The Power of TESOL Translanguaged

TESOL translanguaged holds the promise of developing the English language practices of emergent bilinguals that would enable them to be successful in academic tasks, while supporting a social justice agenda that holds emergent bilinguals as knowers, thinkers, and imaginative meaning-makers. This is precisely because TESOL translanguaged is not centered on the English language, as has often been the case, but on the practices of emergent bilingual students that hold much promise. In an attempt to control the language practices of our emergent bilingual students and impose English only, we have tried pull-out, push-in, and self-contained structures. It is time to give the agency and responsibility for learning to the emergent bilingual students themselves, enabling them to control their school language practices in ways that allow them to think more deeply and to engage and invest in their learning. To do that, the teaching of the English language will have to rely less on structures and more on providing students the affordances to engage with topics of importance; this may mean that the TESOL profession would have to let content, and not simply language, be the driver. A translanguaged TESOL profession would have to be deeply familiar with the curriculum and content expectations demanded of emergent bilinguals. Only if the content is the driver will adequate language practices emerge that would reflect English uses that are academically accepted.

This more content-based approach to the development of English practices for academic purposes comes close to a bilingual education approach, although clearly focused on English language practices. Not only will TESOL teachers have to be comfortable with the topics and content that students must know, but they will also have to understand the discourse structures that are needed to use language for those specific functions. In addition, the TESOL teacher will have to assume a role of facilitator and not just one of the deliverer of structures and language knowledge. In encouraging students to use all their language practices to make meaning of the new content and language, and to produce new meaning, the TESOL teacher has to assume a positionality as sociolinguist—that is, the teacher needs to be able to identify all the diverse language practices of each student in the class, and to understand when, where, how, and why students are using which in order to do what.

For TESOL teachers to function as educators who are sociolinguists, a shift in the preparation of teachers has to take place. Rather than expect TESOL teachers to be familiar with all English language structures, we should expect them to be knowledgeable in the content that students are expected to learn. Rather than expect TESOL teachers to function in English only, we should expect them to be sophisticated sociolinguists and language planners, able to identify the many language practices of the students and how they're being used to learn, and able to plan for objectives that are not only focused on language and content, but also that encourage translanguaging. A translanguaged TESOL would contribute to a social justice agenda that is deeply needed in order to uphold emergent bilinguals as able Americans, capable of academic success.

TESOL educators have contributed much to the education of emergent bilinguals. They understand that emergent bilingual students cannot be expected to meet Common Core State Standards through English only, and they understand that a translanguaging approach would enable emergent bilingual students to succeed. In many ways, TESOL has entered the bilingual world, in the same way that the bilingual world has entered TESOL. The time is ripe for ESL and bilingual educators to work together in the

interest of all the emergent bilingual students in New York State. This inaugural issue of the *NYS TESOL Journal* is a step in the right direction.

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[i] Corresponding Author: ogarcia@gc.cuny.edu