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**Contemplating Translanguaging as Linguistic Social Justice
Pedagogy**

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's Bill of Rights stipulates the right to education in an official language, or languages of choice in public educational institutions. This remains significant given that English is the popular choice as medium of instruction and likely given preference over African languages. English hegemony has implications for discrepancies in the implementation of linguistic social justice, given that multilingual learners attend monolingual schools. The purpose of this paper is to explore translanguaging possibilities as a means of promoting linguistic social justice.

Keywords: translanguaging, linguistic social justice pedagogy, South Africa

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is translanguaging as a possible means towards social justice in the classroom. According to Garcia (2011: 386), translanguaging entails the “shift between two languages in context- it also includes translation, but it differs from both of these simple practices in that it refers to the process in which bilingual students make sense and perform bilingually in the myriad ways of classrooms-reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, and so on”. However, translanguaging functions as more than just a method to scaffold instruction and better understand language, “it is part of the discursive regimes that students in the 21st century must perform, part of a broad linguistic repertoire that includes the ability to function in the standardized academic languages required in schools” (Garcia 2011: 386). Translanguaging is thus a complex discursive practice which permits the development and enactment of standard, academic ways of languaging (Garcia 2011: 386).

In most schools in South Africa, English is the popular choice as medium of instruction, and given preference over the indigenous African languages (Mkhize, 2016). It is also a matter of choice among parents. Given South Africa’s multilingual majority, there remains an evident desire to sustain and promote the English language throughout the working world, by placing learners in schools where English is the central medium of instruction (Rudwick, 2008). A common occurrence is the use of English a class marker, dividing a newly fluent English black middle class from those in rural dwellings struggling to master the language with accents of the less fluent being distinguishable (Madiba in Trimbur 2009: 109). Essentially, English varieties which are considered more ‘native’ are promoted in both the classroom context as well as in the general society, while ‘localised’ varieties are subdued, maintaining a monolingual bias. In this manner, acculturation is reinforced in the classroom context when a learner’s home language is forbidden to be utilised as a resource, while promoting linguistic values toward languages other than English (Phillipson, 1992).

The monolingual schooling norm disempowers multilingual youth due to the lack of social and material resources which support acquisition and comprehension of the language and literacy skills that promote full participation and humanizing experiences in the classroom (Hurst, 2017). While South African schools are now largely integrated to redress apartheid systems, the use of English as the medium of instruction, rather than learners’ home language remains, perpetuating levels of injustice. Thus, endeavors towards active social justice and cohesion become necessary. Utilizing the home language through translanguaging enables transformative practice through enhancing student understanding of the content, encouraging a reconceptualization and re-contextualization of learning materials from various perspectives, as well as cultivating a critical mind required for the 21st century individual (Mkhize, 2016).

These prevailing ideologies create and maintain an adverse impact on African languages as well as the linguistic rights of learners. Evident consequences of low literacy levels as well as insufficient attention to language development heighten,

resulting in increasing learner drop-out rates and failure. Studies in schools often confirm that English remains “underdeveloped as a language, with African languages even more so” (Mkhize & Balfour 2017: 138). In turn, the inadequate development of the home language makes it even more challenging to acquire and enhance the target language (and its associated literacies, as noted by Coetzee & Cillié (2013) and further limits the efforts of learners in their transition from school literacy levels to those required by university through English (Cliff 2015 in Mkhize & Balfour, 2017).

Added restrictions faced by multilingual South African youth include implicit disruptions of equal access to universities due to their limited access to English. Certain students may be accepted into university yet limited access to English distinguishes them unfavourably from their peers. Hurst and Mona (2017: 127) justifiably refer to this phenomenon as Fanon’s (1952) “colonial wound”. Mignolo (2009) describes this as the damage done through regions and individuals around the world being categorised as underdeveloped both economically and intellectually. As such, there is an emergent concern regarding the lack of equal access of schooling success, social and material resources which support acquisition and comprehension of the language and “literacy skills that promote full participation in classrooms and communities” (Hawkins & Norton 2009: 30). The mismatch in language learning highlights disparities in educational systems, teaching philosophies and pedagogies concerning the type of learners to be taught. A reconsideration of the goals of education, the roles of both teachers and learners, and the process of learning are to be adapted accordingly to advance socially just education for all (Hawkins & Norton, 2009: 30). Linguistic access is integral, through translanguaging as one of many methods, as centrally embedded in facets of social justice.

The main concern underlying this paper then, is the extent to which translanguaging might be considered a socially just pedagogy.

Theoretical Framing

Translanguaging

This paper is framed in translanguaging theory. The focal point is how translanguaging works in multilingual spaces to provide a potentially socially just pedagogy for equitable and epistemic access, as well as providing humanising experiences in public secondary school classrooms. Translanguaging is a relatively recent concept which originated as a pedagogic practice, in which the language modes of input and output in Welsh bilingual classrooms were purposefully interchanged (Williams 2002 in Baker & Jones, 2012). The concept, in essence, refers to multilingual speakers mixing languages in an intentional and natural manner. As a multilingual theory, translanguaging explores the use of linguistic repertoires to learn, how bi/multilingual learners use their voices and languages in multilingual behaviours and practices (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). Linguistic repertoires form a natural, behavioural entirety. As such, language is

more than just words; it holds meaning accompanied by knowledge, values, and beliefs as well as language experiences (Busch, 2012). Learners each have their own linguistic repertoires from their home language/s. Therefore, translanguaging considers multilingual language practices, as well as how learners use translanguaging in their language learning. Specifically, bi/multilinguals are aware of their thoughts while generating words in both languages; it is an existing controllable cognition. Translanguaging aids multilinguals in meaning making, as well as cultivating a depth of knowledge and comprehension (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). Essentially, through the usage of multiple languages as a resource, both strategically and flexibly, participants profit from the permeability of learning across languages (Williams 2002 in Baker & Jones, 2012).

In the 21st century linguistic evolving society, multilingualism is viewed as a resource to improve language learning. A translanguaging approach to teaching and learning allows linguistic fluidity: permitting learners to move back and forth using linguistic repertoires (Garcia, 2009). This creates a space for diverse identities in which multilingual learners are given the opportunity to enhance their cognitive capacity using their own linguistic experiences. In this perception, translanguaging offers opportunities to access knowledge through the intentional use of linguistic resources to enhance meaning making. As such, translanguaging has direct implications for language pedagogy and practice. Specifically, with linguistic repertoires rooted in culture and ideology, receiving input in one language and output in another (Garcia et al., 2017) promotes linguistic social justice. In this study, translanguaging evidences linguistic interconnectedness and promotes linguistic social justice for multilingual learners in single medium of instruction schools. Translanguaging promotes the voices of learners faced with an unfamiliar language with alternate representations to release ways of knowing and voices that are otherwise silenced by English (Garcia & Leiva, 2014). In this light, translanguaging encourages learners to use their own linguistic experiences in acquiring knowledge and links the gap in multilingual realities, both inside and out of the classroom (Makalela, 2015).

Specific to the South African context, Makalela (2014), articulates the fluidity and alternation of multilingual linguistic resources. Makalela (2014) refers to translanguaging as an “overarching node for all instances in which multilingual speakers juxtapose the languages of input and output in their everyday ways of meaning-making” (Garcia 2011; Hornberger & Link 2012 in Makalela, 2014b:669). That is, language systems are believed to be fluid and dynamic constructs of multilinguals who freely utilise them (Makalela, 2014b). Equally, languages as socially constructed direct one’s attention to the users of these languages who attach their languages to their sense of being. With translanguaging referred to as the fluid “alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes” (Hornberger & Link, 2012: 262), the notion of shuttling between discourses highlights that multilingual learners belong to both worlds and should not be immersed into dominant discourse while leaving their voices behind (Makalela, 2014b: 671). Makalela (2014b: 671) refers to this notion as the pedagogy of mediating and negotiating the incomes of multilingual speakers in academic discourses.

Linguistic Social Justice

The main argument underpinning this paper supports linguistic social justice as reinforced by and through translanguaging. Nieto (2000: 183) advocates the role of linguistic social justice from an educational stance in providing learners with the necessary resources required in permitting learning at optimum potential. Contextually, linguistic social justice concerns the individual and collective right to choose the language or languages for communication in a private or public atmosphere (Hlalele, 2012: 115). Integrating linguistic diversity in the classroom reinforces social justice by enabling free speech and association (to any/all linguistic backgrounds) as well as permitting the exercise of *practical reason* and entering relationships of mutual recognition with others (Nieto, 2000: 180). Furthermore, Nieto (2010) elucidates that for education to be rooted in social justice, it needs to be responsive of the linguistic needs of diverse learners. Language underpins daily interactions, encompasses more than words, and is accompanied by values, beliefs, and experiences. On this note, translanguaging practices enable multilingual learners to draw on vital, linguistic resources which inherently promote *substantive freedom, control over the environment* and *practical reason*. As such, treating multilingual learners with linguistic capital allows a safe space for individual flourishing and full participation with real effects.

Regrettably, salient injustices occur through the marginalisation of linguistically diverse students. This is often framed by monolingual English ideologies at the expense of students' mother tongue languages (Nieto, 2010). Consequentially this generates disengaged and fragmented learning in the classroom context (Nieto, 2010). Particularly, these injustices commonly occur in cases when translanguaging and the overall use of 'other' languages are prohibited. Learners are explicitly denied access to draw on their own linguistic repertoires and experiences to make sense of their learning.

Research Design

This paper emanates from a larger study on social justice in English classrooms in South Africa. The focus of this paper is limited to interviews with four teachers in the study, although the broader study focuses on about 50 teachers and 200 learners in schools across Johannesburg. The work follows the interpretivist paradigm, where knowledge is gathered and constructed around participant attitudes and ideologies toward translanguaging and social justice, with the researcher as a co-creator of meaning. A qualitative case study was used to explore translanguaging as a socially just literacy practice in multilingual Johannesburg classrooms. Creswell (1994) refers to the case study as "a single entity or phenomenon (the case) bounded by time and activity (a program, event, institution or social group). In this case, the units of investigation comprise one Head of Department (HoD) and three English teachers.

The research site is a formal, public school (called School X for ethical reasons), where English is the medium of instruction. English is taught as a first

language to all learners, regardless of the many multilingual learners enrolled in the school. The national curriculum is strictly adhered to. The school is situated in Lenasia, a working-class area in Johannesburg, Gauteng.

Non-probability purposive sampling (Swain, 2016) was used to select teacher and learner participants who could provide rich data to better understand the respective aims of the study. One HoD and three English teachers were selected from the 45 teachers in the school. One-on-one interviews with the HoD and teacher participants were conducted for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as to allow each participant a space in which to fully express their perceptions and practices regarding translanguaging and linguistic social justice. Audio tracking was used for all interview responses to capture the data as accurately as possible. All recordings were transcribed for analysis.

Data were primarily analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is used in identifying the various themes and patterns in collected qualitative data, describing, and interpreting the evident recurring and main perspectives. Yin (2014) provides insight on how the researcher relies on utilising theoretical propositions to guide the analysis through focusing more attention on data relevant to the study while identifying possible explanations for consideration. Likewise, the researcher matches the collected data to the relevant literature, as linking data to propositions through “pattern matching” which is described by Campbell (1975 in Yin, 2014) as having pieces from the same case study relate to plausible theoretical propositions. This further guides the criteria for interpreting findings, limiting ambiguity and non-relevance in the analysed data.

Ethical Considerations

Consent forms assuring anonymity and voluntary participation were issued to all participants of the study, including the headmaster, informing individuals about the study as well as its requirements and aims, as stipulated by the Ethics Committee of the university where the researchers are located.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the reliability and maintain the value of this research, considering that case studies are bounded and are not generalizable of populations, case study protocol was strictly followed to develop a reliable data base with the case study being generalizable to theoretical propositions (Yin 2014). About the trustworthiness of the research, the researchers mindfully account for personal biases which may influence findings. Principles of record keeping were adhered to, and thick verbatim accounts of participant responses were transcribed.

Data Findings and Discussion

The aim of this paper is to examine translanguaging as a means of linguistics social justice. Data were categorised into appropriate themes, as discussed in the

sections that follow, based on the points of view of the Head of Department (HoD), then the English teachers.

Head of Department Recognising Linguistic Social (In)justices

The recognition of linguistic social justice amongst teachers is often flawed. When questioned about linguistic social justice and translanguaging as an approach, the HoD expressed the following:

“Okay, so to me that means that in the long run, how am I equipping this learner to socially function? So I, I think that this translanguaging disadvantages children from being socially engaged, you know” (HoD, June 2020).

From the outset, the HoD views linguistic social justice as having long term effects on learners. As such, she recognises the social function of literacy not only in the formal schooling institution, but in society as well. However, she views translanguaging as socially restrictive, rather than that it allows both teachers and students to access the full range of their linguistic repertoires, to engage both socially and academically in the shared construction of knowledge (Makalela, 2015). The participant further acknowledges and actively recognises the responsibility of equipping learners with the relevant social and material capital to function yet maintains a monolingual stance in the classroom. The HoD’s assertions could be perceived as misdirected and limited given that translanguaging is speaker-oriented; it focuses on what the speakers do with languages and encompasses the process of moving between and beyond languages while including all other semiotic modes and meaning-making such as note-taking, thinking, cultural and identity expressions and collaborative discussions (Makalela, 2015a). This means that bi/multilingual learners who engage in translanguaging practices can socially function and participate at an enhanced level whilst utilising their linguistic repertoires, when compared to being restricted by monolingual practices.

The HoD articulates a contrary view to translanguaging theory and practice which as expressed by multiple theorists, advocates translanguaging as an essential linguistic tool for multilingual learners. She says:

“I feel like if a medium of instruction is, ah not about to be exhausted, like language, English, it is still going to be used for some time regardless of the whole decolonisation discourse” (HoD June 2020).

HoD asserts that English is the language of progression and social mobility, regardless of South Africa’s history with the language. She highlights issues of English hegemony while stating the common view that mastering the English language allows for many opportunities in the future. In the same light, she implies that minority languages are possibly deemed as an obsolete manner of communication as they have outlived their usefulness in a world that embraces one universal language; one that is advantageous in the world of work. In this case, the HoD comes across as uncompromising, someone who does not embrace or

encourage multilingualism, diversity, or linguistic social justice in her department. This is possibly because she believes in language purity as well as fixed, standard versions of languages (Hurst, 2017). In so doing, the HoD does little to recognise multilingualism as more diverse, democratic, and dynamic than monolingual competence. Noting that each member in the language department looks to the HoD for leadership, methodology and instruction, it is implied that formal, educational environments uphold structuralist notions of language teaching (Garcia et al., 2017). Teachers and policymakers maintain their views on multilingualism through subtractive or additive prisms (Garcia et al., 2017). However, translanguaging is an inevitable practice in classrooms especially as the multilingual population increases in schools (Garcia et al., 2017).

Increased focus is placed on the HoD as her ideologies hold direct implications for teachers whom she guides. As HoD she continues in efforts to discredit translanguaging practices in the classroom as she perceives them impractical. She mentions:

“So, translanguaging disadvantages learners because, translanguaging is not always practical and that reality is a multicultural reality in which the one language you can be sure everyone understands is English. So translanguaging disadvantages learners because you cannot maintain it, you are going to translanguaging to a limited number of languages, what about the rest, but if you maintain the medium of instruction language then you are doing justice to all” (HoD, June 2020).

The HoD further classifies translanguaging as “[im]practical” due to individuals having knowledge of a limited number of languages. She explains that it is instead, better to conform to one language to be able to communicate effectively with all learners. This method she considers more suitable than including a myriad of languages that has the possibility to “confuse” many learners. Through a critical lens, linguistic justice (in the form of accessibility) for many at the expense of the exclusion of a few remains injustice. In this sense, HoD finds it suitable to homogenise all learners in her attempts to attain linguistic social justice, assuming learners are at the same level of learning and are monolingual. The HoD’s ideas have the potential to limit linguistic social justice across grades as the restriction of translanguaging creates inequitable classrooms. This is unfortunate as translanguaging practices give agency and legitimacy to the multilingual speaker (Garcia et al., 2017). Through monolingual practices learners are stripped of an approach which recognises the dialogic nature of their linguistic features, and instead are subjected to placing languages in a hierarchical position (Garcia et al., 2017).

English Teachers Recognising Linguistic Social (In)justices

Inclusivity in the classroom space is dependent on teacher ideologies and practices; as such, teacher participants maintain various views of linguistic social justice. In this paper, the views of Teachers 1, 2 and 3 (T1, T2, T3) are referred to. While questioning T1, a monolingual English language teacher about social justice and humanising experiences in the classroom, she asserts:

“It would mean that all learners are treated equally. Education is more democratic, I guess. Uhm all learners will be valued and have equal rights and responsibilities. So, despite backgrounds, social status, gender, and race etc.... No one will be discriminated (against)” (T1, June 2020).

It is interesting to note that this teacher recognises equal treatment, but did not immediately recognise and include linguistic social justice as part of her description even though the school hosts numerous multilingual learners. Instead, what first came to mind were more public features of social justice, those aspects often considered as maintaining a higher importance, such as non-discriminatory practices of racism and sexism. This suggests that linguistic social justice practices are not consciously considered in the classroom space. Equitable language access and humanising experiences in terms of restoring and acknowledging the voice of multilinguals in the formal classroom setting are often left out.

When questioned regarding her role in the implementation of social justice, T1 stated:

“I think given the role and responsibilities of an educator we try our best to ensure that [social justice]. But in terms of language it [translanguaging] probably only benefits certain learners. But I think we tend to re-explain in simple terms to help them” (T1, June 2020).

T1’s comments are directed at linguistic social justice, after being probed further about language education specifically. T1 perceives translanguaging practices as only serving benefit to multilinguals and as such, it remains a method that is not worth promoting. This is contrary to Fraser’s (1997) framework which emphasises redistribution and recognition inclusive of social equality and recognition of difference to attain social justice. As such, "a shift from justice for redistribution to justice for recognition," is required by mandating a focus on multilingual learners who struggle to "defend their identities, end cultural domination and win [linguistic] recognition" (Cumming-Potvin 2009: 84 in Hurst & Mona, 2017: 130).

Teacher participants too maintain differing views of social justice in education. T2, a multilingual English teacher participant adds her comment on social justice.

“Well, I think, or to my knowledge it means that every child must have equality in the classroom. This, in terms of opportunities, and all aspects of schooling work. Honestly, I don’t feel like it [translanguaging] does, because there’s a specific language (that) learners have to learn here, English. And it is the medium of instruction. Allowing translanguaging is more of a distraction, and it lets learners rely on other languages instead of being independent in their learning” (T2, February 2020).

Noting this, T2 holds similar views to that of her HoD, regarding translanguaging as a futile approach to linguistic social justice. T2 mentions that each learner deserves equality in all aspects of academic work, she refutes translanguaging as having any beneficial outcome on linguistic social justice; she

views translanguaging as a “distraction”. She highlights that although there are evident injustices, English is apparent as a medium of instruction for a particular purpose. Regardless of whether learners had to attend an English medium of instruction schools because they are closer to home, or whether they were forced to attend this school due to their parents’ beliefs, learners must abide by and communicate using the MoI.

The principle that the HoD, T1 and T2 abide by includes immersing multilingual learners in the target language so they may learn it. This practice assumes that learners are only able to move from one language to another for the purpose of acquisition and therefore, assimilation is the goal in traditional language teaching. This is a common belief and practice, even though outdated in multilingual spaces (Nieto, 2017). Contrarily, contexts in which multilingual learners can engage in translanguaging remain pertinent in learners’ cognitive development (Makalela 2014a, b; 2015). Studies suggest that restrictive monolingual classroom spaces limit multilingual learners’ creative space, which is an essential condition for pedagogic and cognitive growth (Makalela, 2015b).

Contrary to previous teacher responses, T3, a senior multilingual language teacher recognises linguistic social justice within and beyond the classroom context. T3 describes social justice as:

“[Social justice] means that all learners must get everything equally. You know, all the resources, all the books to help them, everything that is needed and wanted to make things equal for all the different types of learners. Here, like you explained also, the languages. It needs to be equal for all learners to understand, even with the shortage of things. So yes, translanguaging helps” (T3, February 2020).

T3 maintains a holistic view of social justice and specifically notes the diversity of learners within the school. This extends to multilingual learners as well as those from socio-economically disadvantaged communities. She mentions that every learner should be allowed equitable opportunities and resources, both material and linguistic as well as all other requirements in the creation of a just schooling environment. Unlike previous teacher participants, T3 is accommodative and offers translanguaging as a social space for multilingual learners to actively make strategic choices about the language systems they utilise while meaning making (Wei, 2011). Accordingly, she embodies the belief that languages can effectively co- exist, and as such, her learners are not subjected to prioritising or choosing English over African languages; instead, both/ all languages are validated in her classroom through the incorporation of translanguaging practices.

T3 continues by saying that educators play a role in linguistic social justice. She mentions:

“We are the ones in charge, like when we are teaching you know, we let things happen in the class so it is up to us, wherever we can ah, help you know” (T3, February 2020).

T3’s perceptions and practices align with linguistic social justice. She recognises and values the potential in every learner by allowing and utilising

translanguaging in her methodology. She allows multilingual learners to actively make use of the entirety of their linguistic resources in the creation of authentic learning; learners can use their prior experiences and languages to communicate and facilitate their learning (Cioe-Pena & Snell, 2015). Hence both learning and social justice are enhanced using translanguaging. This extended perception enables T3 to have an integrated pedagogy which affirms all semiotic modes that multilingual learners encompass (Makalela, 2015a). In turn, translanguaging methodology enhances multilinguals cognitive, linguistic and literacy skills (García 2009 in Makalela, 2015a). Thus, T3's ideologies of linguistic social justice and practices contrast those of previously discussed teachers through her clear usage of translanguaging and belief that each language is valued necessarily rather than treated in a hierarchical manner.

Conclusion

Understanding and addressing linguistic disadvantage is a critical facet of our current educational social justice agenda. Using thematic content analysis, this paper highlighted a small sample of teachers' views of translanguaging as a means of promoting linguistic social justice. In essence, certain teachers rejected translanguaging, in favour of English hegemony, while others supported it. Supporters of translanguaging viewed the use of multiple languages as vehicles for greater epistemic access. Translanguaging is posed as a linguistically responsive method in teaching that reflects learners' experiences and linguistic repertoires, which engages learners in relevant, authentic discussion and higher-order thinking (Cioe-Pena & Snell, 2015).

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