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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"I make my students' assignments bleed with red circles": An autoethnography of translanguaging in higher education in Pakistan

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the tension between official monoglossic language ideologies and the heteroglossic classroom realities in higher education in Pakistan. Pakistan has maintained an English as the only medium-of-instruction policy in higher education since independence in 1947, while the everyday classroom practices have been characterized by translanguaging, that is, a hybrid and fluid use of plurilingual resources for communication. Using an autoethnographic lens, I discuss the intuitional processes and discursive practices within which my own experiences with deficit ideologies were shaped as an English language teacher and as I journied into translanguaging. Based on my experiences, I argue that while translanguaging shows great promise to confront monoglossic language ideologies inside the classroom, it offers fewer tools to resist unjust linguistic and social structures.

Keywords: Translanguaging; bilingual education; monoglossic language ideologies; higher education; language policy

One day a student of mine named Ahmar (a pseudonym) visited me in my office for the purpose of seeking my help in improving his English language proficiency. He was a multilingual student enrolled in the second semester of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. A major part of students' evaluation, besides mid-terms and final exams, was based on the points they were assigned by a teacher for their contribution to class discussion. Although English was predominantly used for class discussion, both teachers and students also used Urdu and/or mother tongues during communication. So, Ahmar wanted me to help him improve his English proficiency. Since I had taught him in the course Managerial Communication, I told him, "But your proficiency is quite good, Ahmar. Why then?" He replied, "No sir! I don't think my English is good enough, especially my speaking skills. I often lose my confidence while speaking English and switch to Urdu. I want to overcome my Punjabi accent, sir! I have noticed that even the teachers in our class pay attention to those who speak fluent English with a native-like accent." I did my best to reassure him that what matters in communication is mutual intelligibility and not grammatical accuracy, but he seemed unconvinced by the time he left my office.

This anecdote of a student's self-deprecating view of his own English proficiency, feelings of guilt while using Urdu and Punjabi, sense of shame about his Punjabi accent,

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and the teacher's bias for high English proficiency highlights (a) the pervasiveness of deficit perspectives that view bi- and multilingual speakers as perennially deficient in the target language and (b) monoglossic language ideologies that view language as a bounded entity. Both are uncritically espoused by students and teachers in higher education (HE) in Pakistan. For a long time, my own beliefs about language learning as well as my teaching practices were underpinned by a strict separation between languages, exclusive use of English, and exclusion of mother tongue in the classroom. I would not have been critical of these experiences had I not come across the recent translanguaging turn in applied linguistics (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013; Flores, 2019a; García & Wei, 2014). I will further elaborate on how I came across this turn in the section on my experiences with translanguaging in higher education in Pakistan.

Translanguaging Turn in Applied Linguistics

Translanguaging has come about as a response to monoglossic language ideologies that view language as a separate and bounded entity with fixed start and end points. According to translanguaging scholars, both subtractive and additive bilingualism are underpinned by monoglossic language ideologies, because subtractive bilingualism is aimed at producing monolingual speakers of a target language, and additive bilingualism produces dual monolinguals or double monolingualisms (Flores, 2013, 2019b; García & Wei, 2014). This view of language entails deficit perspectives that treat students as struggling language learners that need help in overcoming their linguistic deficiencies, and their language practices are treated as deviations from a supposedly so-called "correct" or "standard" language. In contrast, translanguaging offers a radically different epistemology by viewing language as a dynamic and hybrid practice and language learning as a transformational practice where multilingual speakers use their agency to draw upon all of their linguistic resources to create trans-spaces to go between the languages and beyond the social conventions of communication (Wei, 2018). Most importantly, translanguaging effects a shift in power relations by giving voice to the marginalized people, shaping new subjectivities, and transforming unjust social structures (Flores, 2019b; García & Wei, 2014). A translanguaging perspective, therefore, offers conceptual richness and scope that best encapsulates the complex and fluid language practices in multilingual educational settings in Pakistan. However, scholars have also argued that an uncritical acceptance of translanguaging might reinforce the existing social and linguistic inequalities (Canagarajah, 2017; Cenoz & Gorter, 2019; Flores, 2017; Jaspers, 2018; Lin, 2015).

It is strange that despite translanguaging being a norm inside and outside classroom settings (Ashraf, 2017), plurilingual practices of teachers and students are framed within monoglossic language ideologies and treated as deviance from English-only policy in HE in Pakistan. Language scholars and educationists (Mahboob, 2020; Mansoor, 2009; Mustafa, 2011; Rahman, 2009; Tamim, 2020) have raised their voices against monolingualism and explicitly advocated for additive bilingualism against subtractive bi/multilingualism. According to them, using Urdu/mother tongue as medium of instruction alongside English as a subject from early years of education on the grounds that it recognizes children's mother tongue, helps students to improve their academic credentials and consequently increases their chances of upward social mobility. However, both subtractive and additive bilingual policies stand in stark contrast to the heteroglossic classroom realities that involve complex, fluid, and hybrid language practices. The National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2009) supports English as the medium of instruction, whereas classroom interaction is characterized

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by translanguaging practices (Ashraf, 2017; Canagarajah & Ashraf, 2013). It is also surprising that additive bi/multilingualism has been proposed for students' early childhood education while the monoglossic English-only policy in HE has gone unchallenged. In what follows, I will present an autoethnographic account of my own subject-formation within the monoglossic language ideologies and journey into translanguaging as an English language teacher in HE.

My Experiences with Monoglossic Language Ideologies and Translanguaging in HE in Pakistan

I was appointed as a teaching assistant in the English department of a public university in Khairpur in 2009. It was a temporary position with a higher workload and ten times less remuneration compared to the salary of a permanent faculty. Because of my specialization in English literature, I was assigned courses including classical and modern English drama and South Asian literature to teach in the postgraduate programs as well as introduction to linguistics and Functional English in the undergraduate programs. My pedagogical practices during my early career were formed in an institutional culture characterized by monoglossic language ideologies and deficit perspectives whereby students were treated as perennially deficient learners of English. Students' oral and written texts in English were evaluated strictly on the basis of their topical knowledge and their fluency and accuracy in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation as per the books of grammar and dictionaries (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge, and/or Merriam Webster's) written and published in the Western English-speaking countries. Although teachers were aware of the Asian varieties of English or World Englishes (e.g., Singaporean, Indian, and even Pakistani English; Rahman, 2020), British or American varieties were preferred over other varieties by both teachers and students.

Due to my background in English literature, I was not very familiar with any approaches or methods of teaching English language. In those days, our university library did not have internet facilities let alone access to electronic resources. Most of the people would use the internet at commercial places popularly called internet cafés; Facebook and other social media had not yet become popular. As teaching assistants, we used to seek help from the senior faculty, as they were regarded as the main source of professional and pedagogical knowledge. It was through the senior faculty members that I came to learn about the grammar-translation method (GTM) and communicative language teaching (CLT). GTM was unanimously dismissed by our senior faculty as obsolete, while CLT was admired, as it emphasized developing students' communicative competence to make authentic use of English in various contexts.

Some of our senior colleagues were flexible with regard to mother tongue use in the classroom, while others were so rigid in their language ideologies that they would not allow students to speak in any language other than English even outside classroom settings. I remember once a student who wanted a senior teacher's approval for a hostel room allotment. In response to a question by the teacher why he wanted a room at the hostel, the student said, "Sir! Because I am a liver of Sukkur." He was not only shamed but also forced to repeat the correct sentences, "I am a resident of Sukkur" and, "I live in Sukkur" literally ten times in a row. Sadly enough, students' pronunciations of English words, use of sentences and accent were a source of humor in private conversations in staff rooms, that is, spaces where teachers would hang out to relax during class breaks.

In 2011, I secured a permanent position as a lecturer in English at another reputable university in the region. It offered degrees in business management, engineering, and

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computer programming. The institution had earned itself a reputation of being the best business school in the interior region of Sindh. The explicit mission of the institution was to make quality education accessible to young students who could not afford to travel to urban cities for education. Predominantly a business institution, its implicit purpose was to produce graduates that would provide cheap labor to neoliberal forces. English was the medium of instruction as well as taught as a separate subject in the first four semesters of the undergraduate program, and one semester in postgraduate programs in all the disciplines. I taught functional English to Engineering students and business writing skills to Business undergraduate students.

The management in this university played a major role in monitoring teachers' pedagogical and assessment practices. English language teachers were subject to management's constant complaints about students' inability to get through the mock job interviews due to their poor communication skills in English. We were made to feel guilty for not doing our job properly. Even the faculty teaching Business and Engineering courses to final-year undergraduate and postgraduate students would also groan about students' inability to "write a correct sentence," implicitly blaming English faculty for their perceived delinquency. Teachers' and students' language practices inside the classroom were closely monitored by the management. Some of my junior colleagues were even called to the sectional head's office and reprimanded for translanguaging or letting the students translanguage into Urdu or their mother tongue. Therefore, this panoptic gaze—like the English instructors were being surveilled by the management—was a source of constant worry that affected teachers' agency in making decisions informed by the instructional needs of the classroom. In order to avoid embarrassment, we used to speak in English when the director or the sectional heads were on a classroom visit but codeswitched into Sindhi and Urdu in their absence. My colleagues and I would share our experiences of guilt about codeswitching in our private conversations. Besides the management, teachers' own linguistic rationalities were located within monoglossic language ideologies. One of my senior colleagues once proudly told me that "I make students' assignments bleed by drawing red circles to highlight their grammatical mistakes."

I left for the United Kingdom to do my Master's and Ph.D. studies in October 2011. I started my Master's in English Language Teaching (ELT) program at the University of Sussex. While doing a term paper on the role of L1 in second language (L2) learning, I came across Butzkamm's article on the role of the mother tongue wherein he argued that mother tongue use was "twice as efficient (i.e., students reach the same level of second language proficiency in half the time)" (2003, p. 38) as the exclusive use of a target language and proposed judicious use of the L1 inside L2 classrooms. Further readings (e.g., Anton & DiCamilla, 1999; Levine, 2011) into this topic helped me to overcome the feeling of guilt associated with L1 use in the English class. However, it did little to disturb my deficit ideologies. I believed that students' lack of proficiency in English and differential performance in the classroom were mainly due to psychological factors, like communicative competence, motivation, anxiety, and willingness to communicate in English. I was interested in exploring why sometimes even students with a high linguistic competence in English avoided communication, while others with a relatively minimal competence made use of it. This led me to choose *willingness to communicate* (WTC) in L2 as a topic for my doctoral research. WTC refers to a speaker's volitional communication in the target language with a specific person or group at a particular moment (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

During the data collection for my doctoral studies and the analysis of the transcripts of classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews, an important revelation was how

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students' L2 WTC and perceived communicative competence was affected by their deficit language ideologies, since some of the participants held a self-deprecating view of their own proficiency in English that prevented them from class participation most of the time. The data also revealed how students made ingenious use of their linguistic resources. Students having Sindhi as their mother tongue frequently shuffled between Sindhi and English, Sindhi and Urdu, and Urdu and English. Sometimes English, Sindhi, and Urdu featured in one and the same utterance. In the interview sessions, I deliberately asked questions in Sindhi, while the participants responded drawing upon a complex idiosyncratic mix of Urdu-English or Sindhi-English, sometimes using English as their matrix language while at other times using Urdu and Sindhi as the matrix, respectively. As a teacher, I had observed multilingual communication in my classroom; coming across this data increased my sensitivity toward students' multilingual practices that did not neatly fit into the frames of code switching and code mixing.

My doctoral research thus helped me to understand the dynamic nature and role of individual differences in English pedagogy from a complex and dynamic systems theory perspective (Larsen-Freeman, 2013). Most importantly, it helped me realize how English-only policy and deficit language ideologies deprived students of the opportunities for participation in classroom discussion and tasks and revealed the complex nature and role of multilingual postgraduate learners' language practices that were treated as L1 interference or reliance on L1 in WTC literature. In my own thesis, I labeled these practices as code switching since those were the frames I was familiar with at that time. The realization, therefore, motivated me to search for an explanation for this phenomenon into the current debates on bi/multilingualism. I was unable to understand the monoglossic ideologies that underpinned managements' deficit perspectives, my own pedagogical practices and, most importantly, the complex nature of students' communication in the classroom. Thus, I was going through subtractive multilingualism with the English language increasingly occupying an overwhelming space in my professional and intellectual life, while my mother tongue and Urdu were gradually slipping into a shadow existence. It was in pursuit of the answers to these questions that I first came across the concept of translanguaging in García and Wei's (2014) seminal treatise, "Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education" in 2019. Without insights from the translanguaging scholarship (Canagarajah, 2017; García & Lin, 2017; García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015), it would not have been possible for me to examine the genealogies of monoglossic language ideologies underpinning the institutional culture, management's deficit language ideologies, and the subject positions my students and I took. Further readings into translanguaging (e.g., Canagarajah & Ashraf, 2013; Flores, 2013, 2017, 2020) helped me to understand how these language ideologies were located within the colonial, national, and neoliberal metadiscursive regimes. While these language ideologies originated during the British colonial era, they were maintained by the postcolonial Pakistani state to serve the so-called national interests and have now been harnessed to push the interests of the transnational corporations in the country. I was fortunate to have obtained a rare opportunity to study in the U.K. where access to expertise and resources helped me to question my own beliefs and practices. However, such opportunities are inaccessible to a vast majority of teachers and practitioners in my country.

A translanguaging perspective has proved to be liberating for me in ways that it has emancipated me from guilty translingualism on one hand and deficit ideologies that underpinned my pedagogical practices on the other hand. Previously, I used to pick up on students' grammar (e.g., prepositions, tenses, vocabulary, pronunciations), and

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I relied on methods, such as CLT, that favored monolingualism and dismissed translingual practices as unwarranted interference. Translanguaging has sensitized me to the complex and fluid language practices of multilingual students and helped me to explore strategies to harness students' linguistic repertoire within an English language pedagogy. Thus, along with the texts prescribed in the syllabus, I use novels, short stories, satirical pieces, and comic strips of popular Pakistani and Indian writers as examples of translanguaging, since these texts draw upon local linguistic and semiotic items for an English-literate readership. Recently, in my English pedagogy classes with third-year undergraduate student-teachers in a Bachelor of Education program, I used Nadeem Farooq Paracha's (2019) political satire titled "*Korruption ka khatma: Revolution is coming*" [The end of corruption: Revolution is coming] from a local English daily newspaper. The article used peculiar vocabulary, sentences, and accentuation (e.g., *Korruption* instead of corruption) as a way to satirize a certain political dispensation and its rightwing supporters. The article was replete with examples of going *between and beyond* languages (García & Wei, 2014). First, students were asked to analyze the writer's use of language, especially the words, sentences, and images that were different from the so-called standardized English and/or close to their home language in structure or meaning. Next, the students were given a task to write a satirical piece on a topic of their choice or on a funny incident they experienced recently whereby they were encouraged to deploy their entire linguistic repertoire. Students then swapped their write-ups with peers to analyze the idiosyncratic use of their peer's language. The scope for such activities, however, is limited in form-oriented courses, such as Business Communication, where postgraduate students are expected to learn to use formal language to write memos, letters, and reports in strict conformity to either British or American formats. However, I sometimes use my agency to introduce textual examples of persuasive communication that involve translanguaging. These activities serve to engage students in metalinguistic conversations, language exploration, and raise their confidence in their translanguaging practices. Thus, the translanguaging approach can be liberating for both teachers like myself and students like Ahmar. That is, it can help teachers to recognize students' rich linguistic repertoire and harness it in their pedagogical work. It will raise students' awareness of their translanguaging practices and encourage them to use their agency to discover and make creative use of their linguistic resources for meaning making.

However, the question that has preoccupied me lately is to what extent translanguaging can help to resist the unjust neoliberal structures within which the subjectivities, predispositions, aspirations, and choices of both teachers and students are shaped. For instance, despite their awareness of and support for translanguaging, students may continue to aspire to occupy positions in the elite national services (i.e., civil-military, or transnational corporations) in the country that valorize advanced-level competency in English. More specifically, despite their appreciation of translanguaging, my Academic Writing students will have to master standardized English and conform to the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for their academic assignments and research publications. Similarly, business students need to adapt to British or American formats for formal business writing for instrumental reasons (e.g., job interviews). Consequently, both teachers and students will remain subject to institutional language policing while translanguaging practices will remain peripheral. Moreover, English maintains its hegemony in HE as the language of instruction, research publications, freelancing, and the World Wide Web. For instance, university teachers' promotions are hinged on the number of publications in journals indexed in Web of Science

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and recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. Similarly, most undergraduate and postgraduate students from humble backgrounds in my university engage in freelancing to bear their daily expenses, and some do it for living expenses or for extra income to support their families. Thus, while translanguaging is helpful in resisting monoglossic ideologies and affirming multilingual speakers' ethnolinguistic identities, it offers fewer tools to confront the hegemonic neoliberal structures and the consequent stark social and linguistic inequalities. Scholars have rightly argued for addressing the political and economic root causes of these inequalities and "a fundamental transformation of school and society" (Flores, 2019b, p. 57; see also Jaspers, 2018). The questions, however, remain: how can translanguaging be made a part of the macropolitics of resisting unjust sociopolitical structures? And, what can English language teachers and language scholars do to form organic links between classroom translanguaging and the movements for social and linguistic justice? While at the moment I am unable to offer any ready answers, I am optimistic that future scholarship in Pakistan will address these questions in the interests of social justice.

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