Chapter 7

Translanguaging Practices in a Hungarian–English Early Childhood Classroom

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ABSTRACT

After a brief overview of translanguaging research carried out in the past, this chapter introduces how Hungarian-English emergent bilingual children used translanguaging practices during play time in a Hungarian-English early childhood education classroom in the AraNY János Hungarian School in New York City (USA). The authors developed the concept of student-led translanguaging and observed it separately from teacher-led translanguaging practices. This chapter presents the data collected through classroom observations over a period of 6 months. The overarching aim of this research is to reveal how translanguaging is used by the students and by the teachers in a superdiverse community of Hungarian descendants living around New York City.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and intensive migration, the number of emerging bilinguals is rapidly increasing. Researchers in multilingualism have now been drawn to focus more closely on the phenomena of code-switching and translanguage. The recent analysis of scholarly papers on the topic under discussion (Csillik & Golubeva, 2017) showed that research in this area has mostly been dedicated to studying the social and psycholinguistic aspects of code-switching, as opposed to Foreign and Second Language Education. This shows a need for more research on multilingual classroom settings.

This chapter discusses the translanguaging practices of an early childhood classroom with bilingual Hungarian-English students from AraNY János Hungarian School in New York City (USA). The empirical study was conducted in the educational center. The main purpose is to help first, second, or third
generation Hungarian immigrants (and their descendants) preserve their heritage language and culture. Typically, the English language proficiency of these children is native-like, and they enroll in the center to develop and improve their knowledge of Hungarian.

The authors study the phenomenon of translanguaging and attempt to identify the repertoire of relevant linguistic practices in an early childhood multilingual classroom, with a special focus on teaching children by involving them in the process of meaningful play, guided by Hungarian-English bilingual teachers.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The choice of language to be used by bilingual and multilingual people depends on multiple factors (Reyes, 2004, for example the social context of communication, the theme, or the interlocutors. In multilingual classrooms, typically more languages are used, native languages and a target one. This phenomenon was not really welcomed in a traditional classroom, and there was a common (false) belief that such code-switching was due to an insufficient knowledge of the target language (Reyes, 2004). Fortunately, the academia and the wider public now admit that language choice depends on a given communicative context. For example, according to Zentella (1997), multilingual people in certain situations choose the language in which they can convey the meaning in the most accurate way. Or, according to Kransch & Whiteside (2007), a different language can be used to establish multicultural identities among multilingual speakers. In addition to the above-mentioned cases, it was observed that code-switching has positive effects on language curricula (Zentella, 1997).

Thus, nowadays it is becoming accepted to occasionally employ code-switching in multilingual language classroom, but when it is referred to as a pedagogical practice it is usually called translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Translanguaging not only serves to understand the meaning, but – as emphasized by García (2009) – it frees multilingual speakers from undergoing language separation or coping with sociolinguistic matters, such as language power and identity.

However, in practice, translanguaging is applied limitedly. According to Canagarajah (2011) and Hornberger & Link (2012), a concrete set of teaching strategies is still missing. Therefore, it seems to be both an exciting and challenging task to identify effective translanguaging practices in early childhood multilingual classrooms.

MAIN FOCUS

This chapter aims to explore more profoundly the practices of translanguaging in an early childhood classroom through the process of free-play. The authors report on the case of heritage language-and-culture learning/teaching in AraNY János Hungarian School in New York City (USA).

Issues, Controversies, Problems

Traditional early childhood educational programs in the USA are based on the Piagetian theory that play provides an ideal environment in which a child can learn, grow, and develop to his or her fullest potential (Piaget, 1962). The importance of play and its long-term benefits on child development is constantly in the focus of recent researchers such as Stuart Brown and Vivian Gussin Paley. Gussin Paley (2008)
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