

# BREAKING THE MONOLINGUAL CHAINS: TRANSLANGUAGING FOR ACADEMIC-LITERACY ACCESS AND SUCCESS

<sup>1</sup>Simba Yafele,<sup>2</sup> Hlavisio Motlhaka (Corresponding author)

<sup>1</sup>University of Johannesburg, School of Languages, Cultural Studies and Applied Linguistics (LanCSAL)  
syafele@uj.ac.za

<sup>2</sup>University of Limpopo, School of Education, Department of Language Education  
hlavisio.motlhaka@ul.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

We question the validity of using one language for learning and teaching in our contemporary literacy and other classrooms. We argue in favour of linguistic and cultural diversity as a precondition for academic reading-literacy accomplishment in particular, and education in general. We lament that despite its harmful effects on educational achievement for multilinguals, monolingual bias is still among us and remains the biggest threat for identity assertion and epistemic access for mainstream multilingual students. The need to break the monolingual chains that shackle literacy and other pedagogy in the 21st C has never been more urgent. The paper reports on an academic reading intervention which draws from socio-cultural and translanguaging fluidity theories; it argues that students' own linguistic and cultural discursive resources can be valuable tools in academic reading pedagogy and concept up-take. Using the reading-development study as a proxy, we query the legitimacy of utilizing mono-language and or mono-culture for learning and teaching in our present-day reading classroom or tutorial room. Data was collected using qualitative methods. The results of this study support the premise that deep understanding ensues when students are actively involved in translanguaged academic reading. The study also found that cross-linguistic enquiry and procedures in academic reading and content uptake are beneficial. Moreover, pedagogy needs to be transformed translingually to democratise classrooms for academic access and success.

**Keywords:** Reading literacy, translanguaging, socio-cultural, cultural discursive resources, mono-language

## Introduction

The 21st Century has been characterised by significant evolution of views on language fluidity as reflected in the concept of the sociolinguistics of mobility (e.g. Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020; Bloemmer, 2012, 2013, 2017), which shows how languages are always in motion and mutate as they interface and embed into each other. Sociolinguistics of mobility implies movement, multiplicity and diversity of linguistic and other semiotic resources (Blackledge and Creese, 2017). Fluid multilingualism has thus become a norm for the new world order and mobility has become a constant feature in what is referred to by Blackledge and Creese (2017) as super-diversity and extreme linguistic diversification. A large body of studies (e.g., Garcia & Li Wei, 2014; Pennycook, 2018; Li Wei, 2018; Massimiliano & Blommaert, 2017) recognize the value of fluid notions of language. Resultantly, whilst maintaining monolingual biases, many universities and other institutions of education have become centres of linguistic and cultural hybridity that is largely related to people mobility that has increased exponentially since the beginning of this century. Naturally, the recent language in education research has begun to interrogate the validity of using one language for learning and teaching in our contemporary multilingual classrooms in favour of linguistic and cultural diversity as a precondition for educational success. It is striking that multilingual speakers of African languages are, contrary to the global trends mentioned, still marginalized by monolingual policies and practices that still view languages as differentiated and capable of being placed in boxes (Makalela, 2015). Despite cited changes about language fluidity, educational institutions largely remain settings and places for monolingual and epistemological bias. This monolingualism in educational spaces is at the centre of a myriad of problems in pedagogical contexts that are multilingual. Monolingual practice and policy have often resulted in the exclusion (overt or otherwise) of students of other languages in educational practice and classrooms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Given the above, multilingual education settings need to, as attempted in the reported study, get transformed translingually.

## Monolingualism

Monolingualism educational practice hardly accepts, if ever, the other languages, let alone the cultures that learners bring with them to the teaching and learning spaces. Monolingual mindsets and practices can be traced back to the European enlightenment period and were used as a separation strategy by dominant groups to control and form nation-states (Ricento, 2000 in Makalela, 2014) in the pursuit of and as a result of empire and state-building, during colonialism and apartheid, for example, a linguistic ideology favouring and promoting the coloniser's languages and culture to the exclusion of all other remorselessly alienated indigenous African languages and their speakers. The vestiges of monolingual ideologies present in many institutional practices are not accidental but are products of history. They originate in part from Eurocentric invented concepts of "One Nation- One Language" slogan in the 1920s as peddled by colonial champions. This notion has, unfortunately,

over time, cascaded down to language policies, practices and notions that erroneously uphold 'One Classroom – One Language'; 'One university- One language' mottos. Languages are considered as separate and enclosed entities to avoid blemishing of one language by the other (Garcia, 2009; Makalela, 2013; Shohamy, 2006). The resulting linguistic patrolling or controlling strategy has followed divisive ideology for too long now. In many instances of African colonialism, English became the medium of education. This monolingual bias is responsible for disadvantaging a large section of African students who undertake their education in an "imposed" minority language that is not even their first and majority language(s). This scenario becomes a social justice issue since students are impacted negatively by discrimination, chained and shackled by monolingual biases in education.

#### **The monolingual chains of violence and violations**

Monolingualism is increasingly earning a reputation as an ideological paradigm of many acts of *violence and violations* (Watson & Shapiro, 2018; Makalela, 2015; Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2018). First, it strips children/learners of their home and community languages inclusive of the cultural vestiges that they employ every day for discussion and communicative purposes. Second, children/learners get methodically disrobed and deprived of their integrity, independence, freedom, and voice. Third, monolingual biases in education deny students the ability to participate in classrooms. Their voices get silenced, and they are unable to enter into dialogue to reflect on their daily realities and lived experiences and to enhance academic performance and achievement. They additionally get stigmatized and are seen as inadequate with poor command of English, which in turn expectably triggers intense esteem-destroying feelings of fear, humiliation, and subjugation. Language becomes a location of tensions, discomforts, struggle, and a symbol of colonialism that promotes language domination and silences the voices of children, learners, scholars, and 'others.' Monolingualism continually marginalizes and recolonizes, non-standard English speakers, marking their languages as deficient, their differences as error and incompetence (Lu & Horner, 2016; Richardson, 2010). Within monolingual contexts, language then continues to be a vehicle towards promoting a culture of silence (Makalela, 2015; McLaren, 1999). This silencing of voices has a direct effect on students' ability to get to knowledge, achieve better academic performance, and access meaning-making in academic contexts and for academic purposes.

#### **Harmful Monolingualism**

Monolingualism then, in all of its complex manifestations and iterations, is harmful to our students, harmful to faculty, and serves questionable and nefarious projects. Speakers of other languages, other than the dominant mono language, get marked as lesser citizens, less literate, less legitimate, less intelligent, less authentic, less competent, and less qualified. In other words, less human. It is therefore reasonable from a justice position to mitigate actively against the harms of monoglossic orientations and practices, "... we need to realize that Monolingualism does not improve but rather debilitates language and deprives humans of the resources that enable them to make meanings flexibly in response to ever-changing conditions" (Cooper, 2010:238). Denying multilingual students opportunities to express their identities in their pedagogy becomes a social justice issue. Keeping languages separate at all times in educational contexts where multilingualism thrives, creates an unjust linguistic hierarchy. However, by making use of flexible language practices, translanguaging unfastens and frees ways of speaking that are often very much regulated, monitored, and silenced. When new voices get let go, histories of subjugation get brought forth, building a future of equity, social justice and academic success.

#### **Translanguaging and its promises**

New approaches for multilingual pedagogy have begun to recognize the simultaneous use of more than one, two, or even three languages in classrooms for either language or content subject teaching and learning by way of translanguaging. The academic reading development project described in this paper is proxy to such methodologies. Translanguaging is understood as a pedagogical strategy for using more than one language for meaning-making purposes (Li Wei, 2018; Garcia, 2009; Makalela, 2015). In translanguaging, "...the meaning of the message is not clear without both(ALL) languages" (Creese & Blackledge, 2010:108). It purposefully interchanges and swaps the language of output and input in the course of a lesson, thus permitting students to reflect and articulate their ideas in any language at their disposal that they are comfortable. Students can get input in one language and offer an output in another one (García & Kley, 2016:11). Garcia has widened the notional concept to include multiple discursive language practices a multilingual person engages in at school, at home, the street, and yonder to formulate and express thoughts to make intelligence of the world (Garcia, 2009). Translanguaging teaching and learning methods can empower learners who are emasculated by English monolingualism. Both local research (e.g., Makalela, 2016; Hungwe-Mbirimbi, 2016, 2018; Ngcobo, Ndaba, Nyangiwe, Mpungose & Jamal, 2016) and international research (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Hornberger, 2009; Baker, 2011) demonstrate how students respond positively to these pedagogies by highlighting pedagogic advantages they bring, despite the inflexible, sectarian and divisive language ideologies that inform school management.

### **Translanguaged education for young and old multilinguals**

Research demonstrates that improved and heightened metacognitive and cognitive proficiencies get accomplished when translanguaging techniques are applied in a multilingual classroom (Garcia et al., 2017). Translanguaging as pedagogy means that the facilitator is aware that the linguistic and cultural communicative repertoires of the students go beyond that of the language acts and uses in the classroom and that the educational mediator taps into those repertoires flexibly and actively to educate. All forms of education that have bilingual and multilingual students ought to incorporate translanguaging. How it gets done, however, differs according to the type of the program on whether it is primary or higher education or younger or more mature students involved. An example is Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development which deals with basic or primary education. This theory could be used to scaffold young learners from "where they are" cognitively to "where we want them to be." Here, learning gets achieved through the support that young learners receive from their peers if they work using translanguaging exploratory talk in pairs, groups, or as a class. For adult learners, translanguaging dialogic instructional practices can get modelled around Mikhail Bakhtin's (1994) dialogic pedagogy and concept of multiple voices. Such a pedagogy grounded in dialogue and attending to the nuances of language can help mediators draw upon students' interests and experiences as well as linguistic and cultural repertoires to engage them in learning that fosters the critical thinking skills students need to be successful.

### **Background of the translanguaging reading- development study**

The case-study reported herein involves a first-year university class setting. It was initially undertaken as a result of the grave concern to many in South Africa, about the low reading achievement among not only primary-school learners but also tertiary students, as indicated in several local and international assessments in recent years. Concerns also had a basis on the fact that students' academic success at Higher Education is dependent on the successful reading, decoding, and processing of educational documents (Giridharan, 2012). It is alongside this backdrop that this study sought to undertake an empirical research study around the reading problems at advanced levels in South Africa and to feed into the body of translanguaging knowledge and scholarship that exists thus far, to push it further. This study experimented with translanguaging to find out how it leverages the fluid languaging of students in ways that deepen their understanding of content and texts in the reading classroom.

### **Theoretical framework**

Drawing from theoretical ideas of Bakhtin and Vygotsky's sociocultural framework, this study aimed to establish the effectiveness of translanguaging as a resource in helping multilingual students to make meaning and shape their experiences to gain understanding and knowledge on the comprehension texts through translanguaging collaborative reading. This socio-cultural dialogic theoretical approach promoted translanguaging collaborative learning among students in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and within dialogic pedagogy, which recognizes the multiple voices of classroom actors as conceptualised by Bakhtin (Motlhaka & Makalela, 2016; Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Helm & Dabre, 2018). The theories within which the study is framed facilitated language awareness and the use of scaffolding for meaningful negotiation as well as the construction of desired voice in reading comprehension text.

### **Aim of the study**

This study aimed to establish the effectiveness of translanguaging as a resource in helping multilingual students to comprehend academic texts. The following questions underpin the study:

- Are there any academic gains in academic comprehension reading proficiency stemming from the use of translanguaging strategies or interventions?
- What are the effects of translanguaging techniques on reading comprehension in a university setting?

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative approach that incorporated interviews and observation data was used in investigating the efficacy of translanguaging as a comprehension reading strategy in higher education. Participants in the study consisted of a group of 25 first-year university students with ages ranging between 18-30 years who are enrolled for a PR Communication module as part of a Higher National Diploma qualification in Strategic Communication. The students are mother-tongue speakers of Sesotho, Setswana, isiNdebele, isiZulu, siSwati and isiXhosa language varieties. They had some degree of proficiency in at least three official South African languages. Sampling was intended to develop relevant data to support and evaluate the efficacy of the intervention.

### **Academic reading intervention and strategies**

The study was conducted in a 10-week academic reading course. The intervention was geared towards the development of both receptive and production skills in the cross-linguistic inquiry, engagement and comprehension of domain-specific texts. Translanguaging approaches were utilized during the intervention to provide students with the opportunity to test text comprehension through input-output alternation. A structured teaching program (model) for imparting translanguaging techniques on various aspects of academic reading was developed. The model emphasized the flexible use of English and students' different home languages in all their varieties. The principle of language alternation was cultivated and used in the reading class, with activities structured in ways that enabled the simultaneous use of more than language. The reading-model

characteristically tapped into the epistemic advantages of translanguaging pedagogy using plural language practices and strategies in comprehension reading development for the undergraduate students in a multilingual context.

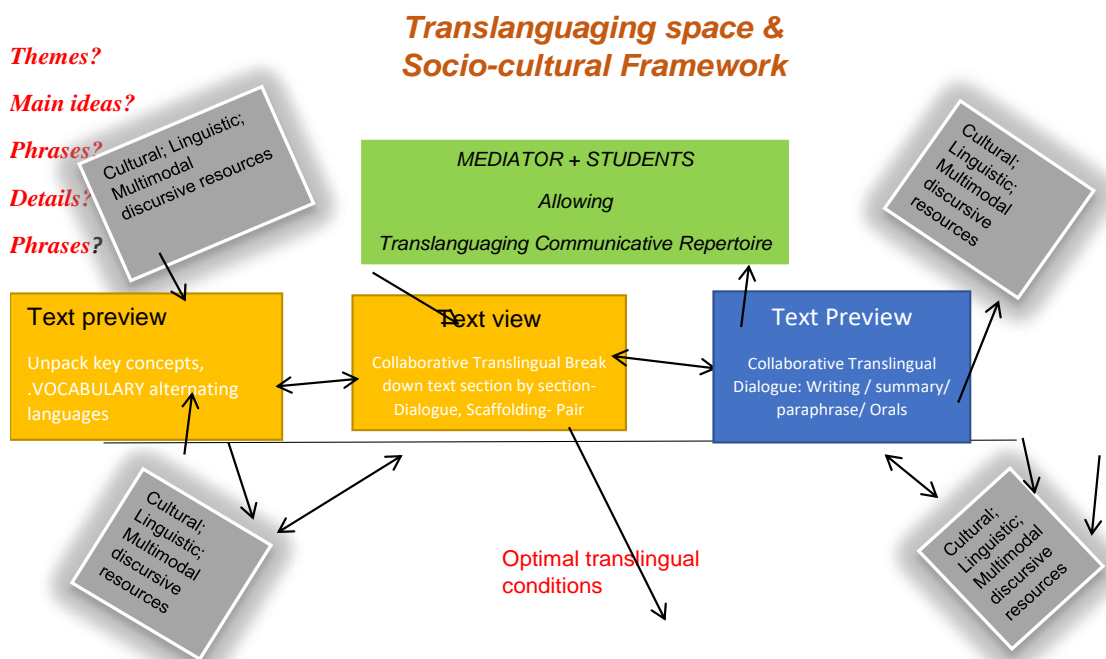
**Translanguaging academic-reading model**

The developed reading model was flexibly adapted to suit different multilingual reading literacy classroom scenarios or contexts. It worked by any reading instructor but may work better if the facilitator shares languages with the learner for more fluid communication and dialogue during language interface. Throughout reading activities, students are given space to translanguaging, to be themselves, and to use languages and discursive resources that they are comfortable with and bring to class. The table below clarifies the adaptable academic reading model developed and utilized in the study.

<b>The pre-implementation phase of Model</b>	
Mediator Plans- prepare clear and concise translingual instructional strategies ready beforehand. Have an emphasis on Agenda: goals, plans, and knowledge to use formative and summative assessments to monitor student learning.	
Select course readings guided by the appropriate reading levels, course, and discipline-related content.	
A standard academic article can be covered easily in a week, over three periods of 3 hours each.	
Mediator Plans- prepare clear and concise translingual instructional strategies ready beforehand. Have emphasis Agenda: goals, plans, and knowledge to use formative and summative assessments to monitor student learning.	
<b>Activities and Roles</b>	
<b>Mediator, Intermediary, facilitator</b>	<b>Academic reader</b>
Facilitates the reading pedagogy. Nudges. Mediates; Aims for students centered class. Plans and uses - Explicit translanguaging teaching strategies	Collaborate in reading tasks and challenges. Talk, talk, talk about the text using their languages or comfortable languages at their disposal. Use own linguistic, cultural and discursive communicative resources, e.g., proverbs from their communities to explain the content in a discussion
The mediator models and exemplifies translanguaging reading strategies through action and allows the student to discover answers for themselves. Engages own multiple linguistic repertoires with the students (if conditions permit). Introduces the concept of reading a text in one language and answer questions in another.	Keep multilingual vocabulary lists. Think- pair- share reading activities The vocabulary inquiry across multiple voices and languages Make predictions and inferences from scanning headings and subheadings about the text that they read in their languages.
Use formulated linguistically pluralistic instructional strategies that embody focused goals, plans, and monitoring feedback	flexible use of English and different home languages in all their varieties Criss-cross between languages, to extend meanings beyond the English language used in the text. Use both English and home language.

<p>The mediator Identifies main content points and concepts. Point out Main, and new disciplinary ideas in the reading texts to unpack in indigenous (home languages) Provide the connection between the knowledge in languages of students if possible. The mediator guides helping to scaffold on the knowledge and skills they already possess — especially their rhetorical, cultural, and linguistic resources.</p>	<p>Read individually and Epiece- meal – a few paragraphs at a time (one or two).</p>
<p>Sets up literature circles: Literature Circles have guidelines of learning tasks, assign sections, and other reading activities, but run by students. The students assigned reading material on course readings, and groups formed based on multiple languages and cultures they share. Homogenous bilinguals work together.Prompt students to discuss challenging or new content through think- pair- share activities</p>	<p>Try to process and interrogate the information using the languages. provide evidence-based on reasoning</p>
<p>Evaluations and monitoring &amp; Sum up: Reinforce. Mani concepts. USE LOCAL languages as far as possible.</p>	<p>After reading – ask each other questions concerning what they have just read</p>
<p>Meet regularly on a scheduled basis to discuss in multiple languages and voices, the readings, given, and own topics addressed come from the students.</p>	
<p><b>Implementation Phase of Model</b></p>	
<p>Divide reading tasks and text according to review, view, preview categories</p>	
<p>Prepare for and do group and pair reading functions that make use of multiple languages</p>	
<p>Focus on themes, main ideas, details, phrases, and words in translanguaged engagement with and discussion of the text — concept literacy development. Main and new disciplinary concepts in the selected comprehension reading texts unpacked in indigenous (home languages).</p>	
<p>Use constrictive elaboration, which allows students to criss-cross between languages, to extend meanings beyond the language input, and to enhance deeper understanding through translanguing talk. Have a whole class or small group sharing of meaning-making using multiple languages and other discursive repertoires. Meaning-making changes as students share and interact with each other, the teacher, and the text. Ensure languages all used. Students are comfortable withlinguistic communicative and discursive resources that they have.</p>	
<p>Simultaneous use of more than one, two, or even three languages in the classroom for either language or content subject teaching and learning, including writing, summaries, paraphrasing, and comprehension reading practised. Reviews and paraphrasing activities are done in any language using new vocabulary in context.</p>	
<p>Translingual dialogues &amp; conversations about academic texts and so personal connections made.</p>	
<p>Be creative and ensure optimal translanguaging conditions for the best results.</p>	
<p>When groups finish sections, chapters, or articles assigned, the readers share in their multiple voices and languages with their classmates about their reading, topics, and then new groups are formed based on further reading selections. Homework attempted as modelled increase the independent reading time.</p>	
<p>A monolingual mediator can conduct this translanguaging classes. What is just required is willpower and to implement the model according to the unique needs of participants and the dictates of a socio-cultural translanguaging framework. FLEXIBLE MODEL</p>	

*The Translanguaging Reading Model*



*Translanguaging space and Socio-cultural Framework. Multiple-voices engagement.*

FIG 1: Developed Translanguaging Academic Reading Model for multilingual at first-year tertiary level

**Fluid translanguaging in academic reading**

The academic reading course structure in the study departed from the English only method that gets often used in university classes. The communicative dialogic approach was used within the academic reading module, which included thorough engagement with the academic text content of course readings in all the languages available to students. The readings covered typical topics in a communication course that included communication theory, verbal and non-verbal communication, intercultural communication, barriers, communication, multicultural communication and group dynamics.

**During the lessons**

Text concepts and vocabulary items got compared, contrasted, and discussed using different languages that the students brought to class. The instructor’s teaching approach approximated typical translanguaging practice where isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, isiNdebele, Sepedi and English were encouraged, especially in discussion groups and pairs; even in just thinking about and engaging with text issues to achieve fluidity in communication.

**The Pedagogical Design of the reading literacy intervention**

The reading intervention is based heavily on Freeman and Freeman's (2000;2007) model of reading instruction along the lines of building background with Preview-View-Review. Freeman and Freeman (2007) discuss this strategy, which uses both the new language and students’ home languages to build background and read texts/introduce new topics and vocabulary items. This study underpinned ideas of scholars in the field of reading (King, 2007; Grabe & Stoller, 2019) who emphasize teaching the understanding of the main ideas embedded in the semantics of words rather than focusing on grammar. The ability to extrapolate the key concepts or ideas from the texts and language used in those texts makes-up the meaning-making process, which is the understanding process that is essential when reading (King, 2007). He suggests a strategy used in class where students ask each other thought-provoking questions, which in turn results in cognitive activities that promote deep comprehension (King, 2007: 273). Thus, the strategies promoted discussion of the text through questions from peers during collaboration, using their home languages. Also encouraged was the use of proverbs and storytelling techniques from students' communities and cultures to explain and unpack concepts and translation comparisons.

**Data analysis**

Analysis of the qualitative data, relied on thematic analysis with verbal reports and observation notes to support emerging themes.

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

This study aimed to establish the effectiveness of translanguaging as a resource in helping multilingual students to comprehend academic texts. The following themes emerged during the analysis observation and interviews: cognitive benefits (critical thinking, inquiry, text-engagement and content-digestion), socio-cognitive benefits (brainstorming, summary writing and paraphrasing skills and paraphrasing), cultural repertoires as resources, affective benefits and metacognitive reflections (vocabulary inquiry across multiple voices/languages). Each of the themes is presented and discussed below.

#### **Cognitive benefits**

##### **Critical thinking, inquiry, text-engagement and content-digestion**

The observation data revealed that students crisscrossed, in different ways, between languages in text inquiry and engagement. The cognitive benefits related to enrichment in the sphere of academic content knowledge were observed, wherein students typically engaged the multiple voices of group members in dialogue and conversation on text concepts and vocabulary. Participants shuttled across languages to make intelligence of difficult words in all languages at their disposal. The process of reformulating a text from one language to another fits the description of translation and interpretation (Cervantes-Kelly, 2010:43) demonstrated in the translanguaging classroom. The results of this study highlight the value of utilizing “own languages” in facilitating students’ epistemological access to academic texts wherein participants moved across languages. In this instance, they were able to tap into their existing vocabulary or develop it. This way, students digested the text information as opposed to indigestion (Garcia, 2009). Makalela (2016) calls this dialogic and translanguaging collectivity in discussion a form of ubuntu translanguaging, which represents cultural competencies. The English language of the academic text makes sense in interface with the other words of the students. The participants collectively guided each other via the complex process of creating and communicating meaning with more clarity and text understanding. The use of one language in text meaning-making here is incomplete without the other (Makalela, 2016; Creese & BlacKRRidge, 2010). The students developed their vocabularies in their styles and that of the texts as they read and searched for the meaning of challenging words through consultation with other multilingual classmates. In groups, naturally, students relied on each other’s linguistic capital to tackle new and problematic vocabulary. This cooperation was visibly useful for enriching their understanding of particular concepts in the field of communication. The text got transformed through this kind of translanguaging engagement, and the levels of perception were very profound. The students achieved a deeper meaning of text content and concepts (Baker, 2011:289).

Other multilingual classroom research initiatives resulted in similar findings (Heugh, 2000; Mbekwa & Nomlomo, 2013; Nomlomo, 2007; Webb, 2009). Recent research also validates the cognitive benefits of the multiple language resources in various higher education disciplines such as language, academic literacy, and psychology (Makalela & Motlhaka, 2016; Mkhize et al., 2014; Ngcobo et al., 2016; Paxton & Tyam, 2010). The pedagogical value of translanguaging discussion and meaning-making in vocabulary inquiry is thus widely acknowledged by many scholars in the field of academic literacy. This current study further confirmed it as revealed in the translanguaging dimension to the discussion on academic texts. The most precise messages that came across during the observations is the fact that the students were extremely comfortable with their linguistic identity as multilingual with the linguistic resources they have. Students’ active involvement in different vocabulary development activities across languages enhanced word or vocabulary learning rather than treatment as passive recipients of the information. Translanguaging dialogic reading pedagogy, positioned students as critical thinkers rather than “rememberers” to use the words of Nystrand (1997: 91). Students utilized strategies of dialogic teaching through translanguaging to make meaning as they navigated represented and lived common words in the reading classroom. Infusing translanguaging in the reading program meant that ‘language’ became a tool used to access epistemic learning from texts much more than transactional language for relatively brief encounters. Translanguaging reading activities stimulated students to create a vast range of meanings from written academic texts by exploring, sharing, and enquiring about text content in the languages of their lifeworlds. Students were engaged cognitively in these reading pursuits simultaneously or concurrently developing intellectual reading skills by using all their linguistic and cultural communicative resources to explain difficult words and vocabulary, and they were not limited to only their English knowledge.

The study further found that translanguaging through collaborative learning enhanced students’ comprehension of texts when using their languages to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words. Respondents said the following in their own words to justify the importance of using translanguaging through collaborative learning to enhance their comprehension of texts when using their languages to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words:

*Excerpt 1*

*Oh yes! I think I had a problem with the word prejudice. I was like, 'aah. What is this word about?' I asked Betty, and; She said it is judging. Yes. Moreover, in Zulu, it means, "ukuthathela or ukubukela Bantu pansi." Is like looking down on other people or just having a bias in a negative way against other people, especially those who do not belong to one's in-group (Interview evidence – a snippet)*

*Excerpt 2*

*I remember I was explaining what ethnocentrism is, and I was using my language. I was trying to understand the text more. So, for me to do that, it was easy because I used my language first, and then I remember after explaining it to myself in Zulu and to other members, I explained again in English to Xoli who is more fluent in isiXhosa, and we decided the meaning together. This is what I tried.*

As clearly shown above, the engagement of cross-linguistic semantic awareness insights helped this student to see new connections across languages. It helped her figure out new vocabulary encountered. This engagement with academic text allowed for fluid and representatively accurate cross-linguistic translation. Seeing the English word "prejudice" next to the isiZulu in "ukuthathela or ukubukela Bantu pansi." extended respondents' vocabulary as and when confronted with such academic English words. Students report using all their discursive-linguistic resources to explain difficult words and vocabulary and that they were not limited to only their English knowledge. The students also used contrastive elaboration. Using all the languages available to them, they contrasted their definitions of problematic academic discourse terms, vocabulary, and concepts in their discussion and dialogue at individual, pair, and group levels.

Students report using all their communicative-linguistic resources to explain difficult words and vocabulary and that they were not limited to only their English knowledge. Students talk about how they carried out vocabulary inquiry and translations alternating languages in groups, naturally, students relied on each other's linguistic capital to tackle new and problematic vocabulary. The vocabulary inquiry across multiple voices and languages thus took the form of a peer inquiry and discussion. The main finding is that using translanguaging techniques in an academic reading class, where reception of text content in one language is purposefully used side by side to the text content production, is an effective way to teach and learn academic reading in multilingual contexts. The study has shown that the student-participants preferred the translanguaging approach, which gives room to increased semantic awareness of scholarly text language and academic reading success.

The findings are supported by several researchers who found that translanguaging through collaborative learning engages students in requesting, clarifying, and negotiating conversation drawing from their cultural and language background to ensure that their peers listen and can comprehend text ideas (Hungwe-Mbirimbi, 2018; Mgijima & Makalela, 2016; Makalela, 2015). Through a process of reading from the relevant sections in the text and simultaneously engaging with the text in other languages, they know, like Tswana, Zulu, and the idiomatic expressions and at times proverbs in those languages, students were able in their multiple voices to engage profoundly and understanding with the text. Idea articulations and communication was fluid and versatile. Therefore, the use of students' linguistic communicative repertoires in translanguaging group discussions on texts, can encourage cognitive and active engagement in learning to make meaning and understand concepts from academic books (Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2016; Alamillo, Yun & Bennett, 2017; Mendoza & Parba, 2019). Thus, translanguaging serves as a form of epistemic democratization, which facilitates thinking between two, three, or more languages - taking linguistic fluidity as the norm and building reading pedagogy from students' language practices and accessing additional language and communicative resources supported or deepened participants' extrapolation of text meaning and the learning of text concepts in Communication 1.

**Socio-cognitive benefits****Generating and developing ideas**

On numerous occasions, the reading intervention participants had a group discussion to produce ideas around the text information. During text previews, viewing and reviews, students working in groups brainstormed across languages about their readings. Translanguaging facilitated the process of freethinking and generating ideas about texts across languages. In the text previewing and viewing, brainstorming through translanguaging contributed to the increase in students' motivation, confidence, and participation as reflected by the positive students' behaviour (freely engaging in discussion, independently making text annotations and mind maps in any language). This finding agrees with studies by Makalela (2016), Carroll and Morales (2016), and Motlhaka and Makalela (2016) which found that traversing between languages available to students, generated fresh ideas about the text in many ways during text preview and view stages. Observation from this study shows students jotting down notes and making mind maps in all languages available to them. The use of varied languages by the students provoked further text discussion and ideas. By using their own linguistic and communicative repertoires, students did things differently by using their languages and hence provoked thought processes on



the text. Extensive use of their words is likely to have ignited fresh ways to examine academic texts. Respondents said the following in their own words to justify the importance of using their own linguistic and communicative repertoires from their home languages to generate and develop ideas about the text:

*Excerpt 3*

*This approach that we learned, allows us to break down and simplify using our languages and to bring down the concept or idea of academic words' meanings, and therefore allows us to explain clearly, much more clearly what the word is when someone asks us. You can even put it in your own language.*

*Excerpt 4*

*Actually, I think this intervention is assisting us to understand the words. Because even though we have been learning and were being taught in English since grade 1, but we have not been excelling in our interpretation of academic words and texts.*

*Extract 5*

*There are English words, like stereotypes and ethnocentrism. These words! These big English words that we have been coming across. However, you find that in your language, there is not a direct equivalent word to describe this, but when you like to translate it, you make it easier. For that word in your language, you can form a sentence or a paragraph to make it easier for you to understand.*

These excerpts show that respondents acknowledge the importance of using their home language repertoires which helped them to brainstorm and understand the meaning of new and difficult words and complex syntactic rules as well as gave cognitive support that allowed them to work at a higher cognitive level than they would be if they were restricted to English only. Text learning got achieved through the support that the academic readers received from their peers when they work using translanguaged exploratory talk in pairs or groups. The students employed the meaning of the English words used in the academic texts and extending it to home languages through their metalinguistic knowledge and translanguaging. Using translanguaging, forced students to think and compose. There is evidence of thinking and producing due to translanguaging in the observation data. The participants were able to get involved and engage in versioning the text from the English to their African home language.

### **Summary writing**

Students read the text and summarised it in home languages, which allowed them to work at a higher cognitive level. Students worked collaboratively. They guided each other in the ZPD and used their everyday natural languages. In the summarising episodes captured in the observation data, there was text ownership and pride evident. No one got left behind in understanding text meaning. There was accommodation for all students' ideas. Vygotsky's ZPD, where group members use mediational means collaboratively to create, get, and transmit meaning with a multitude of resources and all their language systems where scaffolding is central to learning as a socially constructed process (Motlhaka & Makalela, 2016) underpins the collaborative summary writing. Students used both their home languages and English for an in-depth understanding of the text. Students typically articulated and wrote ideas from a text in their first language to make meaning and gain understanding and knowledge of the text as cognitive support that allows them to work at a higher cognitive level than they would be if they were restricted using English only (Hungwe-Mbirimi, 2018). Working in this manner, students got empowered with an understanding of complicated, new, or unknown phrases and words by using their linguistic resources from all language resources to enhance their knowledge of the target language. Moreover, to formulate ideas and create text content (Motlhaka & Makalela, 2016). The fieldnotes from a tutorial observation data below are revealing:

*Extract 6*

*It's like we are summarizing... Understand this (pointing to the passage and translate it into your own language and understanding. The two Zulu speaking students continue with their collaborative task on summary writing, with one of the students scribing their output in Zulu. They are observed discussing in Zulu and reaching consensus on keywords in the text. Umuntu angakhona ukukhuluma nomunye umuntu nona bengaphumi esixukwini sense umzekeleliso. "You can communicate with another person even though you are not from the same language group for example." 0947-1012.*

### **Cultural repertoires as resources**

Students came to the reading classroom with multiple voices picked up from and shaped by their culture and communities, and they made use of cultural repertoires to access the epistemological content of the texts. They

incorporated proverbs from the cultures and societies in text interpretation and output. During a typical tutorial on *ethnocentrism and stereotyping*, for example, the discussion of text concepts using multiple languages was deep, wide-ranging, and personal. We have, for example, the observation data illustrating the use of the proverb from students' own cultures and society in text analysis and reading. One participant proposes that an apt Shona proverb that captures the concept of ethnocentrism fully is "*Chawawana idya nehama, mutorwa anehanganwa* (Literal translation being -*Whatever food you get, eat with family (blood) because those not of your blood have a weak memory. They forget generosity easily*)"

This proverb, which has Zulu, Tswana, and even Shona versions, is used to show the mistrust of foreigners. Students in the examples given above also used their languages with a mixture of English. Discussion flowed because languages got mixed, and students made choices about which language or lexicon item to use, when, and why. They made free, linguistically natural choices when they choose the language (proverbs or idiomatic expression) most comfortable, practical, and communicative for them (according to the text context and tutorial group context). In the same tutorial session and group, one student reconfigures the concept of ethnocentrism from a Tswana perspective. In her culture, people who are not proud of their ethnic group and adopt the ways of others are "*looked down upon*" and referred to as "*Magalagadi*". She explains how this term re-expresses ethnocentrism as represented in the text. Another student suggests "*lauzale lekona*" as a Zulu equivalent of in-group. Students move between English and their language mixtures when discussing and viewing a text among themselves. A different student suggests '*mogaetsu*,' which in Setswana means "*one of my blood*," as she thoroughly explains. "*Mtase*" and "*Mkaya*" are further examples suggested by other students as Zulu equivalents. These modes and undercurrents of dialogue contributed to interest and perception (students reacting to and carrying onward the conceptions of the academic texts) and scaffolding. Yet again a Zulu student proposes the following Zulu proverbs as appropriate in understanding the text concept of ethnocentrism.

#### **Andi:**

*There is another Zulu proverb that goes, "Hamba Juba bayacuthapha mbili." Literary translated it is warning a dove, saying, "Go dove, but they will pluck your feathers off wherever you go."*

Explaining how these proverbs assisted with accessing the concepts Andi later explains elaborately in an interview:

*Using proverbs and idioms to and linking or associating these with ideas and concepts from the text helped because it gave us a clear picture of what ethnocentrism is. Take, for example, the proverb of the dove, which leaves the family nest and flies away to an unknown territory. It is warned before it leaves not to cry or distress if the strangers in the foreign territories pluck out its feathers. We could relate this proverb to the concept of ethnocentrism and mistrust of strangers and foreigners or people of different ethnicities. It provided us with a clear picture of what ethnocentrism is and how we should understand it.*

Such talk as exemplified above-facilitated language awareness and the use of scaffolding for meaningful negotiation and construction of desired voice in reading comprehension text. The translingual talk seemingly led to the successful transfer of text content and ingestion of novel reading learning and scholarship from the texts to prevailing knowledge-information and grasp. The lecturer sums up the power of cultural communicative tools like proverbs when used translingually for text-concept access and uptake.

#### **Affective benefits**

The results of this study indicate that translanguaging enables an exchange of diverse opinions due to the low-anxiety situation, which allows for the negotiation of meanings from different perspectives through discussing, questioning, and organizing processes that facilitated students' comprehension and internalizing of critical concepts. Observation data in the form of kinesics; body motion, including gestures, movements of the body, facial expressions, e.g., smiling, frowning, gestures, and posture shows students visibly having fun with words. Alternatively, even silence was revealing in the observations. The data indicate that students had much fun turning academic jargon into pure speech in their multiple linguistic resources. Their joy was written all over their faces as implied in the field notes of the following extract wherein students are viewing and reading the text, working out meanings of academic terms in the text.

*"Text view: The students are happy with the text interpretations of the definitions and meanings of ethnocentrism and stereotyping, and they laugh and smile, celebrating their understanding of the concepts in their own Zulu and other languages. Lots of laughter."...*

*"Discussion is lively and the students look studious, engaged with the tasks and discussions. They appear invested in the tasks"*

Translanguaging in reading activities enabled the exchange of diverse opinions, as well as multiple voices and engagement with academic texts and minimized anxiety. Students exchanged different views due to low tension and anxiety as recorded in the field notes. Allowing students to use their languages naturally and expressing themselves in words most comfortable and workable for them lowered stress. Each group member participated actively. Active participation improved the didactic quality of the talk.

## CONCLUSION

This study challenged monolingual biases and practices while exploring the effectiveness of translanguaging as resource providing epistemic access to and leveraging multilingual students in meaning-making in using their linguistic experiences and repertoire to gain understanding and knowledge on academic texts. The main finding is that using translanguaging techniques in text content reception and production is effective for developing academic reading literacy among multilinguals. Student participants preferred and benefitted from the translanguaging approach because it increased semantic awareness of scholarly text language, understanding and academic reading success.

Secondly, the results of the study revealed that there was beneficial, fluid discussion in the groups of academic readers who used various linguistic and cultural discursive repertoires. Translanguaging was a glue which kept students together and can be used interactively with cognitive gains. The students intellectualized their languages and took control. Pedagogy ought to reflect fluidity in languages and identity dimensions of students. There is need to dislodge the hegemony of monolingual languages and consider the bi/multilingualism of our students as a resources for academic-literacy teaching and learning. Where the willpower exists, the optimum utilisation of translanguaging strategies by all educators in all fields within multilingual teaching contexts similar to the research site has massive benefits. The use might differ as strategies get adapted to the types of students one teaches and their strengths. We must consider the bi/multilingualism of students as a resource for teaching and learning. Translanguaging is epistemic democratization which builds pedagogy from students' natural communicative practices.

## References

- Alamillo, L., Yun, C., & Bennett, L. H. (2017). Translanguaging in a Reggio-inspired Spanish dual-language immersion programme. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3-4), 469-486.
- Baker, C. (2011). Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. Bilingual Education & Bilingualism. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1994). The Bakhtin reader: selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov.
- Bikowski, D., & Vithanage, R. (2016). Effects of web-based collaborative writing on individual L2 writing development. *Language Learning & Technology*, 20(1), 79-99.
- Carroll, K. S., & Sambolín Morales, A. N. (2016). Using university students' L1 as a resource: Translanguaging in a Puerto Rican ESL classroom. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 39(3-4), 248-262.
- Cervantes-Kelly, M. D. (2010). Translation and interpretation as a means to improve bilingual high school students' English and Spanish academic language proficiency.
- Cooper, M. (2010). Sustainable writing. *Horner, Lu, and Matsuda*, 236-243.
- Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal*, 94(1), 103-115.
- Cummins, J. (1979). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of educational research*, 49(2), 222-251.
- Curriu, S., & Pretorius, E. J. (2010). The culture of the sharp pencil: Can a literacy intervention lever school change? *Reading & Writing*, 1(1).
- Dehkordi, M. R., & Shafiee, S. (2016). The effect of triple blank filling and summary writing exercises on learning L2 vocabulary meaning, form and use. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 3(5), 69-82.
- Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S. (2000). *Teaching reading in multilingual classrooms*: ERIC.
- Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S. (2007). *English language learners: The essential guide*: Scholastic New York, NY.
- García, O. (2009). Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. *Social justice through multilingual education*, 140-158.
- García, O. (2009). Emergent Bilinguals and TESOL: What's in a Name? *Tesol Quarterly*, 43(2), 322-326.
- García, O., Johnson, S. I., Seltzer, K., & Valdés, G. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*: Caslon Philadelphia, PA.
- García, O., & Kleyn, T. (2016). Translanguaging theory in education *Translanguaging with Multilingual Students* (pp. 23-47): Routledge.

- Gentil, G. (2011). A biliteracy agenda for genre research. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 20(1), 6-23.
- Giridharan, B. (2012). Identifying Gaps in Academic Writing of ESL Students. *Online Submission*.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2019). *Teaching and researching reading*: Routledge.
- Helm, F., & Dabre, T. (2018). Engineering a 'contact zone' through translanguaging. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18(1), 144-156.
- Heugh, K. (2000). *The case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa* (Vol. 3): PRAESA Cape Town.
- Hornberger, N. H. (2009). Multilingual education policy and practice: Ten certainties (grounded in Indigenous experience). *Language Teaching*, 42(2), 197-211.
- King, A. (2007). Beyond literal comprehension: A strategy to promote deep understanding of text. *Reading comprehension strategies: Theories, interventions, and technologies*, 267-290.
- Lu, M.-Z., & Horner, B. (2016). Introduction: translanguaging work.
- Makalela, L. (2013). Translanguaging in kasi-taal: Rethinking old language boundaries for new language planning. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*, 42, 111-125.
- Makalela, L. (2014). Teaching Indigenous African Languages to Speakers of Other African Languages: The Effects of Translanguaging for Multilingual Development. *Multilingual Universities in South Africa: Reflecting Society in Higher Education*, 97, 88.
- Makalela, L. (2015). Moving out of linguistic boxes: the effects of translanguaging strategies for multilingual classrooms. *Language and Education*, 29(3), 200-217.
- Makalela, L. (2016). Ubuntu translanguaging: An alternative framework for complex multilingual encounters. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 34(3), 187-196.
- Makalela, L., & Mgijima, V. D. (2016). The effects of translanguaging on the bi-literate inferencing strategies of fourth-grade learners. *Perspectives in Education*, 34(3), 86-93.
- Mashiyi, N. (2014). Tertiary educators' reflections on language practices that enhance student learning and promote multilingualism. *Multilingual universities in South Africa: Reflecting society in higher education. United Kingdom, Multilingual Matters*, 145-163.
- Mbirimi-Hungwe, V. (2016). Translanguaging as a strategy for group work: Summary writing as a measure for reading comprehension among university students. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 34(3), 241-249.
- Mbirimi-Hungwe, V., & Hungwe, T. (2018). Translanguaging for epistemic access to Computer Science concepts: A call for change. *Per Linguam: a Journal of Language Learning = Per Linguam: Tydskrif vir Taalaanleer*, 34(2), 97-111.
- McLaren, P. (1999). Research news and comment: A pedagogy of possibility: Reflecting upon Paulo Freire's politics of education: In memory of Paulo Freire. *Educational researcher*, 28(2), 49-56.
- Mendoza, A., & Parba, J. (2019). Thwarted: relinquishing educator beliefs to understand translanguaging from learners' point of view. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 16(3), 270-285.
- Mkhize, N., & Ndimande-Hlongwa, N. (2014). African languages, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), and the transformation of the humanities and social sciences in higher education. *Alternation*, 21(2), 10-37.
- Motlhaka, H. A., & Makalela, L. (2016). Translanguaging in an academic writing class: Implications for a dialogic pedagogy. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 34(3), 251-260.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2017). Why are South African Universities sites of struggle today? : viewed.
- Ngcobo, S., Ndaba, N., Nyangiwe, B., Mpungose, N., & Jamal, R. (2016). Translanguaging as an approach to address language inequality in South African higher education: summary writing skills development. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 4(2), 10-27.
- Nomlomo, V., & Mbekwa, M. (2013). Voices from the classroom: Teacher and learner perceptions on the use of the learners' home language in the teaching and learning of school mathematics and science *Education, dominance and identity* (pp. 133-149): Brill Sense.
- Nomlomo, V. S. (2007). *Science teaching and learning through the medium of English and IsiXhosa: A Comparative study in two primary schools in the Western Cape*. University of the Western Cape.
- Nystrand, M. (1997). Dialogic instruction: When recitation becomes conversation. *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*, 1-29.
- Paxton, M., & Tyam, N. (2010). Xhosalising English? Negotiating meaning and identity in Economics. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 28(3), 247-257.
- Pretorius, E. J., & Currin, S. (2010). Do the rich get richer and the poor poorer?: The effects of an intervention programme on reading in the home and school language in a high poverty multilingual context. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(1), 67-76.
- Richardson, E. (2010). 'English Only,' African American Contributions to Standardized Communication Structures, and the Potential for Social Transformation. *Cross-Language Relations in Composition. Ed. Bruce Horner, Min-Zahn Lu, and Paul K. Matsuda. Carbondale: SIUP*, 97-112.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1994). The transactional theory of reading and writing.

- Shohamy, E. G. (2006). *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches*: Psychology Press.
- Street, B. What's "new" in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current issues in comparative education*, 5(2), 77-91.
- Street, B. (2011). New literacy studies and the continua of biliteracy. *Educational linguistics in practice: Applying the local globally and the global locally*, 59-67.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Readings on the development of children*, 23(3), 34-41.
- Watson, M., & Shapiro, R. (2018). *Clarifying the Multiple Dimensions of Monolingualism: Keeping Our Sights on Language Politics*. Paper presented at the Composition Forum.
- Webb, V. (2009). Multilingualism in South Africa: The challenge to below. *Language Matters*, 40(2), 190-204.