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Translanguaging as a pedagogy: exploring the use of teachers’ and students’ bilingual repertoires in Chinese language education

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Abstract: This research offers a post-structuralist multilingual lens to examine translanguaging practice in Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL) teaching and learning. It investigates a cohort of bilingual Chinese teachers who had been trained in a teacher-researcher education programme in an Australian university. This research asks how the Chinese teachers utilised their own and their students’ bilingual repertoires to assist the learning of Chinese in Australian schools. The participant teachers’ theses were collected, and the evidentiary chapters reporting on their classroom teaching were analysed. Informed by the initial results, a follow-up stimulated recall interview was conducted. This research found that the teachers’ translanguaging practices were identified in the form of theirs and their students’ lingual and non-lingual capitals, and these practices showed a strong pedagogical purpose, particularly in motivating and engaging learners. The teachers’ translanguaging practices contributed to CAL pedagogy across three dimensions: teachers’ classroom instruction, teaching and learning resources, and learning activity design. These practices have demonstrated an impact on the students’ engagement, the enrichment of teaching content and improvement in dynamic teaching processes. This research is expected to provide insights into the future development of translanguaging curriculum and pedagogy in CAL education.

Keywords: lingual and non-lingual capitals; poststructuralist translanguaging; the ‘trans-ing’of resources; the discrete languages; translanguaging pedagogy; translanguaging practice

1 Introduction

Translanguaging practice reflects the everyday reality of bi- or multilingual speakers (Singleton and Flynn 2022; Wang 2019b). In second language (SL) education it

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signifies a contemporary ideology and innovative practice. In contrast, monolingual approaches have been dominating SL particularly ESL teaching for decades with an emphasis on learners’ native like proficiency, consequently oppressing the development of their bilingual capabilities (Akbar and Taqi 2020; García 2009a; García 2009b). Teaching Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL) as a relatively recent curriculum subject offering in Australian schools, has comfortably adopted the monolingual tradition of ESL education, with monolingual approaches being privileged by the majority of CAL practitioners. This mainstream CAL practice has recently been critiqued in response to the development and acceptance of translanguaging practice in SL teaching in general. Wang (2019b: v) criticised the widely accepted monolingual approach as restricting “the possibilities for pedagogical innovation and curriculum development” for multilingual learners. She urged Chinese language teachers and scholars to make “adequate reflections on, or responses to, the critique of monolingual ideologies” (Wang 2020: 4).

Whilst translanguaging practices were sometimes observed in actual Chinese teaching, these remain less aware to most of the CAL teachers, and researchers examined the phenomena lightly in bilingual CAL emersion programs in North America (Sung and Tsai 2019; Yao 2016; Zheng 2021; Zhou 2019; Zhou 2021; Zhou and Li 2015). These studies identified evidence of teachers having drawn upon learners’ and/or teachers’ bilingual resources through translanguaging practices. For example, in Zheng’s (2021) research, the students were found given opportunities to select and organise bilingual resources to showcase their learning; concurrently the teacher strategically used bilingual instructions for “recasting, emphasizing, and summarizing” the content (Zheng 2021: 1329). Similarly, in Zhou’s (2021) study, a teacher’s bilingual approach in math and science classes was examined. This teacher was found purposefully shifting instruction from Chinese (L2) to English (L1) or when predominantly using Chinese translated key points into English to facilitate comprehension and reduce students’ frustration. Sung and Tsai (2019) also investigated an immersion programme and reported that students were encouraged to use Chinese and English to express opinions and communicate with peers resulting in a relaxed classroom atmosphere enhancing students’ motivation for learning. These immersion programs, different from a complete CAL program, focused on students’ biliteracy, dual languages, and/or content and language integrated learning. Translanguaging practices were noted conveniently researched and pertained to delivering instructions and clarifying for understanding and communication.

Two pedagogically informed studies in translanguaging practices have been recently conducted in some Chinese universities by CAL scholars. One research reported Chinese teachers’ embracing bilingualism ideology, and subsequently developing translanguaging strategies from pedagogical perspectives (Wang
2019a). For example, the use of translanguaging during presentations, elaborating new knowledge and scaffolding students’ cognitive learning. Other teachers incorporated translanguaging into operational classroom instructions such as organising activities, providing feedback, and assessing learning. The second research study documented similar results: that teachers implemented translanguaging for explanatory and managerial purposes, including explaining grammatical rules and lexical usage, providing instructions for activities, giving feedback and monitoring learning (Zhang et al. 2020). Such research informs an encouraging step forward towards the development of translanguaging pedagogy and provides insight for the research being undertaken.

In multilingual, multicultural Australia, where the research informing this paper was conducted, incorporating translanguaging into teaching a second language is endorsed through government policies. Whilst educational documents specify support for ‘multilingual use in one space’ there appears to be limited evidence of this approach in practice. For decades Australian Federal Governments have acknowledged bi- or multilingual speakers as a “valuable national resource” (Lo Bianco 1987: 4) and suggested plurilingual capability should be the norm and multilingual education promoted (Kohler 2017). Following the National Policy on Languages (NPL) (Lo Bianco 1987) State Governments have integrated a translanguaging agenda into their local language policies. The Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES), for example, promoted bilingual programmes and methodological training for bilingual pre-service teachers almost a decade ago (BOSTES Board of Studies Teaching & Educational Standards NSW 2013). Echoing translanguaging practice, the Board recently acknowledged “the use of more than one language in a single utterance” as “a common feature of bilingual and multilingual language use” (BOSTES 2016: 40). Likewise, the Victorian Education Department stressed the need for bilingual teachers’ professional learning to be integrated into School curricula (DEECD Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2013), and the Department of Education, Queensland is also “promoting the benefits of bilingual programs” and “piloting in-country [multilingual] immersion opportunities” (State of Queensland Department of Education and Training 2016: n.p.).

These well-intentioned bi- or multilingual agendas are impacting Australian language curricula. Through a review of the NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: Chinese K-10 Syllabus it was found that the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA NSW Education Standards Authority 2017) promoted a pedagogical move from “form-focused language activities and exercises” to an emphasis on providing opportunities “to draw on [learners’] existing language resources” (NESA NSW Education Standards Authority 2017: 28). This document purports translanguaging practice should be promoted and students should be encouraged to “create bilingual texts and resources in the communication and meaning making
process” (NESA NSW Education Standards Authority 2017: 30). The Syllabus positions learners at the pedagogical centre and encourages students to use their multiple languages in their school learning spaces. However, in practice, translanguaging is not widespread in Australian CAL teaching and educators are yet to recognise and enact the central mediating role of translanguaging in teaching an additional language (Scarino 2014: 290). CAL pedagogy in Australian schools has been identified as reflecting pro-cognitive and intercultural understanding, and also demonstrating a weak discourse in recognising bi- or multilingual capabilities “related to ways of learning and knowing” (Kohler 2017: 18). Orton (2016: 369) contends CAL has been underdeveloped in terms of integrating multilingual, multicultural resources and has failed in providing students with Chinese learning as “an intellectually stimulating experience”. This argument is supported by the lack of empirical research reporting on how multilingual resources have been implemented in CAL education. To counter, there is a need for pedagogical development of CAL based on investigations into, and sharing of, best practices across different teaching and learning contexts.

Based on the issues, critiques, and achievements reported above, this research explores teachers’ efforts and agency in designing and planning Chinese language teaching centering the needs of students and at the same time, foregrounding translanguaging practices in CAL classroom spaces. It particularly drills down into how the teachers have drawn upon their own and their students’ accessible linguistic and non-linguistic resources and activated and intertwined these into their teaching practices. The intention is to respond to the current call for more research on identifying patterns, models and structures of translanguaging use (Canagarajah 2011; Lü 2020; Wang 2019a) to inform the development of translanguaging pedagogy. The ensuing section conceptualises ‘translanguaging’ through a post-structuralist lens.

2 A post-structuralist translanguaging framework

From within the field of applied linguistics, translanguaging was originally used to describe a languaging phenomenon in a bilingual classroom – receiving information “through the medium of one language (English)” and using it “through the medium of the other language (Welsh)” (Williams 1994: 64). Thus, ‘translanguaging’ was located ‘between’ the linguistic modes of two languages. In this early phase translanguaging established its legitimacy in the ‘mixing’ of languages in a bilingual space. It has post-structuralist feature as it allows the breaking and crossing of named languages, enabling the learners’ meaning making to involve the “dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages” (Li 2018: 15).
Compared with other linguistic concepts, such as a separatist view of bilingualism and language transfer both of which lack methodology and focus on the speaker’s deficiency, translanguaging remains as a promising concept with a scope that promotes inclusive pedagogy in practice.

A further dimension to the conceptualisation of translanguaging is the inclusion of inter-semiotic modes. Enlightened by the works around multiliteracy, scholars extended the linguistic component of translanguaging to multimodality (Baker 2011; García 2009a; Li 2011). As an aside, multimodality initially referred to monolinguals making meaning through integrating multiple modes (for example, lingual, aural, visual, and gesture) (New London Group 1996). However, as it is argued, “language, or more precisely languaging, is and has always been multimodal” (Li 2018: 22), the potential for translanguaging is that it offers bi- or multilingual learners the opportunity to borrow the established multimodal signs as resources from L1 in L2 learning. This extension from lingual to multimodal empowers the concept of translanguaging with a new capacity in the interpretation of bilinguals’ practice. This capacity could arguably advance translanguaging as a practical theory.

The interpretative strength of translanguaging also lies in the ‘trans-ing’ of resources. That is, the ‘trans-ing’ is beyond the languages themselves by involving bilinguals’ holistic diversity of capital, the capital which has been accumulated through their social, cultural and historical experiences (Anderson and Lightfoot 2018). This focus on bilinguals’ complete repertoire has been commonly acknowledged by translanguaging theorists. For example, Li (2018: 15) indicates translanguaging is a process of “knowledge construction”; bilinguals’ thoughts, personal history and experience, and cognitive capacity (Li 2011) are a central pivot to the ‘trans-ing’ process. Similarly, García asserts that translanguagers “convey not only linguistic knowledge, but also combined cultural knowledge that comes to bear upon language use” (2009a: 47). The ‘trans-ing’ embraces the epistemological uncertainty and relativism of post-structuralism as it recognises and equalises resources and knowledge systems bilinguals possess or can access. This endues the validity of translanguagers as double-resourced and double-knowing agents. The ‘trans-ing’ of resources signifies that translanguaging can extend from the linguistic to the educational domain. It is empowered to examine bilingual teachers’ classroom practice, the funds of knowledge they employ and encourage their students to employ, and the pedagogical knowledge they own or could access from multiple education systems and cultural resources.

When using translanguaging as a theoretical tool, it is important to address its relationship with the named (or discrete) languages and assess whether those old concepts resulting from structuralist language separatism are suitable for inclusion in the new post-structuralist translanguaging framework. The answer seems clear. Post-structuralism has evolved from yet retains some tenets of structuralism. It
conserves the structuralist notion that “meanings are derived from relations of difference [and in translanguage, meanings are derived through multiple languages], that these are largely subconscious, and that they form a structure” (Harcourt 2007:5). However, post-structuralism rejects the structuralist claim to uphold “the arbitrariness of the sign and the completeness of the linguistic system at the expense of the moment of difference” (Butler 1990:40). The difference is, structuralists limit the understanding of these forms by ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable’ from the perspective of the [degree of] arbitrariness of a named language. As (Otheguy et al. 2019: 647) observed: “when bilingual students persist in displaying their translanguage abilities, educators continue to regard these practices as truly cognitive ‘errors,’ or ‘interference’, and in identifying them as real symptoms of psycholinguistic deficiency”. Post-structuralism advances and liberates these forms and accepts and even legitimises their existence. As such, a form like ‘You ask me, I ask who?’ (example cited in Li 2018) would not be judged as deficient English, as structuralists would contend based on as negative or positive transfer, but rather a ‘legitimate’ translanguage form. However, a complete rejection of structuralism would be a risk for translanguage theory as there will be no forms nor structures examinable and the one semiotic system claimed for bilinguals’ practice will fall into inaccessible imagination. This echoes Turner and Lin’s (2022: 427) argument that “there is perhaps now a danger that the patterns internal to linguistic systems will be, to some extent, denied, leaving us with a similarly lopsided view of language”. In a similar way, MacSwan (2017) suggested the concepts of discrete languages should not be abandoned in the interpretation of translanguage. Instead, relying on traditional multilingualism and codeswitching scholarship may avoid translanguage theory being left only with ideological emptiness (MacSwan 2017).

How do we see the dynamism of translanguage in relating to the patterns, forms or structures of the named languages? As translanguage is a continuous languaging process, is it therefore too dynamic to be described by any external label or concept of discrete languages (Vogel and García 2017)? It is clear that post-structuralism emphasises on probing “the moment of difference” of the named languages (Butler 1990: 40) and determining what the ‘structure(s)’ or ‘form(s)’ and “discovered regularity” could possibly mean in a particular time condition (Harcourt 2007: 17). Thus, the forms or the structures are ‘temporary’ existences on and across the scale of the diachronic process of translanguage. This resonates with MacSwan’s (2017) suggestion that “codeswitching may be seen as an instance of translanguage, alongside other bilingual phenomena such as translation, borrowing, and additional processes, in a range of modalities, as in earlier treatments” (MacSwan 2017: 192). The belief that there is no ‘language’ but only ‘languaging’ (Maturana and Varelo 1980 cited in Li 2018: 16) may be understood from Dialectical Materialism – there is relative stillness in absolute motion. Denying
relative stillness may put translanguaging into the abyss of agnosticism, and makes translanguaging practice or pedagogy an unachievable empty and fantasy. By embracing a post-structuralist position, translanguaging is afforded the potential to be a powerful tool for interpreting or examining teaching and learning phenomena in bilingual classes. It can expand the analytical focus of such phenomena from linguistic and multimodal evidence to incorporate bilinguals’ non-lingual resources. Further, by availing these existing bilingual concepts from the discrete languages, translanguaging as a concept for analysis can descend an impressionistic pedestal to become a practical entity with ‘embodied’ forms.

3 The research

The participants in this research were a group of teacher-researchers who had recently graduated from an Australian university. They were labelled ‘bilingual Chinese language teacher-researchers (the Chinese teachers or the teacher-researchers in brief) as they were trained in a unique programme “The Research-Oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program”. During their enrolment, they received a comprehensive professional development package including an assigned position at local Sydney schools as Chinese language teachers in training. Concurrently, they studied as Higher Degree Research students researching their own Chinese language teaching, which was documented and submitted as their theses. As indicated from their identity as ‘teacher-researchers’, their teaching and research were closely related. The data for their research were collected from their teaching through an action research methodology.¹

Data in this research were drawn from the participant teachers’ research theses and a stimulated recall interview with each individual. Eight theses accessible from the University’s database were selected as these satisfied two criteria: “Chinese language teaching” within the thesis title (excluded were those with a focus on teaching Chinese culture or professional development); and the author/the teacher-researcher of the thesis accepted an invitation to participate in a stimulated recall interview. The evidentiary chapters of each eligible thesis that recorded the teacher-researchers’ use of bilingual resources were analysed. The stimulated recall sessions were then an opportunity for the participating teacher-researchers to unpack what was recorded in their theses.

¹ The training they received from the Programme included six pillars: introduction to language and education theories, knowing the learners, teaching pedagogy, teachers’ professional development, and research methodologies. The above Programme information is offered to contextualise an understanding of the participants’ contributions to this research.
Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis enabling the researcher to generate an understanding of the studied phenomenon (Clarke and Braun 2017) which in this context was the use of bilingual resources in the classroom context. To identify the themes, the data were analysed via 'structured' directive and 'unconstrained' inductive approaches. It was an intentional consideration to implement both approaches as a directive approach only would likely result in ‘cherry-picking’ coding, and in reality, researchers are unlikely to be working from the naive perspective that they are uninformed by any theory. Therefore, initially the data were analysed from the directive, structured approach – within the framework of the post-structuralist Translanguaging developed above. The second round of coding was informed by an ‘unconstrained’ inductive approach. That is, the ‘left-over’ codes after the first-round of ‘structured’ directive analysis were then reviewed and categorised generically. This round was less theoretically directed and enabled a degree of freedom to reconsider the preconceived categories and allowed new themes to emerge naturally from the data.

4 Findings

The analysis of the theses data establishes that, in varying degrees, translanguaging activities appeared in each of the Chinese language teachers’ classes. These activities drew upon the teacher-researcher’s linguistic capital – their English and Chinese languages, and non-linguistic capital – resources, artefacts and knowledge, in and across the two linguistic-cultural systems. From a pedagogical perspective, translanguaging was identified as being enacted in classroom management and instruction, scaffolding the learners, transforming or internalising the learning, designing assessment tasks and providing feedback and comments on students’ performance. Interestingly, the data from the stimulated recall sessions indicate that despite their various uses of translanguaging in teaching, the participant CAL teachers did not demonstrate its conceptual understanding.

4.1 Translanguaging use in classroom management instruction

Data indicate that in their classroom management, all the teachers used English as the medium of instruction as they were teaching the Chinese language to beginning school learners the majority of whom speak English as their first language. In common, there were some occasions when they switched from English to Chinese and added Chinese to their English. These were noted most frequently when
providing classroom instructions, and/or emotionally engaging the learners. For example, Zhen used translanguaging in her classroom routines: “qǐ lì” (stand up), “qǐng zuò” (sit down please) and “zài jiàn” (goodbye). Yan provided student feedback with “Excellent!” followed with “bàng bàng da (棒棒哒)” and accompanied both with a ‘thumbs up’ gesture. Yu commented “tài hǎo le (great)” with a high five gesture. Tang’s data included a short dialogue: “T: Good morning, guys. Nǐ hǎo ma? S: Hěn hǎo! T: Very good! Jīntiān (today) we are going to learn how to say family members.” These data confirm that translanguaging was implemented in the forms of code-switching and translation as part of the teachers’ instructions to direct movement, provide positive feedback and introduce content.

During the interviews with each participant, they were asked to describe their pedagogical intentions and aims when they had implemented translanguaging. As all the students were beginning Chinese language learners with limited vocabulary, Tang reported the purpose was to facilitate students’ engagement as he explained:

When students were a bit bored by what was happening, I sensed the situation and would jam in one or two Chinese words to surprise them. They were like ‘what?’ and I would switch back to English and continue.

For Tang, his purpose was to keep the students curious, and responsive in trying to gauge the meaning of his use of Chinese. For Yan, when providing positive feedback to students, she preferred to use the Chinese translation so students would just ‘hang there’ in the moment – to prolong the experience for “students [to] enjoy the good comments.” For Zhen, the aim was to expose the students to ‘normal’ classroom routine directions using the Chinese language “to make them get used to some easy Chinese instruction.” These examples of translanguaging practice appeared to be sporadic, however not random. The teachers used translanguaging with pedagogical drive aiming to engage their learners.

4.2 Scaffolding the new learning

The data also reveal that the teachers employed translanguaging to scaffold students’ new learning. These include recognising the advantages of using both the teachers’ and students’ visual and expressive literacy from their L1 (teachers’ Chinese and students’ English). The two strategies employed were: (1) to draw on the learners’ capability of deduction already operating through prior L1 learning; and (2) to recognise the similar and contrasting pronunciation of the two languages’. For both strategies, the teacher-researchers’ use of translanguaging in these contexts aimed to reduce the learners’ cognitive load in learning L2 Chinese.
Examples of scaffolding the students’ new learning by building on their L1 (English) visual literacy were found in the teaching of pictographic words. The students were asked to draw on their prior experiences and their daily lives, to predict the meaning of some pictographs. For example, Tang and Yu, when introducing pictographs, asked their students to visualise an actual object each word appeared to represent and therefore to ‘guess’ what the pictograph might mean. The range of answers provided by the students was beyond the teachers’ expectations. In the stimulated recall interview with Tang and Yu, they both identified this phenomenon:

As I was teaching lower primary stage children, they sort of thought Chinese words were pictures and always like to comment: ‘It looks like a … ’ I made use of this advantage and taught them quite a few pictographs to start with. They were crazy about guessing the meaning based on the look. Sometimes their imagination went wild though. For example, when I showed them ‘网’ (net), and asked them what it looked like, I expected them to say ‘net’. However, many said it looked like a dead person, as the two crosses (xx) in English visual literacy means the closed eyes of a person. When I showed them ‘田’ (farmland), and I hoped they saw a crisscrossed farmland, but they saw a ‘chocolate block’. They also linked ‘水’ (water) to ‘lizard’ maybe because lizards are everywhere in their life (Tang).

I had a lot fun with them. I enjoyed teaching them Hànzì and asked them to guess the meaning. I remember when I taught them ‘吃’ (to eat), I asked them what the left and right looked like respectively. I thought they would say left part ‘口’ is a ‘mouth’, and right part is blah blah blah … but the students said it looked like an ‘ice block’. When I stretched my mouth into a square shape, they went: oh! It’s a mouth. They said the right top is the English letter T and the bottom is Z. They surprised me a lot – but what matters, I think, really is they were engaged in the process and made connections with what they had known (Yu).

The data indicate that the Chinese teachers created space for the students to attach meaning to the Chinese Hànzì through engaging their prior visual literacy knowledge. As expected though, the students’ visualisation reflected their perception of their local social and cultural environment, thus on many occasions their suggestions varied considerably from the Chinese teachers’ ‘visual product’. This reflects Li’s (2011) argument in terms of bilinguals bringing their personal experience, ideology and cognition into the new meaning making experience. According to these teachers, this multimodal or mnemonic translanguaging strategy proved to be effective in engaging students, stimulating their creative thinking and assisting the memorisation of some Chinese Hànzì.

Deductive reasoning, a higher level of translanguaging, is a strategy employed by the Chinese teachers. This was more frequently identified in their lessons where they scaffolded students’ comprehension of ideographic Hànzì. It is not as explicit as code-switching or translation; it is the deductive knowledge or capability to deduce, gained through L1 schooling, and was ‘trans-ed’ in this research to support
the meaning making during the learning of Chinese words. An example Tang provided is when he taught students a set of three associated ideographs: ‘人’, ‘从’ and ‘众’, based on a singular person ‘人’. He guided the students, through induction, to reflect upon the meaning of the Hànzì comprised of two/double ‘人’ and three/triple ‘人’. Another example he gave is a set of indicatives: ‘上’ ‘下’ ‘卡’. From an epistemological viewpoint, he explained the representative meaning of the three strokes in the Hànzì ‘上’: a reference line at the bottom, a vertical line pointing to the north and a Chinese dot representing an object. He explained it is a location word, and it means ‘up’. He then asked students to work out the meaning of ‘下’ and ‘卡’ by applying the same type of reasoning. This strategy worked well due to the indicative and ideographic nature of Hànzì, with success noted in terms of motivating the learners, developing creative learning contexts and associative memorisation.

When teaching Chinese pronunciation, some teachers intentionally guided the students to be mindful of the phonetic systems of the two languages through comparing the similarities, contrasts, or differences. Students were then able to link the pronunciation of Chinese words to ‘Australian Pinyin’. An example in Yu’s lesson was when she compared the Chinese vowel ‘ā’ to the ‘a’ sound in ‘glass’, ‘ē’ to ‘ir’ sound in fur, i to ‘ea’ sound in ‘tea’, and ū to the ‘oo’ sound in ‘fool’. Similarly, Zhen purposively used English phonetic knowledge to help students with Chinese pronunciation. She constructed lessons where the Chinese pronunciation was scaffolded to the existing English phonation system. For example, when teaching greetings in Chinese, Zhen explained that ‘nǐ hǎo’ (你好 hello) sounded like the English words ‘knee’ [nɪ:] and ‘how’ [hau], ‘wǎn ān’ (晚安 good night) sounded like ‘one’ [wən] ‘Anne’ [æn]. When introducing the Chinese vocabulary around the theme ‘colour’, she guided the students to think of ‘lǜ sè’ (green) as ‘loser’ [ˈluːzə], ‘hēi sè’ (black) as ‘hey’ [hei] ‘sir’ [sɜː], and ‘bái sè’ (白色 white) ‘bye’ [bai] ‘sir’ [sɜː] (Zhen). As her lessons progressed Zhen noted the students creating their own English and Chinese sound connections: “After they learned bā (eight), I couldn't stop them making sheep sound of ‘baa, baa, baa …’ and when we learned méi (eyebrow) and bǐ (nose), they went ‘maybe, maybe, maybe … ’.” These examples of ‘trans-ing’ between English and Chinese in learning pronunciation facilitated student-centred experiences and engagement. From a cognitive perspective, this translanguaging mnemonic technique is valuable. By associating a new facet of the L2 learning to ‘something’ familiar to the learners in their L1, the teachers made L2 learning more accessible or meaningful to the students (Tai and Li 2021).
4.3 Translanguaging activities for transforming learning

Translanguaging practice was reflected in the activities these teachers designed specifically for transforming the learning. Quite often the Chinese language teachers drew on both their own and their students’ resources to design activities such as multimodality exercises, shū kòng (write/writing in the air), music, calligraphy, colouring in and paper cutting. More accurately, these resources themselves are learning activities from both the teachers’ L1 (Chinese) and students’ L1 (English) experiences. They were not simple trans-activities between languages, but languaging practice embedded in these ‘trans-ing’ activities.

In terms of practising listening and speaking, some teacher-researchers designed multimodal activities. For example, for reviewing the vocabulary learned for body parts, Yun introduced the nursery rhyme, ‘Heads, shoulders, knees and toes’ for her younger students. She created opportunities for them to sing the song in Chinese. Zhen’s activity was to combine the melody of ‘London Bridge Is Falling Down’ with the lyrics of the Chinese song ‘nǐ hǎo gē’ (你好歌, Hello Song) for students to practice. Shu planned for the students to sing the Chinese version of ‘twinkle, twinkle little star’ once they were familiar with the Pinyin lyrics. According to the data revealed during the stimulated recall sessions, engaging students’ familiar melodies seemed to be an effective way to motivate participation and improve their oral Chinese. According to Fan, students often had “an ‘a-ha’ moment” with their familiar melodies. Yun’s experience was that it is a “pleasant way to practice oral Chinese” especially when the students were allowed to “switch back to English or hum along with the tune when they forgot the Chinese lyrics”. Shu’s data indicated “Students were focused while doing the activities and remembered words very well after a few times repeating the same song”.

For Hànzì writing exercises, the most prevalent activities were ‘shū kòng’ (writing in the air), paper cutting, colouring in and calligraphy. Their purpose was to create opportunities for students to make use of the available Chinese and English teaching resources, to review and become familiar with the written form of the learned Hànzì. ‘Shū kòng’ (书空) is an old-fashioned practice of writing in the air. Tang recorded his use of ‘shū kòng’ with his classes. After learning several new words, he would engage the students in a “finger dance”. He admitted that it was “not an exciting activity” but students were “not badly engaged”. Fan (and also Tang, Yun and Ning) provided calligraphy practice for students to experience and sense Hànzì as symbols of Chinese art and culture. Students “enjoyed it” while becoming familiar with the structure of learned Hànzì. Compared with her other peer teachers, Yan preferred ‘colouring in’ – an activity with which local students were familiar. She acted on one student’s
suggestion that “their other teachers used it”. She said: “This is one of the few activities I used to settle them down and make them concentrate”. Fan regularly provided ‘paper cutting’ activities in her class. She explained her students were particularly “excited about cutting those symmetrical Hànzì such as “山, 天, 林, 中”. They were “very creative” and were able to extrapolate their thinking to include words in English that were symmetrical such as mom, dad, eye and aha.

The activities these teachers designed and implemented were focussed on ‘learning by doing’. Their purpose was to have young learners become familiar with the ‘sound’, or the ‘look’ of Hànzì in order for learning to be more smoothly internalised. During this process, these teachers integrated translanguaging practice through switching and intertwining the two languages. They combined lingual and aural modes across the two languages, as well as specifically melding the teaching resources from both systems – Chinese calligraphy and English colouring in.

4.4 Translanguaging to assess learning

Translanguaging activities were identified in the Chinese teachers’ suite of strategies including those for assessing students’ learning. For example, Tang played Bingo – a popular game amongst the local students, designed to test listening and identification of vocabulary. The game commenced with the teacher verbalising a Chinese word, and the students were asked to find the equivalent English on their card and cross it out. Tang recalled: “it was a competition game. It was challenging but the young learners really loved it as they all wanted to be the first person to cross out all their words and call out bingo.” Another teacher Ning designed a Digital Storytelling assignment to examine the students’ written comprehension. In the assignment, she required the students to compose a Chinese story using the sentence patterns and words they had been learning, that is, incorporating the vocabulary for body parts, fruit, ball games, colours, and the names of animals. She encouraged the students to use English and Chinese Pīnyīn to facilitate the completion of their stories. Ning recounted: “The thrilling part of the task was that the students all had their passionate story to tell. Some students were addicted to it and even tried to make their story twist and turn so that they could use more [Chinese] words they remembered.” This assessment task reflects the teachers’ insightful use of translanguaging as a facilitator for Chinese language learning.
5 Discussion – learner-focused, purposefully designed translangugaging practice

Scholars have been emphasising the role of translanguaging to assist students with meaning making and to provide a safe learning space in bilingual classrooms (García 2009a; Canagarajah 2011) by acknowledging the value of “the planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning” (Lewis et al. 2012: 643). The translanguaging practices of the participant Chinese teachers in this research demonstrate a direct and purposeful pedagogy. As non-linguists they did not espouse a full theoretical understanding of translanguaging according to the data revealed in either their stimulated recall session or in their theses, but none-the-less they were able to successfully permeate this strategy throughout their CAL classes with successful outcomes for learners.

5.1 Translanguaging instruction

Early research purports a long-established norm of monolingualism in language education (Blackledge 2000; García 2009b). CAL literature also identifies the decades where Chinese Medium Instruction and rigorous Chinese monolingual pedagogy in Chinese classrooms in China’s higher education system were promoted (Wang 2014; Wang 2019b). Similarly promoted were Chinese-only policies and practices across CFL immersion programmes in North America (Lü 2020: Zhou, 2021: 103). As Wang and Kirkpatrick (2012) critiqued, these positions in language education are more political than scientific; CAL teachers did so or were asked to do so to show their strong “national pride” and to build or maintain their “Sinophone identity” in front of their ‘foreign’ students (Wang and Kirkpatrick 2012:15). Consequently, translanguaging use such as code-switching and translation is predominantly regarded as detrimental. Under this regime it can be argued that institutions’ and/or teachers’ monolingual ideology were prioritised at the cost of students’ learning. This research has identified alternative evidence and promising results. That is, these Chinese teacher-researchers who were vested in a specific language teaching and research Programme at an Australian University used English as the main language of instruction along with Chinese to facilitate instruction in order to meet the learning needs of the beginning Chinese learners. Embracing translanguaging through switching and translating between the two languages was strategic as they had a strong commitment to motivating and engaging the learners. Their own identity of being a Chinese language teacher was not a priority when they ‘trans-ed’ the instruction. Their
translanguaging practices perhaps indicates an identity shift towards a ‘bilingual language teacher’ and distanced from ‘Chinese language teacher’.

5.2 Translanguaging resources

As discussed in the theory section, scholars widely acknowledge the scope of translanguaging as a meaning-making and knowledge construction process (Baker 2011; García 2009a; Li 2011; Li 2018) involving the implementation of a range of lingual and non-lingual resources. They recognise the lingual resources of bi- and multilingual speakers as being assessable through their multilingual literacy and multiliteracy capacities, and non-lingual resources through personal experience, ideology, cognitive capacity and cultural knowledge (García 2009a; Li 2011). The data in this research foregrounds the CAL teachers’ specific and strategic use of translanguaging resources as they ‘trans-ed’ languages. This includes integrating English and Chinese in the form of code-switching and translation, designing multimodal exercises such as combining lingual and visual or aural modes across the two languages (for example, singing Chinese lyrics with an English melody and vice versa) and bringing their aural systems into comparison when teaching pronunciation. More importantly, they ‘trans-ed’ the resources in the two systems carried by the languages. They unified theirs and/or their students’ funds of knowledge in the two systems by using learners’ prior knowledge of deduction and reasoning in explaining Chinese Hànzì formation. They also incorporated pedagogical and cultural resources from both systems by embracing Chinese calligraphy and paper cutting, English colouring in and the Bingo game to engage students in Chinese language learning. These activities permeated the curriculum designed by these teacher-researchers, demonstrating their commitment to achieving learning outcomes for all students. Additionally, the translanguaging practices described in the previous sections provide evidence that the teachers attempted to equalise resources and knowledge across both the English and Chinese systems. This indicates a measure of progress for the teacher-researchers in recognising themselves and the students as double-resourced and double-knowing agents. This echoes Cenoz and Gorter’s (2020: 307) recent argument that pedagogical translanguaging should aim at using “the knowledge multilinguals have” from “their own linguistic and educational background”. The practices of these teacher-researchers has the potential to contribute to ‘best practice’ evidence in the development of translanguaging in Chinese language education.
5.3 Translanguaging activities

Further to the translanguaging practices identified within instruction and resources, the data also indicate that this group of teachers demonstrated advanced pedagogical use of translanguaging. By ‘advanced’, they went beyond merely creating space in class, optimistically waiting for translanguaging to evolve. They demonstrated that translanguaging can be a systematic and purposeful pedagogical practice (Canagarajah 2011; Cenoz and Gorter 2020). Resonating with Wang’s (2019a) finding on the creation of translanguaging strategies to cognitively scaffold students’ meaning-making and comprehension by teachers, this research found that translanguaging activities were designed around and for the students. Although not all the teachers equally showed systematic translanguaging use, their data collectively contributes to an understanding of the possibilities for a successful multidimensional translanguaging teaching process. Translanguaging was not practiced randomly. Rather, the translanguaging activities were pedagogically driven with the needs of the learners focused at the centre. The implementation of activities was to motivate and connect with students emotionally, to engage their participation in class and to scaffold their learning to reduce their cognitive load.

The research findings discussed above are in discord with early scholars’ perceptions of CAL in Australia as incorporating teacher-centred methods implemented by teachers with a limited knowledge of their learners and teaching resources (Moloney 2013; Moloney and Xu 2015; Orton 2015, 2016; Wang et al. 2013). The participants in this research, whilst fulfilling a teaching assignment as teacher trainees in local schools, were concurrently studying in an Australian university’s post-graduate degree – an innovative teacher-researcher education programme. As part of the curriculum designed to inform their teaching and research, they were introduced to linguistics, encompassing translanguaging, and educational theories such as constructivist pedagogy. They learned to use research to inform their teaching, and conversely, how to solve teaching challenges through research. This specialised Programme coupled with the positive value Australia holds for multilingual resources in education, may have provided these Chinese language teachers with the skills and confidence to focus their teaching pragmatically on catering to the needs of their beginning Chinese language learners from design to implementation.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, translanguaging is elaborated from a post-structuralist perspective and applied in the analysis of the pedagogy implemented by a group of specially
trained Chinese language teacher-researchers. Enacting this ‘post-’ framework, evidence is cited confirming these Chinese language teachers did not implement translanguaging in a fragmented, ad hoc fashion, but rather with a clear pedagogical purpose. Specifically, translanguaging was decisively employed as part of their medium of instruction for the purpose of motivating and engaging the learning; translanguaging resources from the teachers’ own and their students’ backgrounds were integrated into teaching which has the potential to contribute to the construction of CAL translanguaging curriculum; and translanguaging activities were embedded in the teaching process which may assist with the development of a dynamic translanguaging pedagogy. The limitation of this research is that the group of participant teachers were from one teacher-researcher training Programme in one Australian University and therefore not a representative sample. Future research could consider broadening the participant groups and exploring student learning outcomes when translanguaging is practiced in language curricula with young beginning learners.

References


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