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English-plus or English-only: The Affordances and Constraints of Reading Using Translanguaging among Chinese Students at a Private University

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Abstract

Private higher education plays a vital role in its transition to a knowledge society. However, it is also facing a challenge to mitigate the local tension between access, equity, and quality. Recently, translanguaging as pedagogy has emerged in an emancipatory manner for teachers in English medium instruction contexts, like the Chinese private university, where the students are not able to perform in English-only classrooms. However, although pedagogical translanguaging in English reading is acknowledged by bilingual educators, we have little knowledge about the students' attitudes toward it. Students are the real actors of translanguaging practices. Their attitudes and stances are decisive to their further application of this translanguaging approach. The study aims to explore Chinese private university students' attitudes toward pedagogical translanguaging as a classroom norm in an English reading classroom. The data were collected through two debriefing interviews before and after translanguaging as intervention. A thematic analysis of the affordances and constraints was carried out to examine their perceptions about translanguaging. The findings showed that translanguaging practices among Chinese private university students have not been completely independent of monolingual ideology. Yet their appreciation of translanguaging informed the possibility of fortifying translanguaging awareness and thus establishing an ecological and democratic translanguaging classroom.

Keywords: affordances and constraints, English medium instruction, reading pedagogy, student attitudes, translanguaging

Introduction

China is moving towards a knowledge-based economy (Välilmaa & Hoffman, 2008) and using this metaphor framing her socio-economic development, which illustrated by the transition of Chinese higher education from mass to universal access (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2019; Trow, 2007). Private higher education in China has been making a very positive contribution satisfying the need of the students with a lower academic level to develop high-

level knowledge production and advanced skills development (Singh, 2011). However, concomitantly, there is a concern about how to alleviate the tension between access, equity, and quality. It can also be rendered into how to scaffold these students with low academic performance in their high schools to achieve academic success in the university and demonstrate the outcomes of teaching and learning in a particular way, especially for the students in linguistic programs with the complexities of bilingual or multilingual development.

For language educators and researchers, translanguaging has emerged as a creative and contextual way not only for helping us understand the complexities of bilingual education, but also for providing us guides for ameliorating language teaching and learning practices (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2021b; García & Li, 2014; Li & Lin 2019; Zhang & Jocus, 2022). In the present study, translanguaging is seen as a pedagogical paradigm, which enables Chinese private university students (PUSs) majoring in English to flexibly use Mandarin Chinese as a form of input and English as output for complex academic task mediation, meaning construction, and knowledge communication. It is perceived as a creative way to facilitate emergent bilingual learners, such as PUSs, in the transitive stage of English learning for potential English proficiency. As an acclaimed paradigm for bilingualism, the research subjects of previous studies on pedagogical translanguaging relating to China have been drawn either from the Chinese university students outside China (Li & Zhu, 2013) or public university students inside China (Cai & Cook, 2015). The present study turns from the more customarily quantitative use of interviews with guided questions (or questionnaires) to a qualitative use of debriefing interviews (Many, 2002), exploring the affordances and constraints of Chinese PUS' attitude towards pedagogical translanguaging in an English reading classroom.

The significance of their attitude toward reading using translanguaging lies in how their classroom linguistic decisions directly decide their learning outcomes. As Chang (2019) comments, with linguistic bias, PUSs might suffer detrimental effects on content acquisition and socio-emotional well-being. Conversely, overcoming linguistic bias and thus establishing a translanguaging stance (García, 2017), PUSs might be motivated by the language ecology metaphor (Chang, 2019) and thus enjoy the benefits from translanguaging as pedagogy.

To achieve this goal, the present study aims to carry out data collection and analysis around the following research question: What practices afford and constrain gains for translanguaging in PUSs' reading practices?

Literature Review

Pedagogical Translanguaging Awareness

Research in translanguaging literature has documented the various efforts of educators with a translanguaging stance (García et al., 2017) to initiate an inclusive ideological paradigm shift. Such shift has engaged emergent bilingual students' whole language repertoire as a resource to enhance their literacy and socio-emotion. Hornberger and Link (2012) argued that it is a necessary and desirable pedagogical practice to create possibilities for students' educational achievement by recognizing, valuing, and building on their communicative

repertoires and translanguaging practices. Kampittayakul (2018) carried out an observational study in a one-on-one tutorial program to investigate the use of pedagogical translanguaging to enhance Thai students' interactional competence. The findings showed that students at various academic levels could accept translanguaging and be pushed into a growth zone through translanguaging pedagogy, dependent students showing good listenership and independent students showing good speakership.

Back et al. (2020) have employed two case stories to vividly demonstrate using translanguaging as emotional scaffolding to navigate difficulties in terms of academic content acquisition and related behavioral issues facing emergent multilingual learners. They found that teachers and students were raising their awareness of actively seeking out L1 support from family members, community home language volunteers, bi-/multilingual teachers and translanguaging researchers to co-create a translanguaging space and establish multilingual ecology. The findings from Menken and Sánchez (2019) indicated that teachers who had implemented translanguaging strategies could establish more favorable perceptions of bilingual students and bring more dynamic language practice to bilingual students. In turn, the students who could well-perceive and value the translanguaging strategies showed better performance in the assessment and evaluation activities.

Reading Using Translanguaging

In the context of English as a foreign language, teaching those who have English reading difficulties has been a known concern among English teachers and educators. In Singapore, Vaish and Subhan (2014) found that the monolingual Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback (IRE/F) interaction pattern could be changed into a more complex translingual one, such as I (Eng+Mal)-R(Mal)-I(Eng+Mal)-R(Mal)-E/F(Eng). In doing so, the teacher could observe students' intelligibility, delay the evaluation move, and alter the way students raise and answer questions. When linguistic repertoire was acknowledged, students could show more agency in reading. In South Africa, Hungwe (2019) used translanguaging combined with paraphrasing as a holistic strategy to teach academically rootless and multilingual university students reading for comprehension. The findings showed that emergent English learners and early readers of English could not express the author's views unambiguously in English only. Demonstration of their deep understanding had to rely upon the use of their L1 or L1 and L2 both.

In the US, Daniel et al. (2017) helped elementary teachers in English-only classroom settings conduct teaching practices to develop translanguaging as a classroom norm. Through introducing translanguaging strategies, teachers and students jointly explored translanguaging. The findings demonstrated that these teachers with translanguaging awareness could help their students acknowledge and acquire the value of translanguaging for literacy development. In the UK, Creese and Blackledge (2010) described a flexible bilingual approach to linguistic practices in both Chinese and Gujarati community language school. They argued that the vital pedagogical outcomes of translanguaging involved enhancing student identity performance, lesson accomplishment, and participant confidence. Menken and Sánchez (2019) found that the teachers who has experienced reading using translanguaging had more favorable perceptions

of bilingual students and more dynamic language practices in the classrooms. In turn, the students showed better performance in assessment and evaluation activities. In a word, a worldwide variety of bilingual and multilingual classroom contexts demonstrated the transformative nature of reading using translanguaging.

Criticisms about Translanguaging

As discussed above, translanguaging as a practical theory of language and pedagogy in applied linguistics has critical implications for school policy and practice. It has been adopted by many researchers who were sympathetic to it, known as the English-plus group (Padilla, 1991) or advocates for bilingualism. However, a counter group, English-only, expressed their substantial disagreement questioning the need of translanguaging. English-only advocates dismissed it as simply a populist neologism and part of the sloganization of the post-modern and post-truth era (Li, 2017). They argued that academic English as a standard language ideology has been entrenched with mainstream political dogma, perpetuated through powerful social, political, and economic forces in American society (MacSwan, 2018), which was also true in other parts of the world with globalization and internationalization in higher education. Back et al. (2020) have seen the detrimental influence of English-only ideology on emergent bilingual students. They argued that monolithic perception and instruction could veil the student voices, stop them from drawing on the resources they have acquired in their mother tongue, and harm their emotional well-being, which would lead to more pressure and anxiety on them, impede their learning experience, and result in negative emotions and behavioral issues. Conversely, translanguaging as a member of English-plus group may have the potential to mitigate the issue.

In fact, the terms with the “trans-” and “bi-” prefixes weighed the existence of borders and boundaries between multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual peoples globally. They also entailed questions, like how to balance unity and diversity (Thompson & Hakuta, 2012)? How to grapple with the tensions between innovations and traditions (Hawkins & Mori, 2018)? Influenced by civil rights movements, translanguaging and bilingual programs in diversified contexts have reflected various underlying language ideologies (MacSwan, 2018; Thompson & Hakuta, 2012). The struggle remained between translanguaging in classroom discourse and parallel monolingualisms in political discourse (Li & Lin, 2019). That was the reason why we found no strong and telling evidence to favor or oppose translanguaging and bilingual education (Conger, 2010). The value of translanguaging as a practical theory of language and pedagogy in applied linguistics rested on its potential of producing a language-competent society rather than being a divisive linguistic instrument (Padilla, 1991).

Research Methodology

Participants

The present study was a qualitative research project involving adult participants whose L1 was Mandarin Chinese and whose major was English as foreign language enrolled in the English Department in a private university in China. Their goal was to be an English language teacher in China. To meet that goal, they had to endure high stakes English language tests while

at the same time being labelled as deficit based upon being private university students in China who were unable to score high enough on university entrance exams to enter more prestigious Chinese public universities.

Instruments

Translanguaging was employed as a pedagogy to develop reading practices and dialogue journals were used enabling students to actively engage in reading reflections. The present study focused on a third instrument, debriefing interviews (Many, 2002) as created situations which allowed the researcher to ask the participants collectively and face-to-face for clarifications of their responses to reading practices, and thus for deeper reflection on affordances and constraints of reading using translanguaging. A structured-interview guide with 20-item questions for debriefing interviews (See Appendix) was devised to elicit the data. The discussion between participants in the interview provided member-checking, which was employed to triangulate data. The units of the analysis were the affordances and constraints of translanguaging in reading practices that emerged from these interviews.

Procedures

The research process of the present study included three phases:

In the first phase, the first debriefing interview was carried out before the intervention of translanguaging in reading instruction to explore students' attitudes toward reading using translanguaging. It lasted 104 minutes. Then, the interview was transcribed based on the actions of translanguaging emerging in the interview.

Six months later, the study went into the second phase. The second debriefing interview with the same guided questions was implemented after the intervention of reading using translanguaging for exploring the change of students' perceptions regarding pedagogical translanguaging. It lasted 25 minutes. Then, the second interview was transcribed based on the actions of translanguaging.

In the third phase, data analysis and research report were completed. The themes of affordances and constraints of translanguaging emerging in the two interviews were coded based on recurring regularity (Casanave, 2012). The changes of perceptions of students towards reading using translanguaging were examined.

Results and Discussion

Findings

The following section discussed results of the debriefing interviews. In so doing, it provided data to answer the research question: What practices afford and constrain gains for translanguaging in PUSs' reading practice? To easily navigate between sections, the transcription of the debriefing interviews was italicized for its distinction from discussion.

The debriefing interview was conducted twice: before and after the intervention of translanguaging in English reading practice. The results of the students' attitude towards translanguaging emerged from these interviews.

Affordances of Translanguaging as Pedagogy Perceived by Students

The data from two debriefing interviews presented a plethora of affordances of

translanguaging as pedagogy, some of which were beyond expectation. With the students' explanation and illustration, the importance of translanguaging in reading emerged. In the following section, we examined these benefits of translanguaging as pedagogy perceived by students in detail based on 11 themes which emerged in the interviews.

Enhancing Comprehension. The reading comprehension process was a meaning-making process, which required two levels of comprehension, literal comprehension and deep comprehension. Achieving literal comprehension, the students needed to settle for shallow knowledge like listing facts, definitions, and examples. Compared to literal comprehension, deep comprehension was required in more high-stakes exams, like short answers, and was achieved when the readers could strategically organize shallow knowledge and employ high order reading skills for deep causes, explanations, inferences, and implications (Hungwe, 2019). However, there were challenges faced by PUSs to develop deep comprehension under the EMI policy, due to their inadequate English reading instruction upon entrance to the university. All 28 students in the interview acknowledged the value of translanguaging to enhance their deep comprehension. For instance, a student named Baby commented:

Excerpt 1. Now I think if we only learn knowledge in English, we usually gain simple knowledge from easy-reading texts. If the text is complex and long, I am afraid to read them. However, if the teacher can provide Chinese articles related to the same topic, I can first have a deeper understanding of the topic, and then I have confidence to read that complex texts in English.

A female student called Rachel said:

Excerpt 2. Summarizing each paragraph in Chinese can make me have a finer understanding of the topic. I am able to identify the main idea for each paragraph. I am aware of more supporting details of the text with the teacher's translanguaging than I read it by myself.

In this instance, through reading using translanguaging, the students could capture the author's details and actively seek to comprehend the English parallel text to express their deeper view on the same topic. This indicated that reading construction mediated by translanguaging could help students avoid inferior comprehension even though they have "read" the texts (McKenna & Robinson, 2006).

Establishing Harmonious Teacher-Student Relationship. Allowing the students to use translanguaging in reading encouraged their agency in language choice, like Grace, Bella, and Estelle stated:

Excerpt 3. We have a closer relationship with our teachers because we all speak Chinese and we share the same culture. We can talk about the difficult language points in our familiar language. Just like, we learn together.

These students could perceive the contribution of translanguaging to meaning construction, which was part of the basis of language learning. With the intervention of translanguaging in L2 reading, the students' sociocultural view was evolving over time. They came to realize that meaning negotiation involved not just texts, but also social relationships (Rose & Galloway, 2019).

Promoting Memory. Chinglish, as a kind of translanguaging, was “funny, direct English translation of Chinese phrases” (García & Li, 2014, p. 34), which was traditionally and typically seen as hindrance English learning and should be avoided. In contrast to such negative view towards Chinglish, Nicole reported her creative way of using Chinglish to promote her vocabulary building and standard English identification.

Excerpt 4. When I am able to discuss English materials in Chinese, I can memorize much more than when I am limited to English only. For example, I use Chinglish “Life has many sour, sweet, bitter and spicy” to express the meaning that “life has ups and downs.” I know that it’s not a parallel translation. If Chinglish is a kind of translanguaging, I think it can benefit me. Sometimes I see Chinglish as the counter-example to raise my awareness of using standard English.

This finding related to García and Li’s (2014) discussion of bilingual vernacular, like Chinglish, which could be a powerful intellectual tool to mediate the standard language of academic reading texts. This data also corroborated the views of Li (2016) and Du et al. (2020) who highlighted that Chinglish was just a critical and unavoidable language variety during language learning. If language learners who perceived Chinglish as an object of ridicule that could change their bias, balance use of learner varieties, and distinguish China English from Chinglish, Chinglish could also play a crucial role in English learning. In real reading practice, we found that “Chinglish”, or China English could be perceived by emergent bilinguals, treated with respect, and understood from the lens of translanguaging.

Improving Teaching Efficiency. Another reason that translanguaging as pedagogy was acknowledged by teachers and students was that it was an effective tool to complement teachers’ oral instruction and make challenging content visible or audible. Andy, Wendy, and April explained:

Excerpt 5. It will save a lot of time if our teacher can interpret the idioms in Chinese orally. It’s very hard for me to identify English idioms. Sometime our teacher explains the meaning of an idiom in English, but I still can’t understand it. When I can’t understand it in English, I will ask the teacher to explain it in my mother tongue once again. But I think it wastes a lot of time in class.

A female student called Aubrey said:

Excerpt 6. Some English teachers told me that most concepts are easier and quicker to understand in English. But I don’t think so. Take our textbook for example, the notes for the text and the terminologies are all written in English containing a lot of new words. Sometime I feel the notes even more difficult than the original text itself. However, if these key points and difficulties in the English text have been examined by our teacher in advance and orally explained to us in Chinese, we can have access to their meaning more easily and have more time to read more texts.

In the eye of the students, translanguaging could support their understanding of the subject matter, extend oral expression on challenging parts, help them catch up with the teacher’s instruction, and thus make sense of the world, read more, and more deeply in the

classroom. Therefore, although reading using translanguaging was against the school's EMI policy, it was the symbol of efficient teaching acknowledged by the students, especially low performing ones. Moreover, translanguaging was inclusive and welcoming to achieve content objectives of the programs even though the language objectives were far from the expectation with limited periods.

Consolidating the Course Content. Often a school supervisor gave advice to the students in Chinese after classroom observation. The supervisor noted that most classroom teachers used L1 and L2 simultaneously to explain the same content, and thus suggested that teachers should avoid this kind of language use. The supervisor believed such repetition was unnecessary if students could understand the content in English. However, we found the opposite perception from Wiki and Katherine as stated in Excerpts 7 and 8:

Excerpt 7. I have understood the main idea of the reading material. Explaining it again in Chinese made me have a strong impression on what I read.

Excerpt 8. When I don't have difficulties in English itself, I can use what I learn from reading to understand and solve the problems in my daily life. As for me, the content emphasized by the teacher in both Chinese and English is always the unforgettable part. I think only the important part deserves emphasizing.

L1 could be used for different purposes for L2 reading. L1 was sometimes strategically employed as a kind of repetition of L2 to fortify the course content. In the interviews, we found most emergent bilingual readers struggled to retain the content after the teacher's instruction. Such repetition could provide students sufficient time not only to follow the teacher's instruction but also to internalize the teaching content. Internalization is a critical factor to form higher mental functions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and thus an essential element for reading development. Through this interview, we found that internalization could be mediated by translanguaging.

Activating Learning Interest. The theme of activating learning interest reflected a pedagogical metafunction for translanguaging: "the creation of affective bonds" (García & Li, 2014, p. 111), which was originally used by teachers to establish rapport with the students through sharing their funny personal anecdotes of language learning in L1 or in both L1 and L2. Such translanguaging practice sometimes could activate the students' learning interest to share their own fascinating personal anecdotes with their teachers and peers, which could also encourage students to participate in the classroom activity. Steve provided an example of such translanguaging practice in which he shared an interesting conversation to show his understanding of a reading material on word formation and contribute to a pleasant classroom climate as noted in Excerpt 9.

*Excerpt 9. A: Do you have a boyfriend?
B: Yes. But he's in another nation.
A: Which nation?
B: My imagination.*

The data resonated with Chang (2019) that interpersonal classroom discourse, such as personal anecdotes and jokes, enriched the discourses in place for potential engagement in

learning activities. It was an effective way to increase the interaction between the teacher and the students on a more personal level. Interpersonal classroom discourse could activate the students' learning interest and get them involved in reading activities.

Helping Find ZPD. English-only classrooms were far beyond most PUSs' ZPD. However, finding one's own ZPD was critical for a language learner because it helped the learner perceive the distance between their actual developmental level and their potential developmental level. The perception of self was also a self-assessment and self-reflective practice. Such practice not only helped raise learner awareness of their ability and promotes autonomous learning, but also facilitated their transitioning from other-regulation to self-regulation (Poehner, 2012). From Esther' report in the interview, we found that such practice could be mediated by translanguaging practice as noted in Excerpt 10.

Excerpt 10. The teacher's Chinese explanation made me know why I can't understand the passage as she does. Not often-use dictionaries may cause the in-ability to paraphrase. Without the teacher's clear explanation in Chinese as to how to use a bilingual dictionary and how to paraphrase, I am not able to realize the importance of using dictionaries and paraphrasing and I can't read deeply.

Excerpt 10 illustrated that translanguaging as pedagogy could also help students develop a capacity to do self-evaluation and thus find their own ZPD.

Increasing Interaction between Teachers and Students. Back et al.'s (2020) called for teachers to create translanguaging space in the classroom for students to articulate their own voices and get involved in the learning activities. A low frequency classroom participator called Mino concurred with Back et al. in Excerpt 11.

Excerpt 11. If Chinese was completely banned inside the classroom, the students with poor English like me, can't give comments to the presentation of my classmates, can't answer the teacher's questions.

It was worthwhile for the teachers and policy makers to consider this student's report. He expressed his strong view against EMI as a representative of the students with low English proficiency. He reminded us that if the teaching was mediated by translanguaging. It could be an effective way to increase meaning negotiation and participation inside the classroom.

Strengthening Perception in Language Functions. A common benefit of reading using translanguaging was that they could perceive the functions of language in meaning making, just as Alice stated in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12. Through our teacher's Chinese explanation and the additional Chinese handouts and articles, I realize how to use nominalization and figures of speech, like oxymoron and metaphor.

Through interviews, it became clear the students tapped translanguaging to negotiate meaning and to hone metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness. In turn, this could bring about the emergence of greater self-regulation (Adamson & Coulson, 2015).

Fostering Socioemotional Well-being and Critical Consciousness. Translanguaging as a response to “Trans-” perspective could destabilize discrete labels and categories and enable us to reflect ideologies around what is language, what is the role of language, and how do we understand human communication and interaction (Hawkins & Mori, 2018). We have seen this “Trans-” turn with the introduction of translanguaging during reading practice, as Excerpts 13 (from Tom) and 14 (from Lilia) revealed.

***Excerpt 13.** It is the first time for me to know that Chinese and English should be equal in an English class. Before the teacher teaches us translanguaging, I only know people should be equal. If we can properly use our mother tongue, such as acquiring the background knowledge related to the reading text, it is useful for my understanding the text.*

***Excerpt 14.** In the past, I am a proponent of EMI policy because I want to study abroad in the future. English-only classroom is beneficial to me because I have to listen to English lectures and use English to complete my essays and tests when I study abroad. But now, I don't think it's a good policy because I realize my English is too weak and I need Chinese to help me understand the content.*

This reflection showed us that some students began to critically think about and initially acknowledge the relationship between named languages and power relations, involving the unequal access to languages, unequal status between languages, and unequal power relations between language users. Although they cannot examine the sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical forces behind this phenomenon, they can perceive some particular contexts, where their local language has taken a backseat to English. At this moment, teachers should provide their confirmation of students' transcendence timely and encourage students to appreciate the fluidity and flexibility.

Supporting Bilingual Identity. The purposeful use of the students' mother tongue should be integral to, rather than a mark against their school success. Pedagogical translanguaging enabled students to make connections between their individual language practice and the required institutional language practice. The following two instances illustrated that the emotions created by EMI policy for emergent bilingual readers, such as resistance and failure, were not conducive to the students' socioemotional development and L2 learning. Being successful in school and feeling like authentic versions of students themselves should work together and enrich each other (García et al., 2017). This was noted in Excerpts 15 and 16, from Baby and Olivia respectively.

***Excerpt 15.** I feel the textbook is not suitable for me because it is all English. The notes to explain the terms are English. I can't understand them. I think it is written for good student at a public university. It is not shameful to use Chinese to learn English because making meaning is more important.*

***Excerpt 16.** Doing bilingual research makes me access to more information and see the world from different perspectives.*

As the two students noted, the introduction of translanguaging strategies to L2 reading enabled them to have a new perception of self. When emergent bilingual readers researched a topic using their entire linguistic repertoire and read using translanguaging, they experienced

the real-life value of being bilingual readers with translanguaging and transcultural competence (García et al., 2017).

Constraints of Translanguaging as Pedagogy Perceived by Students

The following part presented student concerns of translanguaging, which emerged into 4 recurrent themes: not total immersion of English, unfavorable for poor readers, the risks of becoming an L1 dependent L2 reader, and concerns about the Chinese teacher's academic level in native language.

No Total Immersion of English. Despite the numerous affordances that students discussed, one of the near ubiquitous constraints of the pedagogical use of translanguaging in the present study was somewhat ironic—the lack of English immersion. In other words, while students clearly benefited from using their L1, they felt short-changed using it within an EMI context. This constraint was noted in Excerpts 17, 18, and 19, from Bella, Julia and Mia.

Excerpt 17. The top constraint of translanguaging is that there is no 100% English environment for EFL learners.

Excerpt 18. Using a large amount of Chinese in an English reading class made me feel I was learning Chinese. It's helpless for me in English listening and speaking.

Excerpt 19. If a teacher explains English passages using too much Chinese, there will be no difference between Chinese classes and English classes.

Such statements revealed that L1 overshadowed the mastery of the English, which provided evidence of a hegemonic acquisition of EMI. Moreover, attendant monolingualism (Li & Lin, 2019) has been deeply rooted in the minds of students. Some students still had a strong bias against reading using translanguaging. Additionally, their comments indicated the tension between their ideal L2 classroom environment and their real low L2 proficiency. Simultaneously, they called for the principled use of L1 in L2 reading.

Through debriefing interviews, we found that real translanguaging practice both required an epistemological transformation (García & Li, 2014) which argued for a release from monolingual instruction (Creese & Blackledge, 2010) and called for judiciously expanded and integrated languaging in everyday discourse, academic discourse, and professional discourses. Additionally, pedagogy inside the classroom needed to accommodate the disposition of openness we saw outside the classroom. Therefore, enacting a balanced and dynamic translanguaging stance in reading practice (García, et al., 2017) could help students raise their awareness of issues of inequity and oppression, and thus develop their critical thinking.

Unfavorable for Poor Readers. Following monolingual norms of certain pedagogical doctrines, some students still doubted the efficiency of translanguaging regardless of whether they could make meaning in the English-only classroom. Excerpt 20 from Adelaide reflected how stable and standard monolingual norms informed how students thought about languages, language groups, and communication.

Excerpt 20. I worried that the poor English readers would become worse if they were exposed in too much Chinese, even though the teacher said translanguaging was helpful for them to have a better understanding the passage.

This comment showed us a probable reason why most low performing readers would rather pretend to completely achieve reading comprehension than speak out about their challenges and get the help from their teachers. Teachers should help students with an epistemological change in which “mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of languages, language groups and communication” (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011, p 3).

The Potential Risk of Becoming an L1-dependent L2-reader. Translanguaging could be a mediational means to break the common notion of monolingual bias and thus improve the reading development of emergent bilingual readers. Such affordance of reading using translanguaging has been perceived and defended by some students in the previous section. However, other students were less convinced, suggesting that translanguaging was no more than L2 weak readers’ entire dependency on their mother tongue to no useful purpose. Excerpts 21 and 22 from Aubrey and Emma reflected this sentiment.

Excerpt 21. Just imagine, I have got into the habit of reading bilingual texts. Given an English passage to read, if I can’t find the Chinese version of the text, I will be uncomfortable, even at loss. So if I can read in English, I am unwilling to read with the help of Chinese.

Excerpt 22. When I am too much dependent on the support of Chinese in English reading, I can’t develop to think in English.

We argued that this standpoint from some participants limited themselves to be language users instead of language makers. These students not only conveyed their concern and rejection of attempts to translanguaging, but also reflected their fixed-coding view of “reducing human linguistic and communicative endeavors to an analysis based on the postulation of rules, objects, and systems” (Orman, 2013, p. 91). Orman (2013) critiqued the view of seeing human linguistic communication as an instantiation of form and meaning and transference of thoughts and concepts, and emphasized the open-ended, integrated, and creative nature of human linguistic communication. We argued that translanguagers should be more accurately conceived as L1-supported bilingual readers rather than L1-dependent L2 readers.

Concern about the Chinese Teachers’ Academic Level in Native Language. We also found that the students who were firmly rooted in monolingualism tended to learn English in isolation from Chinese, and vice versa. Cindy made such review in Excerpt 23:

Excerpt 23. If a teacher’s Chinese level is low, his/her Chinese explanation for English will make us more confused. Teachers with low Chinese proficiency can also influence the quality of translanguaging.

Again, these students’ real reading practices and thoughts revealed that they just conformed to the fixed rules of either native English or native Chinese. Their theories and

practices rested upon the rejection of sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), Global English language teaching (Rose & Galloway, 2019), and translanguaging theory (García & Li, 2014), which all placed emphasis on the transformative agency of L2 learners. Within these theories in support of bilingualism, all language learners were creative and innovative language makers, as they could “transform” the rules to negotiate meaning (Rose & Galloway, 2019, p. 68).

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that although Chinese PUS can accept reading using translanguaging, they are still dominated by monolingual ideologies. A large portion of PUSs, including high-performing readers, show their concerns in two aspects. One is insufficient exposure to L2, the other is to be L1-dependent L2 learners when teachers cannot strategically use L1 to support L2 reading. Such concerns are indicative of students need for planned translanguaging. They were far from being truly bilingual or multilingual readers when the present study was carried out. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2020, p. 5), a real bilingual or multilingual learner should meet three criteria. First, they can be more effective L2 learners and users when they are allowed and encouraged to use their whole linguistic repertoire as resources. Second, they have a rich repertoire involving not only linguistic features but also their whole trajectories as language learners and language users. Third, when learning a new language, they are more likely to enact a natural link between prior knowledge and new knowledge. Compared with bilingual readers, in many cases, a large majority of Chinese PUS in our context are still monolingual readers who can only focus on the target language preventing themselves from using their other linguistic resources. They need more time and space to develop reading using translanguaging into their habitus.

The findings also reveal the potential unfair teaching rating. The school’s EMI policy and the student attachment to monolingual ideologies both tend to devalue and discourage teachers with a translanguaging stance and thus affect the implementation and operation of reading using translanguaging. This can explain why almost all the teaching demos in this private university are English-only classes, and English-plus as the real reading practices of Chinese PUS are not included in the list of potential research for the teaching quality improvement. However, both teachers and students secretly seek help from their mother tongue in what Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphor would call the backstage. In the front stage, students and some teachers put on the appearance of EMI, but in their back stage practices, they utilize L1 to mitigate the difficulties of EMI.

Educational structures include policies, programs, curriculum, and assessment, which can reflect the values and priorities of dominant groups in society (Cummins, 2021a). Educational structures plus educator roles determine the patterns of interactions between teachers and students, which constitute the most immediate determinant of student academic success or failure. Classroom discourse and its operation are not accidental and random, but were intricately linked to the classroom events and classroom relationships between discourse, learning, and social practices (Jocuns, 2012). Only evidence-based language policies can be most apt to students’ reading development, and thus attain the teaching and pedagogical objectives. School policy makers and teachers should have an open attitude to language policies. Favorable language policies should not be fixed and static but fluid and dynamic, and can also be contested by teachers, students, and administrators. Collaborative relations of power should be promoted for better student development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study presents data and discusses results of two debriefing interviews. In so doing, the research question is answered: What practices afford and constrain gains for translanguaging in PUSs' reading practice? 11 themes of affordances and 4 themes of constraints of translanguaging emerge. Students' acknowledgement and appreciation of translanguaging as pedagogy inform the possibilities of establishing a translanguaging classroom, helping PUSs become translanguagers with translingual awareness, and supporting PUSs' transformation into bilingual readers with translingual and transcultural competence. Students' concerns and rejections reveal tensions and challenges of making translanguaging a classroom norm.

Although, ostensibly, the affordances of translanguaging outnumber its constraints, these constraints entail three big issues. First, PUSs' translanguaging practices in English reading were significantly constrained by monolingual ideology. A translanguaging stance inclusive of bilingualism or multilingualism needs to be established to meet the needs of an increasingly globalized world. Second, PUSs' self-assessment is oriented towards test standards, leading to overemphasizing their weaknesses rather than their existing strengths. A strategic translanguaging design of reading instruction and assessment is required. Third, PUSs' concern with natural translanguaging, such as excessive use of L1 and unwitting translanguaging, is a sad reflection on teachers' ignorance of students' diversified needs for reading using principled translanguaging. The shift from natural translanguaging to planned translanguaging or the principled use of L1 in L2 reading should be made. These challenges from PUSs are also bound to be their teachers' future efforts.

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