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# Translanguaging in Dual Language Bilingual Education: A Blueprint for Planning Units of Study



Cristian R. Solorza  
Gladys Y. Aponte  
Tess Leverenz  
Timothy Becker  
Bianca Frias

*Special Contribution by Ofelia García & María Teresa Sánchez*

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## Chapter 2:

# TRANSLANGUAGING AND DUAL LANGUAGE BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A BLUEPRINT FOR PLANNING UNITS OF STUDY

**Ofelia García**  
**Cristian R. Solorza**  
**María Teresa Sánchez**

## **Introduction**

Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) classrooms are known for their strict language allocation policies, with the two languages assigned to different spaces, times, subjects or teachers. The question then becomes, does translanguaging have a role in dual language bilingual education? The answer is a resounding Yes; and the units of study included here, developed by Cristian Solorza and his team (Gladys Y. Aponte, Timothy Becker, Tess Leverenz, Bianca Frias) are a blueprint for how to do it.

Before we go over the ways in which translanguaging theory has been incorporated into the units of study that follow, it is important to briefly outline why it is important to find a place for translanguaging within DLBE. Translanguaging theory purports that speakers develop their bilingualism only by incorporating new linguistic features into their existing repertoire. Thus, bilinguals do not simply “add” an autonomous language system that is external and separate —English, Spanish, French or any other named language. Instead, bilingualism is dynamic, as speakers *appropriate* new features into their single linguistic system and learn to selectively use different features from their own repertoire to communicate. Bilingual students are constantly negotiating their complex and dynamic language repertoire to adjust to the learning situation at hand, at times suppressing certain features, and other times leveraging them. But bilingual learners’ language repertoire is always available to them to make meaning and to learn, even when faced with tasks that ask them to perform in one language or another. That is, translanguaging theory takes into account the importance of performances by bilingual students in single named languages (the external perspective on language), while privileging the complex and dynamic language repertoire of the bilingual child (the internal perspective).

Because academic discourse requires an audience, all academic inquiry and learning is inherently developed in a social context. Teachers then must develop their students’ sense of audience. For bilingual students, this audience is sometimes monolingual and requires monolingual performances, and yet, other times, the audience is bilingual. The use of what some may view as “informal” bilingual practices and/or language varieties needs to be included as an integral and legitimate part of academic discourse, for it reflects an audience that is often left out of the school context. Translanguaging theory

plays a critical role in creating opportunities for bilingual students to use all of their linguistic resources, whether or not they are socially “acceptable” within specific academic learning contexts, to communicate with a bilingual audience, as well as to deepen their learning.

In summary, translanguaging in DLBE supports the importance of allocating the two languages to separate times, spaces, subjects or people so that emergent bilingual students use only one language, or said another way, employ only some of the features in their repertoire. But in addition, translanguaging in DLBE also opens up opportunities for students to use all the features of their linguistic repertoire in strategic ways to deepen their understandings and develop their linguistic performances.

In the separate allocation of two languages in DLBE, translanguaging offers two types of openings: the translanguaging ring and a translanguaging space. We first describe below these two types of openings — breaches in the strict language allocation policy of DLBE programs. The following section then explains how to plan units of study that incorporate these two openings.

## **Translanguaging: Openings in Dual Language Bilingual Education**

### ***Translanguaging Ring***

Students in DLBE classrooms are very different — some perform with ease in all modes (speaking, reading, writing) in both languages. But most students’ linguistic performances are very different, with some speaking better than they write, others reading better than they speak, and so on. And because bilinguals are never balanced, their performances in one or the other language are never quite the same. Students in DLBE classrooms are often expected to perform as monolingual speakers in each language space, using the language features that match the academic context. And they are often left to figure out the sociolinguistic and academic expectations within each language space on their own.

Dual language bilingual teachers who take up translanguaging theory understand how each child negotiates and uses their linguistic resources in different language spaces. For teachers, this awareness can only develop through deliberate and consistent assessment of individual students’ language practices in different contexts. Armed with these understandings of the language use of individual children, teachers can then differentiate, design learning experiences, and find instructional material that supports each child as needed. These teachers then build around each child what we call a translanguaging ring that the child can use (or not) for different tasks and when performing in one or the other language. This translanguaging ring serves as the child’s

lifesaver when immersed in a language in which they still cannot perform without assistance.

It is important, however, for DLBE teachers to know when to supply the translanguaging ring and when to remove it so that the child can swim by themselves. The units of study included here show how individual students are assisted by the translanguaging rings that teachers supply. These translanguaging rings can consist of differentiated instructional material, peer support, technology support, and other scaffolding mechanisms. Examples will be given in the units of study section below. Translanguaging in this case acts as a temporary scaffold until the emergent bilingual student gains the confidence to perform without it. Although the translanguaging rings are scaffold mechanisms, they are also transformative for the emergent bilingual children, giving them possibilities to learn and engage meaningfully and authentically with the lesson.

### ***Translanguaging Space***

Despite the separate spaces for performances in two separate languages, bilingual students must also be given opportunities to work within an instructional space where their fluid language practices are leveraged for greater understanding and learning of their named languages, as well as to legitimize the translanguaging practices of bilingual communities. To do this, DLBE teachers who take up translanguaging theory must decide how often to enact a classroom translanguaging space and for what purposes.

Students in traditional DLBE classrooms where languages are kept separate are seldom given the opportunity to compare and contrast the language features and discourse structures of their named languages, or the ways in which they are used. The practice of bringing the languages together for critical linguistic analysis is important because it enhances students' metalinguistic awareness and makes them better language users. Students are then able to assess how, when and why they use certain features of their language repertoire for different purposes. Students become aware of cognates, as well as false friends. They become better at metalinguistic reflection — *What is the word or phrase in Spanish or Chinese or French for the English? Are the messages different or the same? Why is it said differently?* In general, they become better sociolinguists.

In addition, despite the separate spaces for performances in two languages, bilingual students must also be given opportunities to perform academically using their entire language repertoire. Bilingual students must experience how published bilingual authors often use different language features of their repertoire to deepen the meaning of a story, to make it culturally sustaining, to give voice to different

characters, to express different realities. Bilingual students must also be encouraged to write stories and skits that reflect their full language repertoire to portray different voices. In so doing, a classroom translanguaging space offers the possibility of transforming the ways in which society and schools view the language practices of bilingual communities and children. The dynamic bilingualism of bilingual communities is often socially stigmatized and deemed inappropriate for official or schooling purposes, communicating to the children that their language use is not legitimate or valued. A classroom translanguaging space constructs a different sociolinguistic reality, transforming the ways in which bilingual practices are held, and acknowledging them as appropriate for academic purposes.

Translanguaging in this case is not temporary; it is not a simple lifesaver ring for individual children that can be removed when it is no longer necessary. Instead translanguaging is transformative, enabling the child's criticality, creativity, and multilingual awareness to emerge, and enabling a bilingual academic sociolinguistic reality. We argue that this use of translanguaging is essential in a DLBE program where students must develop strong bilingual identities that are not truncated or valued differently.

### ***A Blueprint for Planning Units of Study in DLBE with Translanguaging***

The units of study developed by Solorza and his team (Gladys Y. Aponte, Timothy Becker, Bianca Frias, and Tess Leverenz) are organized to incorporate both aspects of translanguaging — the external perspective of developing two languages, and the internal perspective of building the bilingual students' single language repertoire. They serve as a blueprint on how to organize instruction in DLBE programs that take up translanguaging theory.

The five components of the units of study with translanguaging identified below are appropriate for all types of DLBE programs:

1. Translanguaging classroom-community development
2. Translanguaging pre-assessment
3. Translanguaging rings
4. Translanguaging spaces
5. Culminating project/assessment

Components 1 and 2 consist of the preparation needed to set up the translanguaging rings and to create the translanguaging space. Component 3 and 4 (translanguaging ring and translanguaging space) are the actual openings created through a translanguaging design and introduced above. Finally, component 5 assesses the bilingual students' summative performances in the Unit of Study. Figure 2.1 outlines the components of the units of study, which we further describe below.

**Figure 2.1. Components of the Unit of Study in DLBE with translanguageing**

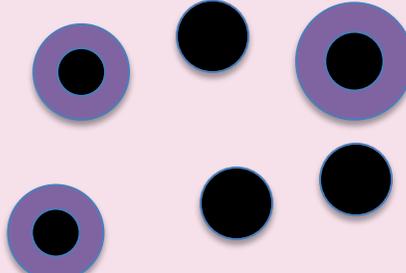
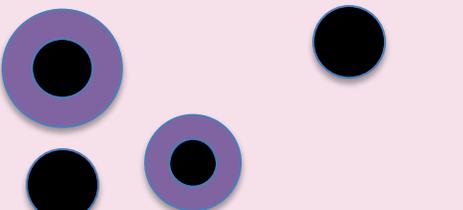
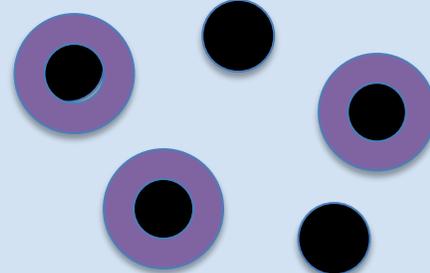
Component	LOTE Space (e.g. Spanish)	ENGLISH Space
1	Translanguageing Classroom-Community Development	
2	Translanguageing Pre-assessment	
3	<p data-bbox="467 464 899 569">Instruction &amp; assessment in LOTE with <i>Translanguageing Rings</i> for individual children<sup>4</sup></p> 	<p data-bbox="963 464 1411 569">Instruction &amp; assessment in English with <i>Translanguageing Rings</i> for individual children</p> 
4	Translanguageing Spaces (as needed)	
		
5	Culminating Project/Assessment	

Figure 2.1 demonstrates the two separate language spaces used in DLBE in which the LOTE is represented in red and English in blue. The mix of blue and red create the purple translanguageing spaces where both languages are used as resources. Children are depicted as circles. Those that have been assessed as needing translanguageing supports are depicted with rings. Note that the children needing translanguageing rings in the LOTE are not necessarily the same as those needing rings in English and that depending on the task, the children needing translanguageing rings also change. The culminating project can be in the LOTE, in English, or in both languages depending on the goals of the unit final assessment.

## **1. *Translanguaging Classroom-Community Development***

DLBE teachers who take up translanguaging theory envision a classroom community where students feel confident using their entire linguistic repertoire while also developing agency to negotiate and decide upon which language features serve their communicative and learning purposes best. But this classroom community is not a given; rather it has to be carefully built by the teacher. This is most important since bilingual students learn very early that their language practices are not welcomed in school, and that their translanguaging practices are not appreciated even in DLBE classrooms that are supposed to support them. Thus, in order to have students leverage translanguaging, teachers need to develop a sense of classroom community that supports these practices. That is the reason why the units of study in DLBE with translanguaging start with the community development piece. For example, in their unit, Gladys Y. Aponte and Timothy Becker pay attention to first developing students' positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity and translanguaging. They do so by establishing consistent classroom routines and providing students with instructional and technological material, as well as peer groups that support translanguaging practices.

In developing a translanguaging classroom community, teachers clearly describe their expectations for interacting with language and content during instructional spaces designated for English, those designated for the LOTE, and those designated as a translanguaging space. As students get used to the fact that translanguaging practices are allowed and appreciated at times and for specific purposes, there is a sense of a classroom community that truly supports different linguistic practices.

## **2. *Translanguaging Pre-Unit Assessment***

Bilingual teachers need to be able to assess students' language performances holistically, both in English and in the language other than English. They need to know, for example, what vocabulary the child knows in English and what they know in Spanish, how the child reads and writes in one language or the other. In order to assess the child's ability in both languages, the Units start by giving students the freedom to perform using their entire language repertoire. The teacher then gets a picture of how well the child understands the content of the lesson, regardless of whether he or she can perform in one language or the other. Additionally, the teacher then starts to holistically understand the linguistic potential of the child. Is the student a strong speaker? A competent finder of text-based evidence? Does the student make relevant inferences from reading? Can the student construct an argumentative text? Does the student know the vocabulary required for the content of the lesson and the discipline? In which language or language variety do they know it?

Once the teacher ascertains what the child knows in one language or the other, instruction (and assessment) in the separate English space and LOTE space is ready to start. The teacher then begins the Unit with holistic understandings of the child's

language repertoire and the ways in which s/he uses it for academic tasks. For example, at the beginning of their 4<sup>th</sup> grade unit on the Lenape and the Haudenosaunee, Gladys Y. Aponte and Timothy Becker ask their students to respond to a series of homework prompts in Spanish, the language of the lesson, but encourage them to use English words and phrases as needed. The next day, during a whole group share the teacher adds her students' understandings to a bilingual chart; Spanish words are written in red, whereas English words are noted in blue. This practice not only embraces students' linguistic resources but it also provides the teacher with access to the Spanish and English words, phrases, and ideas students know and use. This increased awareness of content and language is necessary for the next step in the Unit design: the translanguaging rings for individual children.

### ***3. Translanguaging Rings***

During this time in the unit design, instruction takes place in either English or the LOTE, depending on the language allocation. But armed with the pre-unit assessments, teachers can then supply translanguaging rings by differentiating and designing learning experiences and language reference materials that support each child's comprehension and participation in the lesson. These translanguaging rings are supplied for specific tasks and languages. For example, a child who needs translanguaging as scaffold in English might not need it in the LOTE. And a student who is truly new to the language may first be supplied with a translanguaging ring, which then is taken away after their performance becomes more experienced. For example, in the English day/week, a student may be given a book in the LOTE to interact with new content and asked to use a bilingual dictionary to label a few ideas in English. That is, the translanguaging ring is differentiated for each student within each language-specific space depending on the task s/he is performing and their specific language needs. The translanguaging ring comes off or on because instruction and assessment are intertwined, and the teacher is always closely observing how students use language and what they can do within each language space.

### ***4. Translanguaging Space***

Designated translanguaging spaces in DLBE allows students the freedom to use any feature of their linguistic repertoire. This provides a space where students can transform and recompose their linguistic and content learning, as well as gives teachers an opportunity to assess students' academic performances. For example, because paired biliteracy has been shown to be of more consequence than sequential biliteracy, during lessons in the translanguaging space students are given the freedom to write stories and skits using their entire language repertoire authentically, to read in any language they wish, or to research the topic of the lesson using the many languages of the Internet.

The teacher uses this space to demonstrate to bilingual students that the way in which they use language at home and in their communities can be represented also in school,

without the stigma that it sometimes has. For example, teachers discuss words and phrases that cannot be adequately translated because they express practices unique to their home and community. These conversations develop metalinguistic understanding while empowering students to use their diverse language practices deliberately when speaking and writing.

In short, this translanguaging space is used to validate students' bilingual practices and bilingual identities, and to work against the linguistic hierarchy that positions English as more valuable than the LOTE, and languaging solely in one language as more valid than the fluid bilingual use characteristic of translanguaging. In this free and equitable space, bilingual students are allowed to speak in ways that reflect their bilingual lives, to reflect on the differences between one language and another, as well as on the sociopolitical context that creates the differences and the hierarchies. Teachers must ensure they have collected a rich source of instructional and reference materials that represent the students' entire language repertoire.

### ***5. Culminating Project/Assessment***

Depending on the teacher's objectives and goals for the Unit of Study, the culminating project can be in one or both named languages. If the goal of the final project is to assess students' linguistic competence in one language, then teachers must acknowledge that students are using a smaller portion of their linguistic repertoire. However, it is important for teachers to keep in mind that in order to gain a fuller understanding of what students know, one must provide assessments in the other language as well, or design bilingual culminating projects. Regardless of the language of instruction, students must be given the freedom to access their entire linguistic repertoire within translanguaging spaces or by providing translanguaging rings.

The units of study provide two examples of culminating projects: one that asks students to perform bilingually and one that requires the use of one specific language. In the 1<sup>st</sup> grade culminating project, students share their bilingual family study with their own diverse families, establishing a natural environment for students to use their linguistic repertoire flexibly based on specific audience members. In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade culminating project, students write a comparative essay in only one language. However, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers still allow students to access their full linguistic repertoire by creating deliberate translanguaging spaces within the unit and by differentiating with translanguaging rings.

### **Conclusion**

The units of study give us a blueprint for what might be done in DLBE classrooms so as to develop the bilingualism and biliteracy of all students, regardless of their initial language background and profiles. The blueprint preserves the traditional space for each of the named languages, while establishing translanguaging spaces for students to

access their full linguistic repertoire, as well as creating differentiated translanguaging rings for students needing instructional and linguistic support in one or both languages. Translanguaging is a theory that both acknowledges the external existence of languages, as used in schools, as well as the internal existence of the bilingual repertoire of the child.

