

Translingual Approach to Teaching Writing and Corrective Feedback

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Abstract

Translingualism is essential to observe the ways that writer choose while writing and the reasons writers use the language in a certain way. Having a translingual perspective could give writing instructors an opportunity to adopt a more comprehensive pedagogy to appreciate linguistic diversity in writing. It is essential to encourage students to cross their boundaries to provide them various opportunities in writing. The form of “correct” is reevaluated by translingualism, as it takes different aspects into account while writing and the purpose is to help students find their own voice in academic writing.

Keywords: *Translingualism, Feedback, Writing Pedagogies, Corrective Feedback*

İngilizce Yazma Dersinde Translingual Yaklaşım ve Yazı Düzeltme Geri Bildirimleri

Öz

Yazarın yazı yazarken seçtiği yolları gözlemlemek ve dili belli bir şekilde kullanma sebeplerini anlamak için translingualism önemlidir. Translingual bir perspektif yazma dersi hocalarının yazmada dilbilimsel farklılıkları ve çeşitlilikleri takdir edebilmesi için uygun bir peagoji izlemesine yardımcı olur. Öğrencileri yazarken sınırlarını aşmaları için teşvik etmek ve yazmada farklı fırsatlar oluşturmak önem arz eder. Translingual terimi ile “doğru”

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kabul edilen formlar yeniden gözden geçirilir ve dilde gramer dışında da var olan çeşitli ve farklı yanlar da ele alınarak öğrencilerin kendi seslerini bulmaları hedeflenir

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Translingualism, Yazma Dersinde Geribildirim, Yazma*

Introduction

The idea that Prep-School classrooms consist of students with similar backgrounds is far from reality. Especially with international students, it is possible to claim that prep-classes now more than ever involve students with different linguistic backgrounds and literary skills. Globalization, migration, digital communication and transnational relations (Canagarajah, 2013: 41) as contributing factors to this phenomenon affect the way people communicate, either by speaking or writing or to a great extent. However, as much as this change brings numerous positive outcomes with it in terms of diversity, it also may cause some problems, as well. Students learn to build different ways and expressions to communicate either in their mother tongue or in another language or dialect outside of the classroom to cope up with the new demands of the changing world.

In our diverse classroom, we might have students with strong literacy skills in their first language but may not be able to transfer those into their L2 English. In almost every class, it is quite possible to observe some students who can understand the messages being conveyed in the target language but cannot produce the same level of efficiency themselves; neither in the spoken or the written discourse. Thus, assuming that students start learning English with no prior experience or knowledge would be a huge mistake, yet we still continue to see such practices. These students are already autonomous in another language or they already know English to some degree – either as a result of their educational background or to external resources such as media and the internet. If teachers ignore this possibility and consider students in their even beginner classes as ones with no-English by default, they also ignore the fact that these students might bring “valid and valuable Englishes that would help teachers to teach effectively” (Jain, 2014: 492). To this end, it is highly recommended that we tap on to their antecedent knowledge and use their resources to their- and our- advantage.

The term translingualism means operating across languages. It is like interaction of social communities. Translingualism redefines the notions of fluency, proficiency and even competence (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 600). It is not enough to join a speech community alone; students should learn to be relevant in different contexts. Thus, rather than focusing on correctness, we should perceive “error” as the learner’s active negotiation and exploration of choices and possibilities (Canagarajah, 2006: 593). This approach is important not to miss “the opportunity to validate their students’ linguistic identities, learn from the linguistic diversity in the classroom (Jain, 2014: 492).

In this paper, the aim is to define the term translingualism and discuss what exactly it entails within writing instruction. The purpose is not to create something new. English is already diverse but sometimes even this diversity may lead to certain different limitations. Although there is not sample research on the practical level of implementing this approach, we try to offer some ideas as to the use of translingualism in teaching in diverse contexts. Finally, some examples of successful pedagogical implications in an attempt to show how our stories could be narrated differently with translingualism is shared.

English-Only Policies vs. Translingualism in Efl Contexts

As a common practice in EFL contexts, teachers make students believe that they cannot use their L1 in the classroom to produce something in English-even in the brainstorming phase, and thereby make the existing knowledge invalid. What is missed in doing so is that such unreal assumptions lead loss of voice (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000: 158). After a while, students lose their interest in creating new ideas; instead they start using grammar and vocabulary they are familiar with and this may lead students to be not productive enough even though they have basic background information about the content. Since they are also not allowed to use their L1 literacy backgrounds, they tend to not take risks as much in their L2, either. Since there is no top-down movement while using L2 in writing; they require a transition phase between languages (Jain, 2014: 501). Since reliance on L1 in early stages of writing and that students can move towards more L2 as they progress (Fu, 2009: 6), it is important to move beyond English-only policies where Standard English is the only variation that is assumed to be the norm and that there is no room for L1 use or code-switching in writing.

Therefore, it is argued that differences in a language cannot always be seen as limits but they also can be regarded as new sources to produce meaning (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 304). This will require instructors to embrace a more inclusive approach towards teaching language. There is a recent term seen within the literature called *translingual approach*. This approach is emerging from the concept of World Englishes, which refers to the different varieties of English and creoles based on English developed in different parts of the world for different purposes; and the classrooms that consist of varying Englishes. Translingualism in composition studies calls for attention to what writers do with the language. So, having a translingual perspective could give writing instructors an opportunity to adopt a more comprehensive pedagogy that acknowledges and appreciates linguistic diversity in writing. Encouraging student writers to cross linguistic boundaries through translingual writing pedagogies could provide them with different opportunities to share their stories about language and literacy. One way of creating this pedagogical space – especially for pre-school instructors – is to understand and explore the pedagogical benefits of translingualism, and to see variations in language as resources rather than possible problems that need to be ‘corrected’ to fit the rules and conventions of Standard English and academic writing.

We acknowledge that academic writing is a writing style that has its own boundaries in order for one to be able to perfectly express ideas or facts about a certain issue. However, we argue that it should not be the only form of writing we teach. Languages are mobile so they can be negotiable. Even if we may not be aware of it, even as monolinguals, we have diverse and broad repertoire of linguistic resources that have the capacity to be used creatively for self-expression and to be heard in a range of social, cultural and situational positions. We have our unique voices to tell our stories in the same sense our students have their own ways to write their stories but unless we allow them to be themselves, to be freely make use of their writer identities rich with all the linguistic varieties, all we are going to hear will be the single version of a story we are imposing on them that we call ‘the right way’. Differences in a language is inevitable, so it is possible to use these differences to our advantage while writing or teaching writing. Teachers should consider the varieties students bring to the classroom knowing the fact that “language learners are also language users and creators” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 307). With

different types of writing, students can be taught to reflect their thoughts in clear and certain structures by conforming to the conventions of different genres and by taking into consideration of the different writing situations.

Kaplan in his traditional approach to Constrictive Rhetoric suggests that “each language or culture has rhetorical conventions that are unique to itself; and the rhetorical conventions of students’ L1 interfere with their ESL writing” (Kubota & Lehnerb, 2004: 10). For a student, transferring an idea from a language (like Turkish or Arabic) that uses metaphors, similes and any other kind of language art or ‘fancy’ language to express their feelings in academic writing in English is usually not accepted or easily crossed out as it does not fall under the rhetoric of English while it could be highly appreciated in the language where the idea comes from. This is especially more evident in cases if/when the student is only exposed to 5-paragraph-essay as the norm for English academic writing, which is heavily loaded with academic language, void from emotions or the rhetorical moves of other language(s). This singularity of the way in which ideas are presented on a linear fashion ignores all the other possibilities of how to present one’s own ideas in their own unique way and forces them to make peace with the ‘imported’ ways of writing from the inner circle or the center countries that decide the ways of knowledge construction and create all the norms of use of language without taking into account the specific contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language, in the periphery, where the needs of the students are not the same as the ones in the center (Canagarajah, 2013: 43).

To this end, students who start studying in an English-medium university have to unlearn almost 12 years of writing education in their L1, which rewards the rhetorical implementations on the writing of the languages at their disposal, to fit the expectations of the instructors or the university writing program, or the English language rhetoric, which may not match with their prior experiences. With the introduction of L2 English rhetoric, students start a brand new procedure, and unfortunately do so with a conflicting turn, avoiding individual voices, individual styles and individual narratives. With or without foreign students in the classroom, it is a known fact that a classroom has different students with different backgrounds and thinking ways. In such contexts where diversity shows itself not only in terms of race, ethnicity, or gender, but also in terms of

linguistic varieties, teaching writing to express oneself in their unique ways becomes relatively important. The use of Standard Written English (SWE) cannot be the only norm to take for granted in classrooms of such diversity, so we should move beyond the English-only policies in teaching English to reach all students. In that sense, it is important to argue the benefits of implementing a more inclusive approach to teaching writing in prep-school classes; in other words, translingualism (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 309).

Depending on the concepts of effectiveness, efficiency and efficacy as vital elements for language learning, we should turn to new approaches that would help both teachers and learners of a language; but especially for language learners so that they can clearly express themselves. Translingualism focuses on World Englishes; however, it can apply to prep-classes in Turkey, as well. As students use background information which cannot be separated as terms and phrases or rules, they can apply simple rules of their language(s) and sometimes use similar terms/explanation which we comment on their papers saying ‘It sounds Turkish’.

Translingualism

English has had different interactions with different languages depending on the international relations of countries (Jain, 2014: 493). These relations affected the interaction of languages as well and created different models of Englishes like World Englishes (WE), International English (EIL), and English as Lingua Franca (ELF). Those models prove that throughout its history, English has become a hybrid language. However, these are different forms having different systems; and it is not translingualism (Jain, 2014: 494). Therefore, they have their own limitations. Even these varieties limit the language under certain definitions.

In an era of globalization where languages are in constant contact, being native or non-native is not important anymore. What is important is being able to use the language accurately and being understood. Translingual approach focuses on the fluidity of linguistic features within one or among more languages. It looks at language usage as moving between different ways of expression and how they intermingle. It is the act of building a bridge among all linguistic features a person has or can have. It is also interested in what users of a language is doing with the language(s) they

have and more importantly why they are doing them. So, translingual writers are authors who can express themselves in multiple verbal systems (Kellman, 1996: 164). It could be only in one language they know, or it could include all the systems they are familiar with in all languages they own. Translingual literacy in that sense, looks at the understanding of production, circulation, and reception of texts that are always mobile; that draw from diverse languages, symbol systems, and modalities of communication; and that involve inter-community negotiations (Canagarajah, 2013: 52). Rather than developing mastery in a single “target language,” it is better for students to try for competence in a repertoire of codes and discourses (Canagarajah, 2006: 593).

Supporters of the use of translingualism focus on the fluidity of language systems, thoroughly eschewing concepts such as “Standard Written English” and unaccented speech. Language differences in writing or spoken language is inevitable. Most people speak or write in more than one language and/or use more than one variation of their languages, which are in themselves already are changing as they interact with each other, as mentioned before. So, with the concept of World Englishes, it seems odd to still advocate for the use of Standard English and expect students to conform to this unrealistic language uniformity by excluding other languages and variations. That is why, it is urgent to move away from the traditional approaches to teaching writing in prep-schools which assume that heterogeneity in language impedes communication and meaning (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 310) but look for the alternative paradigm with a more comprehensive perspective.

This would improve self-impression abilities and avoid possible future problems regarding language use as well as self-confidence and risk-taking. For an effective communication, they have the freedom to write across diverse norms and codes in response to specific context and purposes (Canagarajah, 2013: 594).

So, to summarize, translingualism “(1) acknowledges the power of all language users to use their linguistic resources for specific purposes, (2) recognizes the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within

the United States and globally, (3) opposes the English-only policy and the expectations it bears that are limiting writers” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 305).

Studies and Pedagogical Implications

There is growing research in the field of cross-cultural writing and applied linguistics about translingualism and its impacts on students’ development. Translingual orientation in college writing contexts emerged as a response to Standard Written English ideology which neglects students’ linguistic and discursive resources. There are so many levels that SWE neglects the differences between World Englishes and within the language itself in terms of different practices being considered as “correct” or “acceptable, the value of ordinary language users and the role of readers’ response (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011: 306).

Canagarajah provides ways of accommodating diverse varieties of English in academic writing. He suggests a coalition among disparate social groups and disciplinary circles and diverse institutions towards an acceptance of hybrid texts (2006: 612). He also discusses the pedagogical benefits of teaching students to negotiate their rhetorical purposes based on discursive concerns: their intentions, the context, and the assumptions of readers and writers (Canagarajah, 2006: 611). This type of critical discussions enables students to develop metalinguistic awareness in their writing. ‘Not every instance of nonstandard usage by a student is an unwitting error; sometimes it is an active choice motivated by important cultural and ideological considerations’ (Canagarajah, 2006: 609)

Another example to consider is Seloni’s work (2014: 83). In her research study, Seloni looked at the thesis writing process of a multilingual writer drawing from research in translingualism and cultural historical activity theory. Her textographic analysis showed that the multicompetent writer’s disciplinary writing was informed by various linguistic and rhetorical resources, some of which were utilized during his extra-disciplinary writing in the form of creation of map or a visual annotated bibliography, which might be considered non-standard or uncommon within the conventions of thesis writing. Her study made it clear that border between English and other languages (in this case it was Spanish but it could easily be regarded as using a variation of English as well) along with pictorial language are

blurred with multilingual writers who compose texts in their unique ways and at times crossing boundaries of style, language(s), and concepts in their field of study.

Canagarajah shows an example for a variation on English, as well. In his study (2013: 498-499) students in India change the usage of in-on. While writing, they seem to be constantly writing “I’m *in* the bus”. Although teachers keep correcting students, this usage does not seem to change. Then students are asked why they use this preposition, they explain that as India is a crowded country it is quite normal for anyone to be literally “*on* the bus”. Therefore, students use ‘in’ to state exactly where they are (Global Englishes). In this particular case, it is not necessary and even confusing to use the right preposition. As readers, by negotiating the purposes of the writers, the meaning is made mutually and students are able to use *their* Englishes.

Translingualism understands the fact that languages are living organisms and they might be in relation with each other. The way languages are used differently cannot always be considered wrong. As mentioned earlier, not all linguistic or textual non-standard usages are errors to be corrected but they could be purposeful usages that need to be negotiated with the writer. This would help our students to have balance between the setting that they learn and the context that they use regularly. For example, teachers do not have to correct the phrase “I work from zero” to mean working from scratch as the meaning is clear the minute we ask the student what they want to say, and this still holds true even if we do not know the first languages of the students because the key is in opening a line of negotiation. Our students need to be reminded to go beyond the boxed/limited/pre-defined process of text construction to include their unique ways in writing. So, instead of correcting the student, a teacher might ask if there are other alternatives or not or why exactly they chose to use that specific expression in that specific context and if it makes sense to the writer, and then the reader, it can be kept the way it is, but if it does not, alternative ways can be negotiated together.

The examples here show us that authors are gaining their voice and agency despite the rhetorical conventions of academic writing by skillfully inserting their preferred strategies into the text (Canagarajah 2006: 591). With

translingual practice, writers are not simply conditioned by their language and culture, but they bring their agency as they creatively and strategically “shuttle between discourses to achieve their communicative objectives” (Canagarajah, 2006: 591). For example, meshing diverse languages can result in unconventional idioms, word choices, and grammatical structures (Canagarajah, 2013: 498-500) as we see in the India example. In our case, this is what we mean when we warn students as they sound “too Turkish” in their essays, as well.

What this all means for us, prep-school instructors whose aim is to prepare students for the writings they will engage in their various disciplines in English is that when multilingual, or better say, *multicompetent* translingual writers are not boxed in by narrow terms linguistically and/or culturally, they are reshaped as writers who are engaged in movements across linguistic systems where genres, languages, disciplines, and theories are constantly hybridized, and they can find *their* ways of using English.

Conclusion

Whatever the students are writing, they are writing for a reason; they are not writing for us but for themselves- something we tend to forget sometimes. If they are using a non-standard word or a phrase, what does it mean for that student, for us as teachers, and for that context? These are the types of questions we should be asking ourselves in order to understand the complexity of languages they use.

Texts can be considered as living-social contexts, and so they should be interactive. Therefore, students should be allowed to use all the linguistic literacy skills they have. It is essential to guide students to use their language(s) properly; however, when providing feedback, what is our responsibility? As writing teachers, it is our responsibility to prepare students for various writing settings and help them find their own voices to navigate among them. Our primary aim, then, should be to raise students’ awareness of the norms of the target English in the classroom (Jain, 2014: 508) but still keep in mind the possibilities lying ahead in finding their own way to express themselves in different writing situations and in different genres. To achieve this, there are some techniques that we can apply, especially in regards to providing feedback.

With their unique ways of expression, students can reveal their identities, values, interests, and multicompetences in their writing, which actually shows their linguistic diversity. Sometimes, students might directly translate a Turkish idiom into English. A student writing “I worked like a donkey” do not have to be corrected as “I did the donkey work”. There is not a big difference in meaning, and by avoiding such over-corrections, students will not feel like they are always corrected and their self-confidence in using English is not damaged, which will in turn influence their risk-taking in using the L2 in other contexts as well.

As translanguaging is slightly new to implement, especially in EFL contexts, it is very important to understand the common mistakes and to which extent we need to accept a certain usage as error or not. To be better able to see the greater implication, there is further research to be done. To respond and react properly, it is important to understand the audience. There might be some critics considering the extent of this correcting-not correcting process. However, as teachers, we have basic background knowledge about our students and their styles, so it is better to decide what is wrong or right to do and try to collect data about the issue to set as an example for our local contexts. It might not be easy to create a common language, but if it was, we could have created another model of English which would still limit the language of a specific person as each individual has their own rhetoric which could be different from the rhetoric of their languages or their cultures.

Even though translanguaging is supported in writing instruction, there is not much evidence to offer the right implementation in prep-classes in Turkey. The approach is missing practices in Turkey and needs to be implemented to improve especially to encourage better and effective feedback by instructors. What the instructors regard as problematic backgrounds can actually turn into a positive outcome that can help students become better writers especially in academic writing. There might be a classroom full of students with the same mother tongue but different backgrounds or with different languages and similar literacy. How we can respond to students’ papers is yet to be analyzed. Therefore, implementations of translanguaging in prep-schools should be discussed to see if it helps students to build better writing skills.

Resources

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