

(Trans)languaging-for-learning in the South: Innovating with teachers



Authors:

Carolyn McKinney¹ 
Xolisa Guzula¹ 

Affiliations:

¹School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Carolyn McKinney,
carolyn.mckinney@uct.ac.za

How to cite this article:

McKinney, C. & Guzula, X., 2024, '(Trans)languaging-for-learning in the South: Innovating with teachers', *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a525. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.525>

Copyright:

© 2024. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Distinct in South Africa, and many other post-colonial contexts of the Global South, is that the languages spoken by the majority are minoritised and excluded from education. Decades of research in South Africa and other post-colonial contexts has demonstrated the challenges of teaching and learning through an unfamiliar language, in our case English, for teachers and learners (McKinney 2017). This research has made clear that we cannot continue with monolingual English Language of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LOLTA) if we are to give learners meaningful access to quality education.

Research has also shown how, faced with learners' lack of understanding of English textbooks and assessments, teachers use bi/multilingual strategies in innovative ways, which include drawing on the resources of learners' home languages as well as English, or translanguaging (TL), in order to make lesson content meaningful for their learners (e.g. Probyn 2015). However, most research documents practices in which teachers are not supported in their use of bilingual strategies, and all learning materials remain monolingual. We know that it is mainly teachers (rather than learners) who use TL and mainly in their talk, or *oral* classroom discourse. Mostly absent in the existing research is evidence of how bi/multilingual strategies, including TL, might be used in written form, and for literacy activities, whether in formal learning materials, or board work and learners' notes (see Guzula 2022 for an exception).

This special collection of *Reading & Writing* focuses on the use of language, or languaging, and in particular using more than one language, or TL, in order to support learning and literacy development in Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase classrooms that officially use English as the LOLTA. The articles present research on interventions with teachers: a pre-service science teacher education course, a bilingual learning materials project with Grade 4 Science teachers, and four of the six articles arise from the Zenex-funded Languaging-for-Learning (L4L) intervention in 10 schools in the Western Cape. The articles pay particular attention to what can be achieved when researchers and teachers of science, mathematics and English as First Additional Language (FAL) work together to design and implement innovative bi/multilingual teaching strategies.

García and Wei (2014) write about established and adaptive TL spaces. In an established TL space, TL is officially supported and consciously included in planning classroom activities and assessment. Adaptive TL spaces are those where TL is not officially supported, but is nevertheless covertly used by teachers and learners to overcome the limitations of an unfamiliar LOLTA. Many southern post-colonial classrooms have been described as adaptive TL spaces. The articles in this collection, including those from the L4L project, describe spaces somewhat in between adaptive and established TL spaces. While the L4L programme explicitly legitimated and encouraged TL strategies, with workshops and in-classroom support provided to teachers to use TL strategies, not all principals and provincial education department officials supported the practice. Significantly, the full potential of pedagogical TL was limited by official assessments remaining monolingual English. This kind of space which includes both resistance to and embracing of bi/multilingual languaging is likely to be common in educational contexts that have been shaped for so long by powerful monolingual and Anglonormative ideologies. Such colonial ideologies erroneously position monolingualism rather than bi/multilingualism as a norm, with Anglonormativity describing the expectation that all learners will be or should be proficient in English, and positioning them as deficient if they are not (McKinney 2017).

The Department of Basic Education's (DBE) plans to formally implement Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE) incrementally from Grade 4 in 2025 are an exciting

Note: Special Collection - (Trans)languaging-for-learning in the South. This manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled '(Trans)languaging-for-learning in the South: innovating with teachers' under the expert guidance of guest editors Prof. Carolyn McKinney and Dr Xolisa Guzula.

development, and create an urgent need for sharing of research on bi/multilingual teaching and learning strategies as well as on the potential barriers to successful implementation. Findings from the articles in this special collection contribute towards a repertoire of bi/multilingual pedagogical strategies. Collectively the research articles demonstrate that a crucial first step in working to implement productive bi/multilingual strategies in the classroom is to challenge and change deeply held assumptions and beliefs about African languages as undeveloped, and/or not suitable for use in formal education, including schooling. This involves a process of ‘unlearning’ monolingual and Anglonormative language ideologies. But the articles also provide hope that these damaging beliefs can be challenged and changed, using multilingual pedagogies, so that all children might have a better opportunity to be successful learners. Finally, they demonstrate that use of African languages in written texts not only provides a powerful way of developing learners’ literacy, but also of legitimising African languages in formal education, especially in mathematics, science and English.

The articles in this special collection are:

- (Trans)languaging-for-learning: A perspective from the South (McKinney & Tyler 2024)
- Crossing the text frontier: Teachers resisting African language texts for learning (Tyler & McKinney 2024)
- Multilingual literacies for learning: Shifting ideologies, developing praxis (Probyn 2024)
- Crossing the frontier from oral to written translanguaging for epistemic access in natural science (Abdulatief & Guzula 2024)
- Supporting teacher dispositions towards translanguaging-for-learning in a Grade 9 mathematics classroom (Guzula & Abdulatief 2024)
- Translanguaging for learning in selected English First Additional Language secondary school classrooms (Hendricks & Xeketwana 2024).

References

- Abdulatief, S. & Guzula, X., 2024, ‘Crossing the frontier from oral to written translanguaging for epistemic access in natural science’, *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a507. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.507>
- García, O. & Wei, L., 2014, *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Guzula, X., 2022, ‘De/coloniality in South African Language in education policy: Resisting the marginalisation of African language speaking children’, in C. McKinney & P. Christie (eds.), *Decoloniality, language & literacy: Conversations with teacher educators*, pp. 23–45, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.
- Guzula, X. & Abdulatief, S., 2024, ‘Supporting teacher dispositions towards translanguaging-for-learning in a Grade 9 mathematics classroom’, *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a503. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.503>
- Hendricks, M. & Xeketwana, S., 2024, ‘Translanguaging for learning in selected English First Additional Language secondary school classrooms’, *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a502. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.502>
- McKinney, C., 2017, *Language and power in post-colonial schooling: Ideologies in practice*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- McKinney, C. & Tyler, R., 2024, ‘(Trans)languaging-for-learning: A perspective from the South’, *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a508. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.508>
- Probyn, M., 2015, ‘Pedagogical translanguaging: Bridging discourses in South African science classrooms’, *Language and Education* 29(3), 218–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2014.994525>
- Probyn, M.J., 2024, ‘Multilingual literacies for learning: Shifting ideologies, developing praxis’, *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a505. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.505>
- Tyler, R. & McKinney, C., 2024, ‘Crossing the text frontier: Teachers resisting African language texts for learning’, *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a501. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.501>