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Language Policy And Practice In Almost-Bilingual Classrooms

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Abstract:

This study explores language policies in "almost-bilingual" classrooms, in which most, but not all, students share a home language. Teachers who are bilingual face a dilemma in these settings. Should they draw on shared linguistic expertise to benefit the majority while excluding a few, or should they forego significant benefits for most in the interest of equity? This qualitative study examines the classroom language policies and practices of one English-as-a second-language (ESL) teacher at a majority-Latino high school. Drawing on fieldnotes, interviews, and systematic teacher reflection, the authors identify a collection of multilingual practices across ESL and sheltered content courses: translated texts, "translanguaging from the students up," and concurrent translation. They discuss the benefits and drawbacks of these policies for Spanish speakers and "singletons"-- students with no same-language peers-- to offer pedagogical and policy insights for meeting the diverse and sometimes-conflicting needs of students in multilingual classrooms.

Keywords: English as a second language; classroom language policy; multilingual students; translanguaging; almost-bilingual; singletons; linguistic diversity; teacher research

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[1] Isabel was an undergraduate at Swarthmore College at the time of data collection. She is now a graduate student at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education.

Introduction

It is mid-morning at Promesa Academy[2] in Philadelphia, 2014. A small group of uniformed teenagers is assembled behind long rectangular tables. Their teacher, Sarah Apt, stands in front of the whiteboard, her hand resting on a humming digital projector. She welcomes students by name, telling them how happy she is to see them. During the next hour, she will prepare this class of newcomers for their third visit to read to peers with cognitive and physical disabilities. They will be sharing simple books that they write and illustrate themselves. Projected onto the board, it reads:

> What is a good book to read to our friends?
> *Qué hace un buen libro para leer a nuestros amigos?*

Once the students are settled, Sarah addresses the whole class slowly and clearly:

> We have gone two times to read to our friends and they love it! *Hemos ido tres veces a leer a nuestros amigos y les encanta!* You are great teachers. *Ustedes son excelentes maestros.* These are students who have their heads on their desks and don't respond. *Estamos trabajando con alumnos que bajan sus cabezas y no responden normalmente.* It is very special that they like being with you and respond to you.

She pauses, and Marvin, a recent arrival from El Salvador, begins speaking in gibberish, jokingly indicating how little English he's understood. He looks around for laughs and some of his classmates oblige, so Sarah translates, "*Es muy especial que les guste estar con ustedes y les responden.*"

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[2] All names of people and places are pseudonyms, with the exception of Philadelphia and the teachers mentioned by name in the article.

Observers of this scene might notice any number of details in this classroom-- the international array of flags circling the room, the window cracked to counterbalance overactive radiators, Sarah's disarming smile, the fidgeting of high-energy teenagers. Given Sarah's frequent use of Spanish and English, one might also assume that this is a bilingual group. Scanning the faces across the room, however, one student challenges this assumption. Fairer skinned than most of her classmates and wearing a headscarf, she does not appear to be of Latin American origin. In fact, this is Fatima, an outgoing new student from Pakistan who speaks Urdu and Pashto, and her presence in this English as a second language class creates a language policy puzzle. When a teacher can speak the home language of all but a few of her students, what classroom language policies are most effective? Which are most ethical? This paper explores language policies in what we call almost-bilingual classrooms, where most students, but not all, share a common home language.

Though the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy are axiomatic to readers of this journal, it is nevertheless important to begin our discussion of these questions with a brief review of the benefits of home language development and problems with English-only policies, even in ESL classrooms. In the long term, immigrant students who become bilingual and biliterate do better academically and otherwise than their peers who do not (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Using students' native languages in school allows teachers to connect with them as whole human beings (not only as "English learners"), to learn about and build upon their existing knowledge and strengths, and to give them access to grade-level content material. As one New York City high school teacher put it, native language is "oxygen" for immigrant students (Bartlett & García, 2011, p. 115). Since teachers wield considerable power as language policy makers in their own classrooms (Menken & García,

2010), their language use with immigrant students can either provide or deny access to this crucial resource, thereby opening or closing possibilities for native language development and impacting future prospects. Teachers who fail to draw on their students' multilingual resources and adopt English-only classroom policies ultimately put their students at risk of alienation, school failure, and depressed occupational outcomes (Auerbach, 1993).

Educators of immigrant students, including ESL teachers, must therefore find "ideological and implementational spaces" for promoting students' bilingualism and biliteracy (Hornberger, 2002), even when focused on English language development. However, this is not an uncomplicated proposition. How much of students' native languages to use, at what stages of English language development, and in what particular ways are questions that have inspired much scholarship. Early studies in bilingual education, for example, concluded that concurrent translation (CT)-- the back and forth repetition of messages in two languages deployed in the introductory vignette-- is inadvisable (e.g. Jacobson, 1981; Milk, 1984) because it "establishes for the children a pattern whereby they can avoid all second language learning by only following the teacher's explanations in their first language and disregard[ing] the teaching in the second language altogether" (Jacobson, 1981, p.16; see also Faltis, 1996). More recent critiques further warn that CT is inadequate for "the development of academic language" (García, 2008, p. 298).

If neither concurrent translation nor English-only lead to positive learning outcomes, what options for classroom language policies do educators have in almost-bilingual contexts? In this paper, we investigate this question through a qualitative study of language practices, policies, and student experiences in high school ESL classes. Our paper offers a window into one teacher's language policies in the almost-bilingual classroom, a multilingual configuration that has been underrepresented in the literature. As the numbers of speakers of languages other than

English and Spanish in the U.S. increase and de-facto residential and school segregation place more and more Latinos, Africans, and Asians in the same classrooms (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011), educators are increasingly likely to encounter student populations like these. Through our work, we invite teachers in similar situations to reflect on their language use and to expand their teaching repertoires to better respond to students' diverse and sometimes conflicting needs.

Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

Translanguaging in theory & practice

Recent inquiry around *translanguaging* in bilingual and multilingual classrooms offers a promising direction in our search for viable language policies in almost-bilingual contexts. Translanguaging is an umbrella concept that includes an ideology and theory of bilingualism, a set of communicative practices, and a pedagogical stance, all of which can be transformational for emergent bilingual students and their teachers (Mazak, 2017). Proposed by Ofelia García in 2008 to capture the discursive practices of bilinguals as well as pedagogies for working in schools, translanguaging theory considers multilingualism as the worldwide norm and sets aside the notion that bilinguals alternate between separate "named languages" such as Spanish and English. Instead, the bilingual is understood to have "one complex and dynamic linguistic system that the speaker then learns to separate into two [or more] languages, as defined by external social factors, and not simply linguistic ones" (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 12). Translanguaging is closely connected to the concept of *dynamic bilingualism* (García, 2009) which posits that bilingualism is "a repertoire of related language practices or ways of using language within particular sociocultural contexts" (Palmer, et al., 2014, p. 759) and that bilinguals develop different practices to varying degrees to meet the shifting and complex demands of multilingual

environments (García, 2009). Translanguaging also refers to the range of flexible language practices that bilinguals employ when selecting features in this repertoire, such as code switching, co-languaging, and translation, but understands them as "dynamic and functionally integrated" in ways that prior conceptualizations did not capture (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012, p. 655). Current research continues to add to the full range of communicative practices that could be classified as translanguaging (Mazak, 2017).

Teachers who adopt translanguaging as a pedagogical stance recognize the full range of multilinguals' communicative practices as valuable in schools and enact classroom language policies that give the primary "locus of control" for language use to students (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011). Using collaborative and cooperative structures, multilingual and multimodal materials and pedagogical practices, they invite students to draw upon their linguistic repertoires in "creative and critical" ways as they engage with the curriculum (García & Kleyn, 2016, p.21). While space does not permit a full review of translanguaging pedagogies, they include organizing students in same-language groups for certain purposes and mixed-language groups for others, providing home- language texts to augment English-language materials, and using strategies such as "preview-view-review" to strategically alternate languages at each stage of the lesson (García & Kleyn, 2016). In translanguaging pedagogy, teachers also guide students when their language use is "not conducive to group progress" such as when it excludes group members with different home languages (García & Sylvan, 2011, p.13).

Valuing and utilizing language flexibly in the classroom has multiple benefits. Academically, translanguaging can serve to engage students, provide more access to curricular content, increase participation, deepen understanding and enhance the complexity of discussions, ease the cognitive load for beginners, develop metalinguistic awareness, and keep pedagogical

tasks moving forward (Arthur & Martin, 2006; Carroll & Morales, 2016; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Kano, 2014; García & Sylvan, 2011; Kiramba, 2016; Woodley, 2016). Heather Woodley (2016), for example, shows how translanguaging in a highly diverse elementary classroom encouraged participation. By creating a "multilingual ecology" of labels, signs, and posters, providing select home language translations, pairing students with the same home languages, and encouraging language comparison during vocabulary study, the teacher created a culture that engaged all students, including newly-arrived emergent bilinguals who would have been silenced in an English-only environment.

Translanguaging can also serve to express "shared identity and solidarity" and build rapport between students and teachers (Arthur & Martin, 2006, p. 196; García, Flores, & Woodley, 2012), increase students' sense of belonging in the classroom (Selzer & Collins, 2016) and affirm their bilingual identities (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017). Ofelia García and Camila Leiva (2014) show how Leiva establishes a sense of Pan-Latino solidarity with her students through the flexible use of English and Spanish. Along with culturally-relevant curricular materials, translanguaging can open space for students to more freely express themselves (Carroll & Morales, 2016) and to navigate socio-emotional challenges. Selzer and Collins (2016) illustrate how translanguaging facilitated interpersonal connections between Latino students with interrupted formal education and their teachers. Using translanguaging, students engaged deeply with texts and discussed experiences of linguistic discrimination and bullying, embarrassment about low English proficiencies, and pressures to drop out of school.

Translanguaging can be transformative for educators and their students insofar as it challenges existing linguistic hierarchies, rejects notions of language purity, and "liberat[es] the voices" of emergent bilinguals (García & Leiva, 2014; see also Kiramba, 2016). Furthermore,

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teachers can let go of anxieties about bilingual students having "gaps" in one or more of their named languages when they do not conform to monolingual norms. Instead, they encourage students to deploy existing language practices as they build upon their funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzales, 2003) to expand their multilingual capacities.

Translanguaging Policy and Pedagogy in Almost-Bilingual Classrooms

Translanguaging pedagogy differs in key ways depending on class composition. In bilingual settings where teacher and students have varying degrees of access to shared linguistic repertoires, the teacher can conduct bilingual class discussions and preview-view-review activities, provide spontaneous clarification of difficult ideas or translations when students do not understand, and otherwise draw on their shared repertoire, as in the examples from García and Leiva (2014) and Selzer and Collins (2016), above. In multilingual settings, on the other hand, translanguaging comes more exclusively "from the students up" (García & Sylvan, 2011) where students from same-language backgrounds draw on shared minority languages to scaffold and extend their understanding of academic work. In these classes, the teacher addresses the whole class in the majority language, as a matter of equity (e.g. García, Flores, & Chu, 2011; García & Sylvan, 2011). In Woodley (2016), for example, the teacher encouraged students to use their home language resources with one another, and he successfully leveraged students' multilingualism in myriad ways while communicating with his students in English.

Little research has considered the possibilities and challenges for translanguaging in the almost-bilingual classroom. Though it has been acknowledged that "singletons"--students who are the only ones in their classes to speak their home language-- face steeper challenges and fewer opportunities to develop their bilingualism in multilingual classrooms than students with same-language peers (García, Flores, and Chu, 2011), researchers have yet to examine how

language policies and practices impact singletons and speakers of more dominant minority languages in almost-bilingual settings. Our study homes in on this issue, building upon the theoretical and practice-based literature on translanguaging to analyze the classroom language policies and practices of the second author, Sarah Apt, and her colleagues. After discussing the ways in which pedagogies premised largely on Spanish- English bilingualism impact both Spanish speakers and singletons in their almost-bilingual classrooms, we offer recommendations for policy and practice to meet the heterogeneous needs of students in almost-bilingual groups while honoring and building upon students' linguistic and cultural resources.

Setting & Methods

Promesa Academy

The stately, five-story stone edifice of Promesa Academy, erected in 1929, covers a full city block in Philadelphia's most linguistically diverse zip-code. On the south side, a colorful mural depicts youth from around the world daydreaming and running, framed with inspirational phrases in Spanish, English, and Khmer. To the west, a supermarket owned by a student's family offers products from their native Puerto Rico as well as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam. The surrounding litter-free sidewalks advertise the school's commitment to order, a point of pride after a tumultuous recent past.

The largest high school in the neighborhood, Promesa became a charter school in 2011 during the most recent of reforms to this long-struggling institution. At the time, test scores and graduation rates were dismal, attendance was poor, and Promesa was on the district's list of persistently dangerous schools. After the 2011 conversion, led by a community organization with a decades-long history of Latino youth advocacy, the school has become safer and it enjoys a better reputation. Many important issues are slow to change, however, due in part to inequitable

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school funding statewide (Education Law Center, 2017): The school budget continues to shrink, even as the student population grows; staff leave at a rate of 20-30% per year; and test scores remain well below targets.

In order to meet state requirements for English language development, emergent bilinguals at Promesa take both ESL and sheltered content classes as well as "mainstream" electives. Certified ESL teachers teach ESL in addition to co-teaching alongside content-area specialists in social science, science, and math courses. However, in the few cases in which content teachers are fluently bilingual in English and Spanish, co-teachers are not assigned, under the administrative assumption that speaking Spanish will allow them to meet the needs of all of their students, even though they do not have ESL certification or formal preparation.

Promesa Students

In 2017, the Promesa student body numbered approximately 2,000, grades 9-12. 77% qualified for free or reduced lunch, 20% received special education services, and 25% were emergent bilinguals, although school staff estimate that over half of Promesa 's students spoke languages other than English at home. The school population has changed dramatically in the past several years, growing from 1600 in 2011 to 2,040 in 2017, and shifting from about 60% Black and 40% Latino in 2011 to nearly 70% Latino and approximately 30% Black students today. These changes have led to interethnic tensions. Between 2011 and 2017 the ESOL program also grew from under 300 to over 500 students, and the composition of the program altered. In 2011, ESL classes at Promesa enrolled a majority of Spanish speakers from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and a handful of singletons who spoke other languages, including Haitian Creole (Kreyol), French, Vietnamese, Khmer, Arabic, Malayalam, Urdu, Pashto, and Wolof. Between 2013 and 2014, the demographics shifted, as a dramatic surge in

unaccompanied minors crossing the U.S.- Mexico border brought increasing numbers of Central American adolescents to the U.S. (Shah, 2016) and changed the face of Promesa's student body.

Fleeing violence and poverty in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, unaccompanied minors are typically guided to the border by *coyotes* (paid smugglers), a harrowing journey which is often preceded and punctuated by traumatic events (Nazario, 2015). Apprehended by ICE officers, many are then taken to *hieleras*-- detention centers nicknamed "ice boxes" because they are so cold-- before being transferred to family members or foster homes in the U.S. as their petitions for refugee status are evaluated (Negroponte, 2014). Unsurprisingly, many unaccompanied minors suffer from untreated post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (Shah, 2016) that compound the socio-emotional burdens posed by family separation and tense reunifications, culture shock, and other stresses of immigration (Nazario, 2007; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2013). At Promesa, some of these students exhibit unusual behaviors for their age group, such as making animal noises during class, hiding under tables, and others that appear to be rooted in trauma. Furthermore, many boys have been working and out of school for some time and face the compounded challenges of being academically behind, having to sit all day, and being treated like children, when they were used to being physically active, productive adults. Though some unaccompanied minors are enthusiastic students, others experience school as a punishment that they only endure because they have heard that immigration judges look favorably upon those enrolled in school.

This paper analyzes language policies and practices in Sarah's ESL and content classes between 2014 and 2017, most of which consisted of a mix of unaccompanied minors from Central America, recent arrivals from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, and one or more singletons. The newcomer class we profile at the beginning of the paper, for example, enrolled

fifteen newcomers, ages thirteen to eighteen. Most were from Central America, a few from the Dominican Republic, and one from Pakistan. Later in the year, an Iraqi student enrolled. Students had varying levels of academic preparation. Literacy levels in Spanish ranged from pre-alphabetic to about fifth-grade among the unaccompanied minors. The singletons had uninterrupted educational experiences and grade-level home language literacy and academic backgrounds. Additionally, we (Elaine and Isabel) observed these same students in other classes, including history, math, and science. These classes include one taught by Alanna Hibbs, a ninth grade World History teacher who is bilingual in English and Spanish and whose class appears in the data we analyze below. Finally, we also examine materials and activities relevant to the paper's central questions that Sarah used when she co-taught African-American History with history teacher Judith Marks (who did not speak Spanish) in 2012-2013.

The Teacher

Sarah teaches a range of courses at Promesa, including Newcomers (a course intended to meet the academic needs of unaccompanied minors), ESL 1 and 2, and a Spanish literacy course. She has also co-taught content courses including African American History and Consumer Math and frequently serves as an interpreter at school events. Sarah entered teaching to advance social justice for immigrant youth, and she pursues these goals by promoting additive schooling and demonstrating authentic care for her students (Bartlett & García, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). She advances these principles by placing a high value on students' ethnolinguistic backgrounds, which she draws on through culturally-relevant projects and writing assignments. She also draws on these resources through activities with real-world applications to foster English language development. For example, when Sarah realized that many of the newly-arrived unaccompanied

minors had agricultural experience, she established an after-school club in which students learned about plant biology as they restored and populated a long-defunct school greenhouse.

Sarah is dedicated to creating community within her classroom and establishing links with students' families and the neighborhood. She establishes a warm and convivial atmosphere in each class period, maintaining a calm and friendly demeanor and connecting with students personally. She makes particular efforts to encourage the inclusion of singletons, giving them one-on-one attention during independent work time. When she found out about the impending arrival of two Haitian students, for example, she prepared her Spanish-speaking group by sharing information about Haiti's history and discussing a comic strip about a Haitian student who was bullied. Her communication with families includes regular telephone contact with parents and a program of bi-monthly dinners for ESL students and families.

Data Collection & Analysis

The research we report here combines methods from educational ethnography (Walford, 2008) with the traditions of reflective teaching (Farrell, 2014) and collaborative research with teachers (Erickson, 2006; Lee & Walsh, 2015). In 2014-2015, Elaine and then-undergraduate research assistant, Isabel, both Spanish-English bilinguals, conducted observations in Sarah's newcomer classroom. They recorded observations of the newcomer class, other classes attended by newcomers, and a few school events in 18 ethnographic field notes. During this period, Elaine also recorded four semi-structured interviews, including an individual interview with Sarah and group interviews with seven newcomers.

As the work in Sarah's classroom became more collaborative, Elaine invited Sarah to join her in data analysis and write-up. We followed Merriam (2009) and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) in coding the data set and developing analytic themes. Because we knew we wanted to

focus on bilingualism, language use, and singleton students, Elaine first read through all fieldnotes and interviews, highlighting relevant excerpts. This produced 40 single-spaced pages from which she developed a first set of analytic codes. Sarah then re-coded these excerpts, applying existing codes and adding new codes to describe patterns she noticed in the data. Throughout this process, we met to discuss emerging thematic relationships, which became the major claims of our analysis (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). After organizing these claims into an outline, Sarah shared additional examples of each from her recollection of other classes and contexts and her collection of class materials, and we selected examples which provided the most compelling illustrations of each theme for inclusion in the paper. The findings we elaborate below emerged as robust findings during our analysis of the original dataset but also draw on Sarah's teaching materials, copies of student work, and her own recollections of her teaching practice in other classes where they add support and nuance to the original findings. Because Sarah is a co-author, we do not quote her extensively below; instead, her perspective is embedded throughout the article.

Findings

Our analysis revealed a collection of multilingual practices that are typical of Sarah's pedagogy: the use of 1) translated and annotated texts 2) translanguaging "from the students up," and 3) concurrent translation. Through these language policies and practices, Sarah establishes multilingualism-- and particularly bilingualism-- as a core value in her classroom, supports recent arrivals' content learning, and opens up spaces for students to process difficult immigration experiences. However, these language practices simultaneously present various drawbacks, suggesting the need for strategic revision.

Translated Texts

Sarah frequently provides translations of key texts in some or all of her students'

languages. Figure 1 shows an excerpt from a hand-out she and a co-teacher created for a lesson

on Reconstruction in an African American History class in 2012-2013.

[Insert Figure 1.]

In addition to writing some of the informational text in simplified English, such as "Black Males

Can Vote" and including a picture intended to support the textual meaning, this representative

excerpt also provides a Spanish-language gloss of key information. In other hand-outs, Sarah

provided word banks with Spanish translations preceding texts written in simplified English and

graphic organizers. Powerpoint slides often included translation of key points and questions in

Spanish, Kreyol, and Vietnamese.

Textual translations allow students learning English to take more control of their learning

and to be less reliant on their teachers (Valdes, 2001). In the ESL classes at Promesa where we

observed the use of translated texts, Spanish-speaking students were more likely to be able to do

their work without the teacher's help. The following field note from a sheltered World History

class in March 2015 illustrates this benefit.

> It is almost time for class and Ms. Hibbs stands at the door welcoming students in as they
> arrive. There is a "Daily journal" on the board. It reads "I _____ (liked/didn't like) this
> unit about China because _____." Celia calls to Ms. Hibbs, "*Miss, que significa esa
> vaina*?" [Miss, what does that thing mean?] but the Spanish translation is on the slide, so
> Celia reads it out loud to herself.

Here we initially see a newcomer turn to the teacher for help in understanding the assignment but

then use the textual translation to proceed without her help. The use of Spanish language texts

also serves to provide Spanish speakers with deeper and more complete access to and

engagement with grade-level content. In African American History, Sarah frequently translated

speeches and other primary sources in order to fully convey the authors' meaning. Her archive of

class materials includes Spanish translations of speeches by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, which would have been too difficult in the original but that she believed would lose too much nuance if reduced to simplified English. Sarah and Judith wanted students to see the connections between their people's histories and fights for justice. By allowing them to access the speeches in unsimplified form, they hoped their students would achieve a deeper understanding of the history of African Americans in the United States, building bridges between Black and Latino students.

Textual translations made a deeper level of understanding possible for Spanish-speaking students at the early stages of learning English, by giving them access to cognitively demanding concepts and academically rigorous texts (Seltzer & Collins, 2016). This is evidenced in the following sample of student work from a project in which students created a Jim Crow era newspaper. As part of her contribution, 16-year-old Melani included English-language terms with Spanish definitions. Here, she is writing from the point of view of an African-American writer of the period (the original spelling is maintained; our translation follows).

> THE GRANDFATHER CLAUSE: *es una ley que usa la segregation para privarme el derecho de votar esta ley dice: que aquel que aiga tenido un visabuelo que aiga votado, tenia el derecho de votar, pero pra esas fechas nadie tenia un visabuelo con derecho al voto porque para esas fechas todavia existia la esclavitud* [It's a law that segregation uses to deprive me of the right to vote this law says: that he who had had a great grandfather that had voted, had the right to vote, but at this time nobody had a great grandfather with the right to vote because in those dates slavery still existed.]

With exposure to the concepts in their first language, students responded with the use of both languages and displayed an understanding of the historical period. As in García and Kano (2014), the use of L1 texts allowed emergent bilinguals at various levels of English proficiency to support and expand their understanding of the course content. Melani's definition includes not just the law itself but also an explanation of how it disenfranchised African Americans, showing

depth of understanding. Additionally, these texts allowed Spanish-speakers to identify with African-Americans, as when Melani used the first person above.

Unfortunately, Sarah and Judith did not have the resources to provide a comparable level of materials in other languages. While singletons sometimes had access to translations of single words or phrases on PowerPoints or handouts, most of their materials consisted of simplified English texts and photos, which by definition could not provide them with the same depth, complexity, or nuance of information and understanding.

Translanguaging from the Students Up

In addition to providing textual translations, Sarah also created an atmosphere in which students were welcome to use any language in class participation. We witnessed this frequently in the newcomer class as students responded to Sarah's questions in Spanish and/or English. Her open language policy is on full display in a video that her ESL 1 class produced in 2016 about their immigration stories. Working with a facilitator from a local arts organization, the video includes dramatizations in Kreyol about the decision to migrate, a Spanish-language account of a Salvadoran's journey through the *hielera*, a nostalgic song in Vietnamese, and a student's Spanish-language rap about growing up in three countries. Background music is alternately in Spanish, English, Vietnamese, and subtitles roll in different languages. All of the scenes in the video demonstrate students' authority over their language choices and showcase how L1 use allowed them to express themselves more fully and freely than they could have in English at their early stage of second language development (Carroll & Morales, 2016; Kiramba, 2016). Taking control of their language use also provided students with "creative and critical" opportunities for expression (García & Kleyn, 2016).

Inviting students to share their own perspectives also provided a form of socio-emotional support within the curriculum (Selzer & Collins, 2016). Alejandro, who traveled to Philadelphia from El Salvador to reunite with his parents, wrote a scene that illustrates this aspect of the assignment. His script was comprised of short snippets of multiple phone conversations that occurred as he traveled from San Salvador to Guatemala City to Texas. Dialogues between his father and the *coyote* and between Alejandro and his parents convey a range of experiences and emotions: receiving the exciting but nerve-wracking news about his impending departure; his parents' love for their son and fear of the dangers facing him; their faith in God as his protector; and Alejandro's detention in a *hielera*. Over the course of the semester in which they worked on this assignment, other students who had been preoccupied by the traumas they had faced but unwilling to tell their stories eventually wrote about and shared them with the class and their families, relaxing and participating more freely as they did so. As it provided this catharsis, the script-writing activity also helped Alejandro and his classmates to learn a new genre and develop L1 writing skills. Furthermore, the use of students' politicized funds of knowledge (Gallo & Link, 2015), cultivated through their migration experiences, served as a bridge between the school and families by making their struggles the topic of academic work.

Allowing students to write in their home languages also provided Sarah with a more accurate assessment of students' abilities, since they were able to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to express themselves (García, 2009). In her interview, Sarah discussed a narrative written by Yvette, a newcomer who was often silent in other classes. Yvette "use[d] Spanish to really clearly tell a very complex story," incorporating sensory details, metaphor, and dialogue, though omitting punctuation and capitalization. Yvette's narrative demonstrated that though she had received limited formal education, she had a talent for storytelling. Furthermore, the

opportunity to tell a story that mattered motivated her to learn punctuation conventions. English-medium assessments alone can lead teachers to believe that emergent bilinguals are functioning at low cognitive levels; examining their L1 writing sometimes proves otherwise.

Singletons' native-language writing provided useful, though more limited, information. When students wrote their immigration scripts, Andre wrote in French, but in narrative form and without punctuation. Sarah, who does not speak French, discussed with him how he could convert it into a script, demonstrating with English examples. Andre then converted his narrative into a script and inserted punctuation. However, Sarah was unable to give in-depth feedback on the content or monitor the quality of revisions. For example, she could see that Andre had inserted periods but not if they were in the correct places. Furthermore, Andre could not fully profit from the emotional benefits of sharing his experience with Sarah and his classmates because they could not fully understand the content of what he had written.

Concurrent Translation

Concurrent translation stood out as a prominent feature in Sarah's approach to working with newcomers. In most of Elaine and Isabel's visits to the newcomer classroom, Sarah alternated between English and Spanish frequently, speaking in English and then translating most phrases, as in the introductory vignette. On our few visits to other classes, we found this discursive pattern used by other teachers, too. In one visit to a history class, for example, Ms. Hibbs translated each question she posed to the class, first in English followed by Spanish, throughout the period.

Many Spanish-speaking students relied on their teachers' use of concurrent translation to get through their classes. In interviews, they expressed their appreciation.

S1:   [Miss Apt's use of Spanish is] good, because if she doesn't say it, if she

speaks English, we won't understand. That is, she has to explain in Spanish so that we understand what she's saying.

S2:   ...When she speaks English, then she translates it into Spanish and then I start getting the way she said it before in English. She translates it and transforms it, so that you have to pay attention and work with the words that she's saying to try to learn more.

In these responses (translated from Spanish), the first student indicates the importance of Spanish for clarity and understanding. The second expands, explaining that Sarah "translates . . . and transforms" the information and that this strategy helps her to learn English by comparing the translation to the original. This description recalls theorists' assertion that translanguaging goes beyond the sum of individual codes (García & Leiva, 2014; Mazak, 2017); the transformation itself provides information.

Nevertheless, students were not entirely satisfied. During the same interview, when one girl suggested that Sarah should speak more English in class, the others readily agreed and proposed that Sarah give explanations in English, using Spanish only to clarify difficult vocabulary. The singletons in the newcomer class reported a similar desire.

S1:   I say this is very helpful class, that help you a lot. Um and they will help you to speak English, to learn more English.
E: Mhm. [*to S2*] Do you also feel like you're learning more English in the newcomer class? [*S2 shakes her head*] No. Can you tell me why?
S2:   Because all the students speak Spanish...And the teacher, she's, like, she speak few of English.
S1:   So you don't feel like she speaks enough English in the class?
S2:   Yeah.

These students, from Pakistan and Iraq, disagree about whether Sarah's use of English is sufficient, with the first maintaining throughout the interview that Sarah always also tells her what she needs to hear in English (a feature of concurrent translation). Even though the second student believes Sarah should speak more English, neither find Spanish use alienating. Instead,

the second expressed "feel[ing] interested when [she] heard her speak Spanish." The girls'

positive attitude toward Spanish may be explained by the authentic care that Sarah consistently

showed all of her students as well as the friendships they had forged with classmates, which

raised the status of Spanish in their eyes (Link, Gallo, & Wortham, 2013).

Positive attitudes toward the pedagogical use of Spanish were not shared by all students,

however. Marvin, from El Salvador, frequently displayed a disengaged affect in class, which on

multiple occasions he attributed to Spanish use in his classes. When Elaine tried to ask him about

these bilingually run courses, he corrected her, explaining that his classes were "*todo en espanol*"

[all in Spanish], confirming Jacobson and Faltis' warnings that students will tune out English

where teachers provide concurrent translation (1981; 1996). In a parent-teacher conference, his

parents also expressed dissatisfaction with his exposure to English. Some singletons also found

the heavy use of concurrent translation off-putting. During preparations for the immigration

skits, the visiting artist spoke Spanish and Sarah translated. At these times, Fabienne, a Haitian

student who was normally highly engaged and cooperative, put her head down and refused to

participate. Multiple times, she said she "hated" the class and wanted to be learning English.

While she eventually participated in an improvised skit in Kreyol, and though she elsewhere

displayed a willingness to engage in Spanish language play with her peers, it was clear that from

her perspective, Spanish-medium sessions wasted time. Fabienne and other singletons

experienced the teacher's use of Spanish as inequitable (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011; García &

Sylvan, 2011) and responded by expressing withdrawal and dissatisfaction.

Discussion

In this paper, we reflected on one early-career teacher's practice to consider the

possibilities for language policy and practice in almost-bilingual classrooms. We illustrated how

the use of textual translations, an open language policy that allows students to translanguage "from the students up," and concurrent translation provided students with increased autonomy, access to content and ideas, and opportunities for socio-emotional expression. These benefits were most available to Spanish speakers at Promesa, however. Teachers' use of Spanish, though not entirely alienating to singletons, presented various disadvantages. In the remainder of the paper, we summarize our findings, discuss additional benefits and drawbacks, and offer suggestions for future practice.

Some of the language policies illustrated above provided students with increased access to course content and more autonomy than they would have encountered in English-only classrooms. In content courses, concurrent translation and translated texts provided Spanish speakers more expedient and deeper entry into academic content. Textual translations and an open language policy also allowed students to be less reliant on their teachers to explain every time they did not understand English talk or text. Instead, they could refer to translations and confer with each other in their L1 to support their learning, thus avoiding the infantilizing nature of the English-only classroom (Auerbach, 1993) and freeing teachers to provide individual attention to singletons. Though this may not have been the strategy of choice under better-resourced circumstances, it proved useful in classes of 25-30.

In conjunction with personally and culturally relevant assignments, certain strategies also advanced social justice aims and provided socio-emotional benefit. Giving the "locus of control" for language use to students positioned them as agentive in ways that are difficult to replicate through exclusive use of the L2 early on (Carroll & Morales, 2016; García & Leiva, 2014). Doing so also implicitly challenged disempowering hierarchies that relegate emergent bilinguals to positions of little power and influence (Kiramba, 2016). The socioemotional advantages of

native-language use were significant, especially for the unaccompanied minors. Without a doubt, concurrent translation provided a more welcoming environment for Latin American students, some of whom experienced difficult transitions to the U.S. and had trouble sitting and focusing for long periods. By sharing stories in their first languages, students from all backgrounds were able to express their life experiences at a level beyond their basic abilities in English and to connect with each other across ethnolinguistic boundaries. Furthermore, the preparatory L1 writing students produced for the immigration stories video illustrates how an open language policy can allow teachers to more accurately understand students' academic abilities (Coelho, 2003) and can help teachers to challenge deficit perspectives, a shift which has the potential to improve instruction.

Despite these many advantages, all three practices also had significant drawbacks. When translations were available in singletons' languages and they had peers with whom to work in same-language groups, they benefited, but they had significantly less access to translations and to peers with whom they could easily work out ideas. Similarly, occasional opportunities to use their home languages in class were counterbalanced by the isolation that resulted when most social life occurred in Spanish. While most singletons developed friendships across ethnolinguistic lines over time, an observer could not help regretting the difference in welcome to peer life that was possible for newly-arrived Spanish speakers versus speakers of Vietnamese and Kreyol. Most troubling of all, the frequent use of concurrent translation meant that singletons were confronted with classroom discourse that was sometimes nearly half in a language they neither understood nor had enrolled to learn. Teacher-driven exclusion from a principal classroom language poses a serious challenge to equity. While some singletons did not appear to mind Spanish-English CT, since Sarah was able to make the English-language component

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comprehensible to them, others, like Fabienne, found so much Spanish use demotivating. Furthermore, the case of Ms. Hibbs suggests that singletons in other content classes might not fare as well. Hired because of her content expertise and Spanish-English bilingualism but with no background in TESOL, assigned no co-teacher, and in her first year at Promesa, she explained that CT was her only strategy for making her course content comprehensible to beginner speakers of English. This example illuminates the kind of disjuncture that can occur when a program employs policies premised on bilingualism in the dominant languages when more than two languages are represented in their student body.

Although most of the disadvantages we have identified thus far pertain to singletons, their Spanish-speaking peers also faced a major challenge related to these classroom language policies. Though several Latin American students appreciated concurrent translation and were able to use it to make sense of English, many also agreed that 'less is more.' Others, like Marvin, insisted that CT was the cause of their unsatisfying pace of English development. While we do not agree with Marvin's proposal that class be conducted in English-only, his critiques touch upon an issue of great importance for emergent bilinguals in the U.S.: the need to hear and use English in meaningful ways in order to learn it. Frequent use of Spanish by teachers meant that Latin American students had far fewer contexts where they had to use their emergent English skills to negotiate meaning with others, a crucially important ingredient for second language acquisition (Long & Porter, 1985).

Examples of singletons making do with their limited English demonstrate the kinds of learning opportunities that Spanish-speakers were missing. Once, we observed Fatima ask a teacher for a "circle stapler." When her teacher expressed confusion, Fatima held up her ID card and pointed to the corner. Her teacher soon understood that she needed a hole punch to attach her

ID to a school lanyard. We observed circumlocution and gestures less frequently among Spanish speakers, who could almost always use Spanish and relied heavily on teachers' verbal translations, in lieu of other more autonomous strategies for understanding and expressing themselves. Sarah noted that singletons often learned English faster than other students. While concurrent translation no doubt provided a less stressful transition to U.S. schooling for Latin American students facing myriad psycho-social challenges, the degree to which it was used created other barriers to developing English proficiency and language learning strategies.

Conclusion

Almost-bilingual classrooms are decidedly complex multilingual environments in which students' heterogeneous backgrounds present steep challenges for educators aiming to meet students' needs. Nonetheless, our findings point to areas for improving equity and inclusion in these contexts, while continuing to build on students' home language resources. Importantly, policies and practices grounded in bilingualism must be examined critically when applying them in multilingual schools. The policy of not assigning ESL co-teachers to Promesa's content teachers who spoke Spanish, for example, is one that makes sense for a bilingual population, but which creates inequities in an almost-bilingual context. Below, we suggest three areas for educators to consider while working in almost-bilingual classrooms.

First, the most promising translanguaging strategies in almost-bilingual classrooms appear to be those which have been described elsewhere, including developing a multilingual ecology through the use of translated texts, labels in multiple languages, and building assignments with L1 components (Woodley, 2016). At Promesa, teachers could more purposefully include translations of short texts (such as guiding questions) in all classroom languages. Doing so may require the use of imperfect tools such as Google Translate along with

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consultation with more advanced singletons or community members. Though time consuming, this would provide greater access for singletons and send a message of inclusion. Dedicated, collaborative planning time, such as teachers have in the International Schools Network, would greatly facilitate this work. Purchasing books in the most commonly spoken languages among Promesa's singletons, would also be expedient. Developing a library of supplementary texts on themes taught in the ESL sequence as well as in content courses school-wide would scaffold singletons' academic success by providing additional entry points to curricular content.

Next, establishing the locus of control for language choice with students is also important to continue, as it allows students to harness individual and interpersonal resources for learning (García & Sylvan, 2011). However, it is also incumbent upon teachers to guide their students when their choices exclude peers and to design more assignments and workflows in which students plan in same-language groups but deliver final products in English. Sequenced in this way, Spanish speakers and singletons alike would have increased opportunities for developing English skills while experimenting with language learning strategies. Establishing an environment that encourages Spanish speakers to use English during full-class discussion while also preserving students' own linguistic agency presents an interesting challenge in an almost-bilingual school. One low-risk way to begin such work would be to discuss classroom language policies with students, both to explain the teacher's rationale and to elicit ideas to support mutual goals (Auerbach, 1993).

Finally, frequent use of concurrent translation by teachers at Promesa suggests that, like other translanguaging practices, CT is a perfectly "natural" response to the communicative demands of the situation: Faced with a classroom of mostly Spanish speakers who cannot always understand what they say or write in English, Promesa teachers rely heavily on translation to

provide expedient access to the content material. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that Promesa's teachers should consider more strategic and less reflexive uses of CT, deploying it as just one tool in a repertoire of flexible bilingual pedagogies (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Reducing the amount of CT used in ESL classes would be especially expedient, given that students can reasonably expect ESL instruction to be focused on English, as opposed to in sheltered content classes, in which CT might be used in specific contexts to provide clarification of complex content-area material for Spanish speakers.

Recent studies suggest that selective use of translation is effective. Creese and Blackledge (2010), point to the utility of "bilingual label quests" in which the teacher uses the home language to define new words. Wilson & Gonzalez Davies (2016) report benefits to English-medium writing among high school students learning written translation skills. Manyak (2004) finds that oral and written translations by elementary school students and their teacher establish translating as a highly esteemed ability and open up space for cross-cultural exchange. Finally, García, Flores, & Chu (2011) describe translation practice in a heterogeneous classroom. When emergent bilinguals answered questions in Spanish, bilingual Latinos translated the answers into English for the whole class, providing different benefits for emergent bilinguals, developed bilinguals, and monolingual speakers alike. In most of these examples, most benefits obtain when the *students* are the ones translating, what we might call *translating from the students up*. Promesa teachers might consider what classroom configurations allow them to maintain some of the benefits of teacher-led translation (during small group work, for example), while also finding creative ways to let students take on more translating roles. Shifting to increased use of English in whole-class discussions could provide more equitable classroom discourse and access to English for all.

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Figure 1. Excerpt from a handout on Reconstruction (ESL African American History)

13th Amendment, 1865
• Ends slavery throughout entire U.S.A
• 3.5 million blacks are now free!
• Blacks still are not citizens and cannot vote

Acaba con la esclavitud en todo Estados Unidos.
Libera a 3.5 milliones de escalvos.
Los negros todavía no son ciudadanos y no pueden votar.