

Young children capitalising on their entire language repertoire for language learning at school

What this research was about and why it is important

The research discussed in this article aims to develop our understanding of what multilingual classroom interactions, or more specifically - translanguaging - look like in preschool and primary classrooms with emergent multilingual school children. Translanguaging has become more well-known over the last 10-15 years and refers (at the level of the individual) to the ways in which multilinguals make use of their full semiotic repertoire to make meaning and communicate. Unlike previous views of languages as bounded, separate entities, translanguaging sees 'language' as a set of resources from which individuals draw to respond to, and interact with, the social worlds they find themselves in. While we already have some understanding of how older learners and adults translanguaging, we know much less about what younger learners and emergent multilinguals do and how they deploy their growing repertoires. The article is part of a larger study based in Luxembourg, an officially trilingual country (Luxembourgish, German and French) but where, much like England, students in schools may or may not operate in the official languages at home. The paper explores uses of the iPad app 'iTEO' which is a language-learning tool allowing teachers and students to record, playback and edit spoken language, as well as to add written text and visual images. The app allows for stories to be told in a number of different languages and for teachers and students to work together to edit, revise and develop the language - all the time allowing for and encouraging translanguaging practices. This research is of significance in that it looked specifically at these younger learners and focused on what their teachers were doing to help them develop their knowledge and use of the institutional languages and their home languages. It is also one of only a few studies to have looked at child-directed translanguaging.

What the researchers did

- The participants included multilingual learners (4-7 year olds) and their multilingual teachers
- The data were collected in 2 preschool and 2 primary school classrooms in Luxembourg over a two year period
- The methods comprised classroom observations, video recordings of teacher-led activities and student-led activities with the iTEO app, interviews with teachers, recorded conversations with children, and detailed field notes. The aim was to identify what languages the participants used when and with whom and for what purposes and investigate the role of the tool for language learning.

What the researchers found

- When given the opportunities to do so, the children frequently and legitimately drew on all of their linguistic resources (often 4 or more different languages) in the production and negotiation of their stories. They did this spontaneously with different partners and demonstrated a range of interactional skills and strategies (such as translating for their partners, checking meaning, encouraging each other) that made these interactions successful.
- The young (emergent) multilinguals were able to translanguaging strategically showing that they could make careful choices about when and how to use their different resources. These practices did not have a detrimental effect on their acquisition of the target language/s.
- Although the study did not set out to measure students' competencies in different languages, over the two years of the project the researchers were able to see positive changes in the children's knowledge and accurate use of the target language/s.
- Story telling and the iTEO app provided the participants in this study opportunities to engage in a wide range of different activities, undertaking different roles and afforded them a wide range of opportunities for developing oracy which is crucial in language learning and development, as well as in literacy development more broadly.

Things to consider

- Multilingual individuals whether old or young do not experience the world in a monolingual way and will, if given space and encouragement, make full use of their linguistic resources moving in and out of different 'languages' to make meaning.
- Giving children space and 'permission' to draw fully on their semiotic repertoire is important for both language learning and development, and the development of their multilingual identities.
- As teachers, how do our own attitudes to multilingualism and language development shape what we allow/enable students to do in classrooms? How do these opportunities, in turn, influence the choices our students can make in relation to their work and language use?

Examples of iTEO that have been produced by colleagues in Luxembourg are available via the [following link](#).