

# Book Review of Multilingualism and Translanguaging in Chinese Language Classrooms by Danping Wang

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*Abstract: This paper is a book review of author Danping Wang's book, Multilingualism and Translanguaging in Chinese Language Classrooms. A thorough evaluation of the target book's strengths and limitations is provided. Equally important, this review details how the ideas of multilingualism and translanguaging in Chinese language classrooms can be used to inform Canadian educational practices.*

*Keywords: Multilingualism, Translanguaging, Chinese language, Education*

**A**mong teachers in English as a foreign language classrooms in China, as well as those teaching in Chinese as second language classrooms outside of China, there is concern that utilizing students' first language (L1) will weaken the language teaching and learning effect. However, research has shown that there are great value and benefits for L1 being used in the second language (L2) classrooms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Yet, if students are allowed to speak their native language in language programs, what is the ideal proportion of using students' first language in class? How can teachers systematically make use of multiple languages to create a comfortable environment for students from diverse cultural backgrounds? Those puzzles led Danping Wang to conduct a research project investigating Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) classroom language practices and policies in Hong Kong (Wang, 2019). Using ethnography to explore the opinions and attitudes of teachers, policymakers, CSL course developers, and learners, Wang (2019) analyzed qualitative and quantitative data with the sociocultural framework and language learning theories. The book consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 and 2 introduce the current challenges of teaching Chinese in multilingual contexts and review the argument around monolingual and multilingual pedagogies, especially the medium of instruction. Chapters 3 and 4 present the theoretical framework, research design, literature review on classroom language research, and main results including participants' practices and perceptions. Chapter 5 reconceptualizes classroom language research.

Starting with the background of the study, Wang (2019) found that traditional immersion language instruction cannot meet the needs of more and more emerging multilingual learners in Hong Kong. Local teachers realized that the monolingual language teaching approach does not fit with CSL students who were at the beginners' level. As a result, it is urgent to conduct research exploring the mixed language practices in the CSL context and understand teachers' and students' perceptions of the multilingual approach. The findings show that many factors can influence the preferences of teachers and students in choosing monolingual or multilingual approaches, such as their previous educational background and the ability to use other languages. According to García (2009), "translanguaging is the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential" (p.140). Most classroom translanguaging practices followed an educationally principled approach. And teachers' preferences of the medium of instruction were based on three principles: comprehension, efficiency, and motivation (Wang, 2019). Wang argued that language teaching should reflect on learners' needs and adopt a creative way to utilize students' linguistic resources by translanguaging.

In this book, Wang (2019) completed a literature review that covered many important concepts and theories in multilingualism and translanguaging, such as the history of monolingual principle, the function of L1 in L2 classrooms, and sociocultural theories. Therefore, the book covers the topics with rich literature support, and it can be situated within the existing types of research within the field of translanguaging. According to Guo (2019), there are three trends in translanguaging research. Firstly, the potential and significance of systematically using heritage languages in classrooms has been highlighted to search for "teachable" strategies and to develop students' academic performance and language awareness (Barker & Giles, 2010; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Li 2014). Researchers present dialogues in classrooms to investigate the role of translanguaging as the pedagogical strategy to support bilingual and multilingual students in academic literacy (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Li, 2014; Cummins, 2015). Secondly, scholars look at bilingual people's biliteracy practices, social justice, identities, and ideologies (Wei, 2011; Song, 2016). Thirdly, some studies attempt to survey students' attitudes toward immersion programs (Macaro & Lee, 2013) and teachers' perception of mixing languages in the classroom through actual

investigation by means of questionnaires and interviews (Guo, 2019). Based on the synthesis of previous literature, Wang (2019) discussed the controversial issues of former studies, and the research of Wang (2019) covered the topics in the first and third types of translanguaging research. In the future, researchers and educators can continue with the academic conversations in translanguaging and get a contextualized understanding of CSL in Hong Kong. For example, researchers can further explore CSL in Hong Kong from a longitudinal perspective. Through comparing the practices and perceptions of conducting translanguaging as pedagogy at different time periods, researchers may better observe how Chinese language learners' translanguaging changes across time and whether teachers' attitudes would change with students' different language levels. In addition to that, doing a narrative inquiry in future translanguaging studies to connect students' language learning with their life outside of the classroom is also meaningful to help understand socio-linguistic decision making in a situated manner.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the book is still highly recommended as CSL teaching and learning has not been popular in Hong Kong. A better understanding of CSL in China "not only benefits its further development but also sheds light on the complexities of CSL in a wider variety of global contexts" (Zhou, 2020, p.482). In Canada, more and more students in K-12 and post-secondary show interest in Chinese and its culture. For example, Chinese immigrant parents send their kids to heritage schools for learning Chinese and to maintain their cultural identity (Shan & Walter, 2015). Those schools are usually run by Chinese associations or local communities. Furthermore, in Canadian universities, students and teachers can participate in some international exchange or service-learning programs, in which Chinese will be taught. For example, Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China, a program sponsored by SSHRC and directed by Dr. Shijing Xu and Dr. Michael Connelly (Connelly & Xu, 2019), had some Canadian teacher candidates from the University of Windsor go to China for three months from 2013 to 2019. The program "focuses on reciprocal learning in preservice teacher education as one of the pedagogies of working with diversity in the global context" (Xu et al., 2015, p.139). They visited Chinese universities to attend a series of lectures and workshops on Chinese educational philosophy, education system, school system and culture, observe in local Chinese schools, and participated in cultural activities and fieldtrips (Xu & Connelly, 2017). The program fully took Canadian teacher candidates' interests and needs into consideration before, during and after the trip to China. For instance, before the trip, there was the Chinese language learning class based on the teacher candidates' level and after the trip, some of them continued to learn the Chinese language with the support of the research assistants and the program director.

Overall, translanguaging in Chinese language classrooms can be applied to other CSL contexts outside of China, as there are similar challenges and difficulties. For example, linguistic purism is still popular since many people believe the best way to learn a language is to put learners in an immersion program and forbid the use of L1. Yet, the prevailing approach has limitations in the globalized world, such as the lack of full consideration of learners' identity and cognitive resources (Lin, 2006; Manan et al., 2021). Therefore, this book provides insight into bilingualism, multilingualism, and translanguaging research. For language educators, teachers, practitioners, policymakers, *Multilingualism and Translanguaging in Chinese Language Classrooms* critically discusses the core issue of teaching Chinese as a second language, with vivid and complex classroom language practices. It not only conforms to the trend of plurilingual discourses in both societies and schools but also reminds us of preparing language teaching in a post-monolingual era.

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