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## ***Idiolect and Identity: Fourth Grade Students' Translanguaging, Comprehension, and Self-Identity***

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### **Abstract**

The practice of translanguaging offers emergent bilinguals the opportunity to access their full linguistic repertoire. This qualitative study uses the lenses of dynamic bilingualism and *idiolect*, or one's own unique language patterns, to explore emergent bilinguals' translanguaging and reading comprehension strategies during a reading think-aloud, as well as the ways that language factors into the construction of self-identity. Data collected from a think-aloud show that the five fourth-grade students used language flexibly when reading and comprehending the texts that were presented in both Spanish and English. The participants, in follow-up interviews, also explained ways that they use translanguaging strategies when communicating with different audiences and how their identity as bilinguals positions them as mediators of their own language use. These findings support the conclusion that when students' idiolects are supported and encouraged, they are able to develop positive self-identities.

*Keywords:* bilingual education/literacy, translanguaging, code-switching, emergent bilinguals, idiolect, bilingual students' identity

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In the context of the U.S., emergent bilingual students, those whose English language proficiency is under a threshold established and measured by each state, have been traditionally placed in English-only and/or transitional programs with the goal of a quick transition to English (Nieto, 2009). These programs and policies, informed by monoglossic language ideologies, prioritize the acquisition of English and marginalize the bilingual skills of these students (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2007). These approaches disregard the needs and assets of those who speak a minoritized language (MacSwan, 2017). Even in the best-intentioned bilingual programs, additive bilingualism continues to foster monoglossic language ideologies by aspiring to a mythical understanding of bilingualism as “native-like” competency in two separate languages (Flores & Schissel, 2014). These ideological stances may lead students to develop negative attitudes toward their home language (Durán & Palmer, 2013; Urrieta & Quach, 2000).

Dual language programs, whose goal is to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and high academic achievement in two languages, sometimes reproduce these deficit-oriented discourses regarding bilingualism (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). Students’ authentic languaging practices are disregarded or disparaged by curriculum and teachers (Cervantes-Soon, 2014), and students do not see themselves properly reflected within a dichotomous view of bilingualism (Fitts, 2006). When programs strictly separate languages, students’ language and literacy development become constrained as they are required to use resources from one language at a time (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Durán & Palmer, 2013; García et al., 2017; García & Kleifgen, 2019). Many educators see this language separation as necessary to ensure that students develop linguistic skills in each language with equal opportunity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). Although bilingualism is valued, students are limited by using one language at a time depending on context. Emergent bilinguals find themselves in the middle of a contradiction between language allocation policies and authentic ways they inherently use both languages at any given time, without specific constraints (Durán & Palmer, 2013). When language use is strictly separated, it hinders not only the development of sociocultural competence and equitable practices in the classroom (Palmer et al., 2019), but also students’ self-identity as competent holistic bilingual individuals (Fitts, 2006). Because current understandings of identity posit it as fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing (Norton & Toohey, 2011), language use contributing to identity construction (which will be further explained in the following section) should be permitted to be fluid as well.

The present study attempts to capture authentic language practices among emergent bilinguals and how these practices relate to their own identity. Three questions guided our research: How do emergent bilinguals use both languages (Spanish and English) when making sense of texts? In what ways do emergent bilinguals employ translanguaging strategies when engaging in literacy comprehension activities? How do emergent bilinguals describe the ways their language choices relate to their self-identities?

### **Translanguaging and Identity**

A traditional monolingual approach to developing bilingualism and biliteracy argues for separating languages by setting specific times, spaces, and even teachers for each language (Freeman et al., 2005; Gómez et al., 2005). The practice of moving between two languages was highly discouraged in educational settings. In fact, teachers and students have been shamed for mixing languages, which was considered a deficiency (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). This strict language separation policy has been criticized because of evidence demonstrating the significance of both the first and the second language in the development of biliteracy skills. In addition, these separation practices contradict the dynamic linguistic practices of bilingual individuals (Palmer et al., 2014).

In contrast to this ideological stance that drives policies of strict language separation, the possibility of *translanguaging* offers a promising alternative. Originally coined in Welsh as “trawsieithu” by Cen Williams (1994), translanguaging encourages strategic, deliberate use of both languages of instruction in language immersion classrooms (García, 2009). Educators who recognize translanguaging as a pedagogical practice understand that emergent bilinguals possess a singular linguistic system continually constructed through social interactions, as opposed to separate, compartmentalized boundaries between named languages. Following this idea, named languages (such as “Spanish” or “English”) are social constructs, and not lexical or structural ones (García & Otheguy, 2019; Otheguy et al., 2018). Translanguaging allows students to move flexibly between constructed language boundaries and fully utilize all modalities and resources they possess (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; García, 2009). Bilingual individuals select different social languages depending on each situational context, with the ability to speak within a single language or make use of multiple linguistic resources simultaneously (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; MacSwan, 2017).

Students draw many benefits through translanguaging, including improved reading comprehension gains and a deeper understanding of subject matter and academic language through accessing their entire linguistic repertoire (Martínez, 2010; Worthy et al., 2013). Students who can engage in contrastive analysis between their languages are also more likely to develop a deeper language awareness (Cummins, 2007). However, some researchers offer words of caution when allowing students to flexibly use all linguistic resources, as this may lead to unequal participation dynamics in which the dominant language, English, overshadows development of the non-English target language in dual language and bilingual programs (Palmer et al., 2014). When done intentionally and critically, teachers who view translanguaging as rich evidence of emergent bilinguals' linguistic ability believe these students bring beneficial resources to their education, rather than showing deficits (MacSwan, 2017). Because language is deeply connected to social and individual identity (Macedo & Bartolomé, 2001), students in dual language programs who are provided spaces for their authentic linguistic repertoires and practices develop a positive bilingual identity (Reyes & Vallone, 2007).

Urrieta and Noblit (2018) define identity as self-understandings, in particular those with strong emotional resonances, and often marked with socially constructed notions such as race, gender, class, and language. Language is a key factor in the construction of identity—as emergent bilinguals develop and refine their language practices, they shape and construct their own identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Reyes & Vallone, 2007). This can be difficult for emergent bilinguals, as their bilingual identities may not fit neatly into a view of bilingualism that values separation of languages (Fitts, 2006; Worthy et al., 2013). Identities emerge through interaction (Norton & De Costa, 2018) and social positioning (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), and can be multiple and changing over time (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Urrieta & Quach, 2000).

### Conceptual Framework

This study embraces the theory of dynamic bilingualism, viewing *linguaging* as a fluid and complex process (Li, 2018; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Additionally, a translanguaging perspective (García et al., 2017) guides the purpose, data collection and analysis of this study with careful attention to how emergent bilinguals' *idiolects* (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015) shape their self-identity.

## **Dynamic Bilingualism**

Emergent bilinguals constantly engage with both languages, selecting various features depending on the interactional context and their intended audience in varied and complex ways that ultimately enhance their language and literacy development (Cummins, 2007). This view regarding the dynamic nature of languages recognizes the complexity of how language is utilized to make sense of the world, and how bilinguals can enhance their linguistic and academic development (Li, 2018; Worthy et al., 2013). Dynamic language practices can include translating, identifying and using cognates, and employing cross-language strategies where input and output languages are different (Worthy et al., 2013). Dynamic bilingualism allows the fluid use of bilinguals' full linguistic repertoire to demonstrate understanding (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Li, 2018) and allows students to develop a critical metalinguistic awareness (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017), or more nuanced view of their own language use.

To build upon the idea of language as a dynamic process, a translanguaging perspective not only acknowledges the fluid nature of one's entire linguistic repertoire, but also provides legitimization for everyday practices of language employed by emergent bilinguals. This perspective focuses on what bilinguals do with language, sometimes acknowledging named, legitimized languages, and also the students' own ways of using language regardless of the features they choose to employ (MacSwan, 2017). Not only are students' languaging practices validated and normalized, but the monoglossic and monolingual literacy understandings are essentially disrupted in an act of social justice on the part of the teacher for providing space for translanguaging within the classroom (García & Kleifgen, 2019). This translanguaging perspective allows students' bilingualism and bilingual identities to be valued and nurtured in the classroom (García et al., 2017; García & Otheguy, 2019) and welcomes practices of code-switching, translating, and vernacular forms of language which are often seen as deficits within the school setting (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). Emergent bilinguals' own ways of understanding and translanguaging are seen instead as valuable sources of knowledge.

## **Idiolect and Identity**

Because language use is deeply intertwined with self-identity construction and performance (De Fina, 2016), translanguaging allows students to fully embrace their complex and sometimes contradictory identities (Norton, 1995) while empowering their identities as resourceful bilingual individuals who use their full linguistic repertoire for making meaning

(Guzula et al., 2016). Thus, as emergent bilinguals are encouraged to use all features of their linguistic repertoire at their discretion, they are employing what has been termed their *idiolect*, a linguistic object whose elements are lexical and structural units whose features have no inherent membership in any named language, and are deployed selectively depending on context and interaction (Otheguy et al., 2015). This personal and unique language and mental grammar emerges through interaction with other speakers. As such, the definition of translanguageing can expand to include using one's idiolect without regard for socially and politically defined language labels and names (Li, 2018). Students whose idiolects are supported, developed, and viewed as assets in the classroom develop positive self-esteem and self-identity perception (Reyes & Vallone, 2007). For example, a teacher who responds positively to a student saying, "My *tío* is taking me to the *zoológico mañana!*" rather than correcting the choice of words in the sentence may contribute to the student's positive self-identity as a speaker successfully conveying a message.

In order to explore students' use of translanguageing and its relation to students' self-identities, this qualitative study describes translanguageing strategies utilized by bilingual students as they read and comprehend texts. It also explores student perception and understanding of utilizing these strategies.

### **Methodology**

This study utilizes a verbal protocol methodology with descriptive design to allow students to think aloud and reflect on texts they read (Duke & Mallette, 2011; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). The think aloud activity, in which students read a text and pause at key places to process the text aloud, provided an opportunity for these students to engage socially with a text, and allowed them to explore the meaning they constructed from the texts (Brooks, 2016). Because the participants verbally produce the thoughts that come to mind after reading sentences in a text (Magliano & Millis, 2003), and the spoken language in which the protocol is expressed is the language of the culture of the speaker (Ericsson & Simon, 1998), the students had the opportunity to draw on all their linguistic reserves, or their full idiolect, in their think-aloud responses. Criterion sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) identified bilingual participants, as well as convenience sampling, as all the students were enrolled in the same classroom.

### **Context**

The setting for this research study was a small school district in the Midwest. Serving just under 2,500 students, this district has a diverse student population. Latinx students are a majority of the student body at 48%, 37% of the students are white, and 9% are Black. In this district, 16% of the students are emergent bilinguals. Over the past 6 years, the district has been developing and supporting a (Spanish and English) dual language program. At the time of the study, the program had two classrooms of two-way dual language learners (students designated as primary speakers of Spanish or English) in grades K-3, and one classroom each of one-way dual language learners (all primary Spanish speakers) in grades 4 and 5. The language allocation in kindergarten is 80% Spanish and 20% English. Each subsequent year English instructional time increases and Spanish instructional time decreases by 10%, until the program evens out in grades 3-5 at 50% of instruction in each target language. The dual language program typically provides few opportunities for students to flexibly use their entire linguistic repertoire, instead emphasizing the subject allocation of each language, except at the end of units when material is “bridged” into the other language.

## **Participants**

The following criteria was used to select participants for this study: all participants were (a) emergent bilinguals, (b) enrolled in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, (c) who had received literacy instruction in both Spanish and English through the district’s dual language program. As this study was conducted during the fall of 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were a total of nine eligible participants attending school in-person who could participate in this study. Of these nine students, five expressed interest and participated in the study. These five students included one girl, Lizbeth (all names are pseudonyms), and four boys (Tomás, Mateo, Gilberto, and Daniel). All five students were primary Spanish speakers and had been enrolled in the dual language program in the district since kindergarten. Four of the students were still designated as “English Language Learners”—Lizbeth was no longer labeled as such. Their performance on class reading and language tasks was typical or above-average for learners their age with their experiences. Gilberto and Tomás were both studious students who enjoyed challenging themselves with difficult work. Lizbeth was often quiet in class but worked hard and participated when she felt comfortable. Daniel was a dependable, hard worker in class, and Mateo had a mischievous sense of humor that made the classroom a fun learning environment.

## **Text Selection**

We selected four different texts for the think-aloud task. All four texts were from grade-level materials and part of the reading series utilized by the district. We chose two texts in Spanish and two in English (one fiction and one non-fiction in each language). We selected texts in both languages to mirror the opportunities the students have had to experience literacy instruction in both languages (Clark, 2020). Within each text, we determined four places for students to stop and think aloud. This was done in order to make the task not cognitively overwhelming for the students, and to prevent an overload of information in their working memory (Charters, 2003). Finally, with each text, we created a short written-response question for the students to answer that would allow them to connect the themes of each text to their own experiences (Clark, 2020), therefore allowing them to reflect on their own personal thoughts instead of merely quoting the text as part of their answer.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

To address the research questions guiding this study, the following data were collected: (a) audio recordings of each reading think-aloud session, (b) students' written responses to each question that followed the reading of each text, and (c) audio recordings of a 20-minute follow-up reflective interview with each student. Each read-aloud session took place on a separate day, lasting 15 minutes per individual session, and all four sessions for each student were completed within one week. Prior to the first reading and think aloud session, we modeled a think aloud for the students, to introduce them to the activity (López-Velásquez & García, 2017). Each audio-recorded think-aloud session and written response were transcribed and coded for reading strategies and translanguaging strategies used by the student. Finally, each of the interviews contained 15 questions relating to the students' languaging choices during the read-aloud sessions, as well as languaging choices in their day-to-day lives. Interviews were transcribed and coded for further insight into students' self-perceptions regarding their language use and self-identities.

Coding occurred on several levels across the different pieces of data. With the data from the think-alouds, student utterances were coded based on the reading comprehension strategy that was evident (i.e., summarizing, questioning, making inferences, or merely re quoting the text). The language utilized by the student and whether it was the same or different from the language of the text was also coded. These codes were further combined into, for example,

“summarizing in the same language (as the text)” or “translated and summarized” when the student utterances used a language different from the text. The student interviews were coded using an open-coding method and emergent themes to generate codes that aligned with the students’ answers. Some of these sample codes included “showing awareness of the language of the text,” “describing own translating,” and “adjusting language for audience.” These item codes were later refined and combined into the overarching themes described below.

### Findings

Before delving into each specific finding, we noted that all five of the students translated in at least one instance during the think-aloud reading activity. They translated from Spanish to English most frequently, but displayed fewer instances of moving from English to Spanish (see Table 1). By allowing students the flexible use of multiple languages, they were able to utilize their own dialects as they demonstrated comprehension of the texts. The individual interviews provided insight into how students self-identified and positioned themselves as bilinguals who utilized both languages for specific purposes and with specific audiences.

**Table 1**

*Student Instances of Translating During Think-Aloud Protocol*

Name of Participant	Number of Instances	
	Translating from Spanish to English	Translating from English to Spanish
Daniel	16	1
Lizbeth	10	1
Tomás	2	1
Mateo	2	0
Gilberto	1	0

### Students Translated for a Variety of Reasons

All five participants translated in some way during the think-aloud activity, most frequently moving into English from Spanish. During the think-aloud activity when the students were reading and responding to texts in Spanish, we observed 31 instances of translating

into English (with each instance being an idea that was communicated), yet when reading and discussing the English stories, only counted 3 instances of translanguaging into Spanish. The majority of the participants chose to respond aloud and write the reflective response in the same language as the text with the exception of Daniel, who utilized English for every think-aloud, regardless of the text's language.

### ***Translanguaging into Spanish While Using English Texts***

Lizbeth and Tomás were the only ones who verbally translanguaged from English to Spanish—Lizbeth utilized the Spanish word and pronunciation of “*región*” for the English word “region,” and Tomás had one utterance of “*que*” which acted as a pause before he continued with his next response about the text. Lizbeth's use of the Spanish pronunciation demonstrates that she was reaching into her linguistic reserves to make sense of the text, and recognized the word “region” for its counterpart in Spanish. Tomás' pause in Spanish indicates that he was mentally processing through the text in Spanish. Daniel was the only student who chose to respond to one of the written English prompts in Spanish; since his response appropriately addressed the question it provides evidence for the concept of cross-linguistic transfer. As García (2020) explains, translanguaging moves beyond the text's language to focus on the language bilinguals use as they engage with texts, and bilingual students always make use of all their available linguistic resources.

### ***Translanguaging into English While Using Spanish Texts***

As previously mentioned, Daniel utilized English for every think-aloud, whether the text had been in English or Spanish. Each of his responses used only a single language, and he never translanguaged within the sentence level. On the other hand, Lizbeth, Mateo, and Gilberto had instances of translanguaging within a single sentence for a variety of purposes. One of Lizbeth's responses to a text about sequoia trees was as follows:

**Mmm...well it's telling me that...***los árboles más altos y hasta cuánto lo pueden crecer.* (Mmm...well it's telling me that...the tallest trees and up to how many [how tall] they can grow.)

Lizbeth began by processing the text using English, and then shifted into Spanish to summarize that particular text section. She relied on her flexible languaging to process the text

in one language while returning to the language of the text to utilize specific vocabulary and reference concepts that appeared in the text.

Mateo and Gilberto both had instances during their think-alouds and written responses where they used individual words in English to enhance their understanding of the Spanish texts. Gilberto responded to a text in Spanish about a bakery as follows:

*En este párrafo aprendí que su tía de Cecilia tiene una panadería y que Cecilia fue atrás de la panadería y encontró un...un metal, un, como, **wall** de metal? (In this paragraph I learned that Cecilia's aunt has a bakery and Cecilia went to the back of the bakery and found a...a metal, a, like, metal wall?)*

While the story summary was not entirely correct (there was no reference to a metal wall in the story; rather, the character had found a large metal bowl), Gilberto demonstrated that he could utilize his full linguistic repertoire when trying to remember what word he wanted to use. He did not use the words *pared* or *muralla*, both of which could have sufficed for the thought he was trying to express, yet he knew he could cross a linguistic boundary to continue articulating the thought he wanted to express. Similarly, Mateo crossed a linguistic boundary in his written response to a question regarding the sequoia story:

*[Question prompt: ¿Quieres viajar para ver las secuoyas? ¿Por qué o por qué no? (Would you want to travel to see the sequoias? Why or why not?)] Sí para yo puedo **climb** secuoyas. (Yes, so that I can climb sequoias.)*

Like Gilberto, Mateo drew on his English vocabulary when he could not recall the word *tregar*, which is the Spanish equivalent to “climb.” In both instances, translanguaging provided each student with the means to demonstrate understanding using their entire linguistic repertoire.

### **Students' Awareness of Translanguaging**

Even if the outward evidence of translanguaging was not visible, all of the participants reflected on how they relied on translanguaging strategies within their thinking and processing of the texts. Lizbeth demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of her translanguaging: when responding to a question about how she may have used English to understand the texts in Spanish, she responded:

So well, when you asked me, I was like thinking of what I read and also reading the paper a little bit more just in case if I forgot something... I was thinking in English but some words I was thinking in Spanish because some words I didn't know how to pronounce them in English.

Lizbeth recognized that she could move flexibly within her entire linguistic repertoire to fully comprehend the ideas and vocabulary of the text. Similarly, Gilberto explained, "I mostly kind of thought it (the Spanish-language text) in English, that way I could speak it out in Spanish. Because...I kind of know a little more English and it will help me translate it into Spanish a little." Daniel added, "I usually think them in both because it could be different in Spanish too." Both Gilberto and Daniel recognized that some word nuances and vocabulary differences exist between both languages, and tried to explain how both languages are important for optimal comprehension of a text.

### **Audience Awareness and Adjustment**

Each of the participants indicated a strong awareness of audience when communicating with others, and described how they flexibly use their language skills to meet the needs of their audience. They were able to identify the linguistic needs of specific people they interact with, especially regarding family members, and explained how they recognize and adjust their language use within different interactions. Tomás explained that even within his family, he uses different languages with different family members: "When I talk to my mom or dad I speak Spanish, and when I talk to my brothers or sisters I talk English...because, my parents, they only know Spanish more than English, and my sisters and brothers know more English than Spanish." His identity as a bilingual individual positions him to mediate his linguistic exchanges, translanguaging when appropriate for the audience with whom he is communicating. Similarly, Daniel explained the complex network of language use within his family: "My grandpa and grandma speak Spanish, but kind of English too. And my mom and her sister – yeah, they both speak English. But they can speak Spanish too." Daniel identifies and positions himself as one who can utilize a variety of languaging practices with different members of his family.

The participants also identified ways they position themselves as language mediators with different peers during interactions. Both Gilberto and Daniel described how they adjusted their language for specific individuals. When asked what language he typically uses to

communicate with his friends, Gilberto explained, “English, because probably most of us speak it. But when it’s with Adán (a student who primarily speaks Spanish) I speak Spanish with him.” Daniel described a similar situation with a different student, yet explained that he typically chooses to speak in Spanish, “because last year I used Spanish because of Rafael.” Both students again positioned themselves as being able to use language flexibly to address linguistic needs of those with whom they are communicating. The students’ ability to mediate language shows a strong awareness of their linguistic choices and adds an important dimension to their self-identity, which will be further described in the next section.

### **Positive Self-Identity Related to Bilingualism**

The five participants in this study all expressed positive feelings about being able to communicate with a greater linguistic repertoire. “I love being bilingual,” explained Lizbeth, “I feel special.” She also described how proud she felt that if someone wanted to learn Spanish from her, she could teach them that language. Daniel made a personal connection: “It kind of feels good, because now I can speak both (languages), and I can understand my grandma and grandpa in Spanish.” For Daniel, being bilingual is a fundamental part of his identity as he relies on his languaging practices across two languages to communicate with his grandparents. Tomás shared a similar, yet stronger sentiment. When asked what being bilingual meant to him, he responded, “It means to me everything, because if I only speak English, I can only speak English, and because if I want to talk to my mom I can’t, because I only speak English.” Tomás recognized that being bilingual allows him to communicate with his parents in Spanish and also still interact with the dominant language, which is English. Mateo acknowledged the unique educational circumstances of the dual language class: “(I feel) a little bit more different than the other (students), well, except in our class, because I know more about two languages than most other people.” Gilberto took this thought a step further, explaining:

It feels really good because when I grow up, if I work and someone doesn’t know English, I could talk to them in Spanish. If they don’t know Spanish, I could talk to them in English. So it’s kind of helpful in the future of life.

Each student expressed positive feelings about being bilingual, and how being bilingual is an important component of their identities because of the communication opportunities they are afforded by virtue of having an expansive linguistic repertoire.

Additionally, another thread emerged from the discussion about what it means to be bilingual. When the students were asked if they would tell other people they ought to become bilingual, one student said yes, but the other four students all explained that it would be the hypothetical person's own choice whether or not to do so. Daniel declared, "no, that's their choice, because it's not my choice," while Mateo was a bit more adamant: "no, because it's their choice. I would just ask them, not tell them." Gilberto even offered his assistance, and replied, "if they want to try it, yeah, I could maybe tell them some words." To each of these students, being bilingual is a choice that one can make by deciding to add additional languaging repertoires to one's identity.

Another key piece of students' identity that was expressed was the self-perception of their role as linguistic mediators. The students in this study recognized that because their linguistic repertoires included features of both Spanish and English, they are uniquely positioned to mediate conversations in either or both languages. As Lizbeth expressed, "If they speak Spanish and English well, then I speak both, but if they speak English then I speak English, or if they just speak Spanish then I speak Spanish to them." Her identity as a linguistic mediator allows her to recognize that she can adapt her languaging to include features that would best be understood by her audience, in a variety of linguistic contexts. Each of the participants explained instances in which they choose to communicate in Spanish with certain individuals in their lives, and English with others. Thus, this ability to mediate linguistic exchanges takes a central place in the construction of their identities as bilingual individuals.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

This study contributes to the growing body of work regarding the ways that emergent bilinguals develop critical metalinguistic awareness of the structures and use of each language (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). This study also contributes to the call for bilingual students to have the opportunity to use both languages when interacting with texts (López-Velázquez & García, 2017), as well as providing students a time and place to discuss how they draw on their languaging repertoires to make meaning of texts (Clark, 2020). We found that these students were able to use their entire translanguaging repertoire when reading and comprehending texts in both Spanish and English. For all of the participants it was a novelty to be able to respond in

either language, as they may have been used to the dual language program's tendency to keep each language designated to certain content areas.

The power that the English language continues to exert in schools, even in dual language programs, was evident in the greater use of reading comprehension strategies expressed in English by the students, considering the fact that the majority of their literacy instruction had been in Spanish in their earlier years of schooling. This may show that the students felt greater confidence and understanding when creating and explaining meaning in English as compared to Spanish. By encouraging students to flexibly use all of their linguistic strategies, students can focus more on the content being discussed instead of the manner of discussion, which could lead to higher levels of literacy learning (Martínez, 2010), giving the students the opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings and deepen their metalinguistic awareness (Pacheco et al., 2019).

This study also contributes to knowledge about how decisions regarding language use can be factors that contribute to the formation of emergent bilinguals' self-identity. This self-identity is co-constructed within students' self-perception, as well as through the activities in which they engage (Collett, 2018; Nasir & Hand, 2006). Because of the close connection between language, culture, and identity, languaging exchanges typically experienced are a source of identity formation (Reyes & Vallone, 2007). For bilingual learners, using different languages involves mediating between cultures and identities. In this study, the students described ways they positioned themselves as mediators of languaging exchanges as they determined which language to use when communicating with different individuals. As they described the ways they separate and combine features of each language, utilizing their full idiolects, the students demonstrated positive views of their self-identities, expressing pride in understanding how to communicate meaningfully with others through multiple languaging practices.

The students in this study demonstrated complex processing of each text they read as they utilized a variety of reading comprehension strategies between Spanish and English. By opening space for these students to translanguage in their think-aloud responses, they were provided an opportunity to use any prior cultural or experiential resources that could help them comprehend and express their understanding of the texts to have a meaningful discussion and further develop their literacy in both languages (Clark, 2020).

This creates implications for teachers regarding their role in the formation of bilinguals' identities. Teachers must recognize that the learning experiences they develop create a range of

positions within which students can speak, listen, read, write, and participate in different exchanges. In this way, teachers offer multiple ways that students can explore their identities within the classroom environment (Norton & Toohey, 2011). As such, identity plays a major role in the classroom curriculum and is constantly subject to rethinking and reshaping (Reyes & Vallone, 2007). Classroom learning opportunities play a critical role in helping emergent bilinguals shape their self-identities and develop positive perceptions of themselves as bilingual individuals.

This study illustrates how supporting emergent bilinguals' idiolects can lead to students developing positive identities. Since translanguaging enables teachers to build upon their bilingual students' languaging practices, it is a powerful pedagogical tool in the classroom. However, encouraging translanguaging to become a part of classroom interaction, especially in dual language programs, should be done critically—students should be encouraged to experiment with language and utilize their full linguistic repertoire, while teachers still provide mechanisms which prioritize the minority language (Hamman, 2018). If translanguaging is not approached critically, the dominant language, English, can quickly become the preferred language for interaction due to the power it holds as being the majority language (Potowski, 2004). If educators and schools keep this in mind, sustainable translanguaging, which supports a strategic balance between using an emergent bilingual's full linguistic repertoire and promoting contexts to elevate the minority language, can help students develop language and metalinguistic awareness (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017) as well as learning different content through each of their languages (Pacheco et al., 2019).

Further research is needed to investigate the role translanguaging can play within a structured program to support and sustain academic growth and foster critical examination of understandings regarding linguistic hierarchies within schools. While this study only examined the experiences of a few students within the context of one type of activity, the findings contribute to a broader understanding of the full role translanguaging plays in reading comprehension and student identity construction. Future studies might consider broader investigation of the use of translanguaging included within a specific program of study and possibly investigate the experiences of older bilingual students who have had more opportunities to rely on linguistic exchanges as part of the construction of their identities.

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